



# The Politics of Nostalgia and the Marcos Golden Age in the Philippines

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The increasing incidence of disinformation in the Philippines promotes romanticized recollections of Ferdinand Marcos' martial law (1972–1981). While the general scholarship remembers the era for its horrors and atrocities, narratives circulated online claim that Marcos' rule made the nation great and that several groups and institutions conspired to distort people's memory, serving the purpose of Marcos' political enemies. These narratives, shared by Marcos and Duterte supporters, echo a desire to return to a fantastical "golden age." This study investigates the nostalgia for the Marcos golden age, magnifying the salient features of whitewashed memories of Marcos' martial law in online communities, as well as techniques that turn the Marcos propaganda into a basic grammar that frames people's articulation of their frustrations and aspirations. The study found that the described propaganda embeds the *light-darkness-light* perspective in its *us-versus-them* narrative. Within such a framework, nostalgia can set the stage for the expression of polarizing phrases, hate speech, conspiracy theories, discontent, and hope, which complete the grammar of the Marcos propaganda.

**Keywords** disinformation, historical revisionism, nostalgia, social media, propaganda, Marcos

## I. Introduction

It has been forty-nine years since that fateful day when Ferdinand Marcos Sr. placed the Philippines under martial law. Yet today, its lessons remain elusive to many Filipinos. While the general literature recounts the failures, horrors, and atrocities of the Marcos dictatorship, the Marcoses continue to enjoy rock-solid support from many Filipino voters. In fact, Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. topped several 2021 presidential preference surveys, especially those that did not include the name of President Rodrigo Duterte's daughter, Davao City Mayor Sara Duterte (Punay, 2021). The support

the Marcoses received from Northern Philippines came as no surprise, as the region has long been their stronghold. What is perplexing, however, is the number of voters in other regions across different socioeconomic classes who believe in the authenticity of Marcos Jr.'s promise of making the nation great again (see Pulse Asia's December 2021 survey).

In social media, it has become commonplace to encounter people who genuinely look back with nostalgia for martial law years. Marcos loyalists insist that the “yellow propaganda” unjustly unseated Marcos Sr. and aborted the “New Society” he built. They blame the *dilawans* (*dilawan* or “yellow” refers to political figures and oligarchs linked to the former Aquino administrations, the Liberal Party, and their supporters) for the country's social and economic decline. Some sincerely believe the innocence of the Marcoses, brushing off supreme court decisions that demand the Marcoses to return portions of their ill-gotten wealth. Others would say that “the past is in the past” or to “let bygones be bygones,” suggesting that moving on is a necessary step to national healing and progress.

Meanwhile, the general literature remembers Marcos dictatorship differently, as numerous scholars recounted his martial law's failures, horrors, and atrocities. Several historians discussed police and military abuse, which, according to various accounts, came in different forms: illegal detention, torture, rape, extra-judicial killings, to name but a few. They also wrote about the rise of crony capitalism during Marcos Sr.'s reign. Even though Marcos Sr. massively invested in infrastructure development, historians noted how Marcos Sr.'s government took insurmountable amounts of foreign loans to finance his ambitious projects (Jose, 1991). The 1970s and 1980s economic datasets backed such claims, telling how the former dictator and allies made the Philippines the “sick man of Asia” (Kind, 2000: 2). In September 2021, *Sandiganbayan*, the Philippines' anti-graft court, ruled that the Marcoses were indeed involved in massive corruption

and ordered the late dictator's family to return at least 5.43 million USD to the government (Limpot, 2021).

It is not the intention of this study to challenge or validate the truth-claim of every martial law-related narrative. While it recognizes the importance of dispelling disinformation, the study argues that it is also critical to look into the structure of revisionist narratives in digital platforms. Exploring their content can offer clues on why people believe or share them. To this end, the study examines the articulation of positive recollection of the martial law years and the utilization of nostalgia in Philippine politics. It asks the following questions: What role does the nostalgia for a “golden age” play in the construction of Marcos propaganda? How do nostalgia and the Marcosian narrative influence Marcos supporters' structuration and expression of discontent and aspirations? Through diverse expressions of alternate memories online, this study analyzes the structure and form of whitewashed martial law stories to understand how the value of truthfulness is produced and attached to particular nostalgic recollections. At the same time, it unpacks the manifestations of the *light-darkness-light* perspective in propagandistic *us-versus-them* tropes, determining how these frameworks shape the iteration of people's unsatisfied demands in digital platforms.

That said, this study not only pays close attention to the patterns and general structure of the Marcos propaganda but also listens to the resentments of those who sincerely believe in Marcos. It simultaneously determines how political digital content taps emotions and sentiments and how Marcos supporters use them as a resource for expressing frustrations and aspirations. While their constant manifestation of support for the Marcoses can be construed as an essential element of the Marcos propaganda, this study maintains that sentiments should not be dismissed immediately as mere propaganda. Likewise, despite the amplifying effect

of repetitive posts and comments that serve Marcos propaganda's goal and purpose, it is equally essential to recognize the concerns of Marcos and Duterte supporters to understand why the propaganda continues and proliferates. Yet, to be clear, such an approach does not necessarily deny the existence of manipulative and misleading pro-Marcos content on different social media platforms.

One cannot also detach potential financial gains from social media content creation. For instance, the presence of embedded third-party sponsorships or mid-roll ad breaks in some pro-Marcos YouTube videos (i.e., *Sangkay Janjan TV's* videos) confirms monetary compensation. The study recognizes that profit and other related incentives can figure in creating pro-Marcos and pro-martial law content. However, the impact of profit and the motivations in promoting Marcoses' political agenda are left for further research since the study's main objective is to foreground the vocabulary and techniques that transform Marcos propaganda into a grammar that frames people's desires and affects.

This study is organized into four sections. The first section provides a brief survey of related literature, ranging from memory studies and historical revisionism to academic works investigating the Marcos regime and propaganda. The study's methodology is elaborated in the second section. Meanwhile, the third section defines nostalgia and describes how Marcos supporters express nostalgia for the Marcos golden age. It also examines how their framing of the Marcos golden age sets the stage for various articulations of longing, anger, discontent, hope, and truth. The study ends with a conclusion that reflects on the complexities of nostalgia, propaganda, and truth.

## II. Contesting Memories, Revising Histories

Memory contestations, the contradictions between what is being remembered, and the instrumentalization of the past constitute the class-based account of the politics of memory (Olick and Robbins, 1998). As Jelin and Kaufman (2000) write, the space of memory becomes a space of political struggle when memory is seen as a collective. Along this line, Aguilar (2019) elaborates how this struggle is manifested in public history—the recollection of the past that is most accessible and sensible to the general population. Memory contestations result from different but interrelated factors, such as people’s positionalities, access to sources, proximity to an event, and separation from the past.

Although both memory contestations and historical revisionism catalyze political struggle, the former should not be confused with the latter. While memory contestation is a phenomenon that involves multiple actors’ conflicting recollections of past events, politically motivated historical revisionism is a deliberate attempt to distort collective memories by sanitizing or denying narratives of terror or corruption to advance an actor’s or group’s political agenda. This kind of distortion and politicization of collective memories are observed here as techniques of propaganda.

In the Philippines, historical revisionism is often associated with the Marcoses (Ong et al., 2019). Aguilar, in his 2018 keynote speech at a Philippine Studies Conference in Hiroshima University (published in the *Philippine Studies Journal* in 2019), brilliantly identified possible causes of our people’s vulnerability to disinformation and alternate martial law narratives: first, the production of textbooks that inadequately confront Marcos’ lies and atrocities, second, the Philippine justice system’s failures in making the Marcoses accountable, and third, the academe’s inability to influence public discourse. These factors provide avenues for promoting a “clean” Marcos

image and sustaining his family's popular backing. They also help validate Marcos supporters' nostalgia for the dictatorship, for it provides them more reasons to defend and protect the Marcoses against critics.

Few recent academic works have attempted to raise awareness of the systematic manipulation of memories and histories to promote political agendas. Problematizing the instrumentalization of dead political figures in online spaces, Serquiña (2019) looked into the 2016 vice presidential race and probed several digital campaign materials that “reincarnated” former presidents Ferdinand Marcos Sr. and Corazon Aquino. Treating cyberspace as an archival apparatus, he examined how the “canonical deaths of Marcos and Aquino propelled the campaign propaganda and political personalities of Marcos Jr. and Robredo” (pp. 66–67). One relevant interpretation of propaganda materials for this study is his analysis of superimposition as an aesthetic strategy. To Serquiña, such a technique, which superimposes the living (Marcos Jr.) with the dead (Marcos Sr.), “projects a sense of continuity” (p. 68). The analysis here of nostalgia for the Marcos golden age follows up on Serquiña's work and suggests a connection between propaganda and indigenous rationalities.

The intermingling of the living and the dead was also the focal point of Masangkay and Del Mundo's (2016) research about Marcos Sr.'s burial in the *Libingan ng mga Bayani* (LNMB) or Heroes' Cemetery. Their study drew on the literature of dead body politics, and they found that the corpse of the Marcos Sr. served as a tool not only for the rehabilitation of his image but also for the advancement of the living Marcoses' political agenda. As a material symbol, the dead body promoted mythologized narratives about the dictatorial regime. By underscoring the connection between Marcos Sr.'s corpse politicization and the so-called Marcos playbook, Masangkay and Del Mundo managed to expose the Marcoses' decades-long attempt to regain political clout.

Meanwhile, Bautista (2018) tackled the issue of historical revisionism head-on by summarizing the revisionist narrative of the living Marcoses into three parts, namely the “glorious past” of the Marcos era, the Aquino-led coup against the Marcos regime, and the “fallen dark” present (p. 279). According to Bautista, this narrative of the past promotes a fantasy of Marcosian “greatness,” suggesting that the yellows prevented the realization of this greatness (p. 280). He also identified Marcos Sr.’s *Bagong Lipunan* or New Society as the Marcos-sponsored historical revisionism’s ultimate object of desire and argued that this objectification mythologized the nation and its supposed glorious past. To contribute to this work on Marcos propaganda, this study analyzed underexplored textual and audio-visual sources and intervened by offering a nuanced framing of the Marcosian tripartite narrative. Mainly, while the study maintains Bautista’s depiction of the past and present and recognizes the ousting of Marcos as a critical turning point, the study adds perspectives about the future in its time frame to underline the role of hope in the iteration of various Marcos propaganda content.

This study is not the first to examine the connections between a glorious past and a hopeful future. Ardivilla (2016) analyzed internet memes to understand the instrumentalization of Marcos Sr.’s mythologized past for living Marcoses’ amplification of campaign promises and preservation of wealth and power. However, the key concern of his work is the emergence of contesting memories online. To this end, Ardivilla explored the present utilization and reconfiguration of martial law propaganda images to interrogate the naturalization and opposition of manipulated memories of the Marcos regime. He treated memes as primary sources because their medium (the internet) “offers direct and quick consumption and transmission” (p. 88). While Ardivilla’s work dissects opposing memes to determine how they produce and transmit intended meanings, this study takes a different

route by zeroing in on pro-Marcos narratives to understand not only how propaganda texts produce meanings but, more importantly, how their expressions become “logical” and “moral” to those who communicate and consume them. Further, apart from memes, this study explores other forms of expression of memories online, offering broader insights into the structure of Marcos propaganda in other digital platforms.

As Ardivilla (2016) correctly pointed out, studies on Marcos Sr.’s propaganda remain relevant mainly because Marcos Jr.’s propaganda extracts and utilizes symbols and aspirations articulated by the former. In this regard, McCallus’ (1989) article is valuable for it offers insights about Marcos Sr.’s instrumentalization of cultural myths for justifying and communicating political activities. Observing cultural myths as collective representations, McCallus argued that myths create a symbolic environment that places “present and future circumstances in a frame of reference conducive to speaker’s purpose” (p. 131). They form a narrative structure or script that “builds an identifiable drama” and affects “the way an audience perceives a particular situation” (p. 131). Through myths’ superimposition of the present on the past, they create “an aesthetic version of reality,” which “sees the world through the lens of historical imagery” (p. 132). McCallus’ systematic analysis of early martial law propaganda provides a guide to understanding the nature, functions, and operation of Marcos-sponsored myths.

Reyes’ (2018) more recent work on Marcos Sr.’s propaganda focused on the dictator’s supposedly authored books. These books “written” by the late Marcos generated an image of himself as a “scholar-president.” A thorough investigation of these books found intellectual fraud involved in their production. According to Reyes, the existence of these fraudulent works proves Marcos Sr.’s propensity for massive deception and his obsession with “projecting himself to be more accomplished than he truly

was” (p. 208). He added that the circulation of Marcos Sr.’s purported works and ideas online could help bolster Marcos Sr.’s false genius, “especially to those who are convinced that Marcos was unjustly villainized by his political rivals” (p. 210). So, uncovering Marcos Sr.’s and his collaborators’ unethical practices, as well as the inconsistencies in “his” books, are initial steps in debunking Marcos supporters’ claim that Marcos Sr. is the “most brilliant president in history.”

To go beyond what the current literature has established, the study reconsiders past analysis of the Marcos propaganda and suggests other frameworks that may be useful in deciphering its meanings and intentions. The next section explains in detail the study’s research strategy.

### III. Examining Marcosian Narratives Online

The study examined narratives, posts, and replies that manifested nostalgia for the Marcos golden age in various Facebook pages of public figures (or of those supporting and promoting public figures) such as the Marcoses’ *Marcos pa rin* (Marcos still), *Pres. Ferdinand Emmanuel E. Marcos*, and *Bongbong Marcos*, Duterte’s *Duterte Media*, *Duterte Kami* (We are Duterte), and *DU30 Trending News*, and Ronald “Bato” Dela Rosa’s *Ronald “Bato” Dela Rosa Supporters*. The sources of various posts in these pages were also explored when available or accessible. These pages were selected based on their manifested political biases and inclinations. Empirical evidence showed that these pages acted as communities or hubs for Marcos and Duterte supporters. Also, both pro-Marcos and pro-Duterte networks are analyzed here because Marcos and Duterte supporters share common desires (real change and progress) and enemies (yellow politicians and oligarchs).

Listening to Marcos and Duterte supporters involved analyzing the content and comment sections of several Facebook and YouTube videos that promoted Marcos. Common themes and patterns are observed in the process. Facebook posts and comments were treated as primary sources and examined using discourse analysis. The study carefully monitored YouTube influencers' and viewers' tone of voice and word choice (textual and audiovisual for influencers, textual for viewers). Statements that reflect affects, nostalgia, virtuousness, discontent, and hope are identified and included in the study's analysis.

To discover and immerse in various pro-Marcos channels, YouTube recommendations were followed, as they often suggest similar contents and channels. Keywords such as "Marcos history," "hidden truth about Marcos," "Marcos gold," "Marcos golden age," among others, are used to conduct searches on YouTube. This study's representative samples are taken from the most viewed channels, such as the *Sangkay Janjan TV*, *Mr. Riyob Channel*, *Pinoy Epic Viral Videos Channel*, and *Bagong Lipunan* (New Society). Videos viewed more than 100,000 times were transcribed and analyzed to understand the structuration of frustrations, hatred, and discontent. The author translated all quotes from Filipino.

#### IV. The Nostalgia for the Marcos Golden Age

Nostalgia is a type of memory that simultaneously stimulates pleasure, loss, and hope. It makes people reminisce and yearn for something no person can ever go back to. It idealizes a person's vision of the past (Gabriel, 1993), making them yearn "for what is now unattainable, simply because of the irreversibility of time" (Pickering and Keightley, 2006: 920 in Angé and Berliner, 2015: 2). This longing for an earlier, simpler time, as Kant (in Natali, 2004)

describes, manifests the psychological tension resulting from the pains and difficulties during periods of transition.

Nostalgia can evoke social emotions, making it a viable tool for steering public opinion. Its power to establish “a sense of solidarity in the face of political, social, or economic upheaval” allows politicians to foster nostalgia and capitalize on pessimism to advance political propaganda (Murphy, 2017: 56). Politicians like Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, for instance, mobilized nostalgia for an earlier mythologized era to build substantial support from the public (Gabriel, 1993). Similarly, Marcos Sr. and his wife, Imelda Marcos, used different myths to mobilize the people (McCallus, 1989). To a certain extent, the former First Couple mythologized historical progress by conceiving themselves as the origin of their New Society (Rafael, 1990).

Today, Marcos Sr.’s wife and descendants carry out their political comeback by exploiting people’s misinformed nostalgia for an imagined golden era (Serquiña, 2019). Social media posts that express martial law nostalgia picture Marcos years as a period of infrastructure and economic boom. Their stories often exaggerate the dictator’s “brilliance,” his dedication to serving the people, as well as other “achievements” of the New Society he established during his authoritarian rule (Figures 1 and 2). They also tend to spotlight the democratic post-Marcos governments’ failures by juxtaposing the prevalence of crime and poverty today to the supposed peace and prosperity during the martial law years. This section analyzes this phenomenon, as well as the political undercurrents and socioeconomic conditions that give traction to the Marcosian narrative. First, it illustrates how Marcos sympathizers and supporters remember the martial law. Next, it explains how the notion of truth is attached to pro-Marcos and pro-martial law statements. Finally, it analyzes how the Marcosian narrative is framed and how this framing stirs varied yet similar



**Figure 1** Posted on Ronald “Bato” Dela Rosa Supporters Facebook page. Before being elected as a senator, Dela Rosa was the police chief that headed Duterte’s drug war. The caption says that no other leaders can equal the achievements of Apo (Marcos). The late Marcos never received such recognition from the Guinness World Records. The only record he had with them is the “greatest robbery of a government,” which recorded an estimated 5-10 billion USD. The author took the screenshot in 2019.

expressions of people’s mixed affect.

## 1. Remembering Marcos’ Martial Law

“During the time of Marcos, no one rapes, and nobody gets raped. The MetroCom (Philippine Constabulary Metropolitan Command) protected the people in the streets. Nowadays, it would be a miracle to walk alone at night without getting raped,” explained the cab driver to his female passenger, proudly sharing how safe it was to walk the streets of Manila during the martial law years. “Life was better back then. Jobs were plenty; goods were cheaper.”

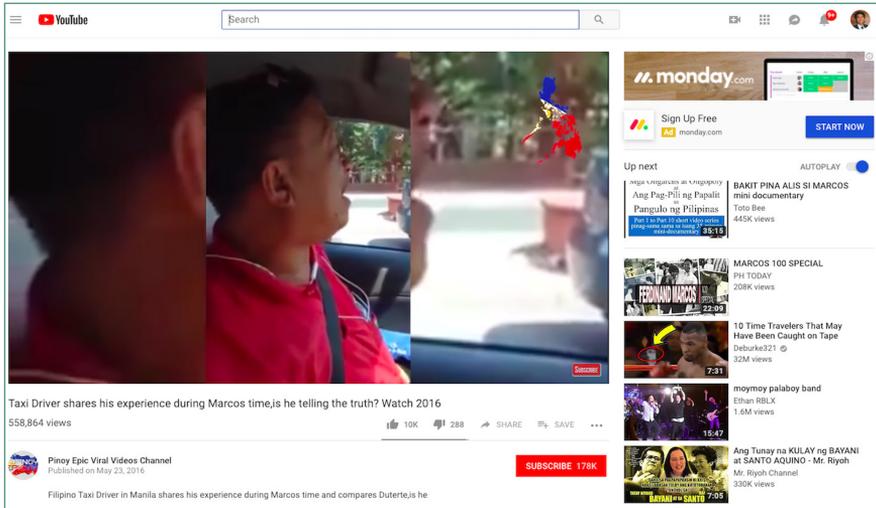
The cab driver went on as he recounted how the Marcos government made it easy for anyone to start a farming business (through Marcos Sr.’s



**Figure 2** A post from the Pres. Ferdinand Emmanuel E. Marcos Facebook page claimed that the Philippines was the second richest country and the most literate in Asia during Marcos' rule. The author took the screenshot in 2018.

*Masagana* 99 agricultural program), invest on a jeepney or cab, or get hired even at the age of fourteen or fifteen. Life back then, it seemed, was easier, simpler, and better. And this idea, at some point, triggered the cab driver's emotions, as he also shared with his passenger his anger and frustrations with the Aquinos, the political family who "ended" the Marcos-led prosperity and peace and order in the country.

The conversation, which lasted for about 5:45 minutes, was documented and published on YouTube by the cab driver's passenger in May 2016. In the video's comment section, one would observe how several viewers conveyed similar nostalgic sentiments. They shared their memories of the Marcos government's generosity during the martial law years, which then provided bread, grits, and skimmed milk to public school students. Some viewers went a step further in describing the atmosphere of the supposed "economic boom" in the 1970s by enumerating a myriad of infrastructure projects during Marcos Sr.'s reign. They brag that all Marcos projects, until now, are still functional and being used by the general public. Meanwhile,



**Figure 3** A YouTube video expressing nostalgia for the Marcos rule. The author took the screenshot in 2018. This video has been taken down in 2019.

others vented their rage toward Filipinos who contributed to the late strongman's ousting as they complained about rampant corruption and social deterioration.

Comments and reactions on posts that share the nostalgia for the Marcos golden age manifest a type of anxiety caused by numerous peace and order threats and discontent caused by the post-Marcos governments' failure to deliver on promises of economic growth that will be felt by all. Many Filipinos often comment that the late Marcos' downfall did not result in any revolutionary changes. Filipino workers continue to live precarious lives. Their meager salaries cannot cover the cost of decent housing. High-quality health care and legal services remain inaccessible to many. Hunger and despair continue to constitute people's everyday reality. Further, post-Marcos administrations fell flat in weeding out deep-seated corruption and addressing widespread ineptitude in different government branches. Exasperated groups even argued that the revolution that ousted

Marcos only restored the old oligarchic rule. These perspectives provide a backdrop for statements that picture the Marcos dictatorship as a golden age.

While sharing recollections of the “lost greatness,” Marcos supporters also express a belief that a Marcos could bring the nation back to its mythological glory. For instance, in posts that show support for the 2016 vice-presidential bid of Marcos, Jr., it was typical to see the following comments:

Victorio R\*\*\*\*: BBM (Bongbong Marcos) deserved to be vice president. So that we can revert to the Golden Age of Marcos. EDSA [revolution] has long been unfashionable, and the treatment they gave Marcos has no relevance, which is why the Philippines has failed now because of BALD (a derogatory nickname given to Pres. Benigno Aquino III).

Ronnel Y\*\*\*\*: Marcos remains to be the president who can provide beauty and comfort to our country, the Philippines.

Venia M\*\*\*\*\*: I chose BBM as vice president because I witnessed the prosperity during the time of the Marcoses. He is intelligent, industrious, and he knew how to bring peace. When he was leading the country, our lives got better because the drug addicts were silent in San Andres Farm, and I always joined the farmers and the veterans, and I witnessed how they were valued, the farmers were given titles to the land they till. They are my heroes (probably pertaining to the Marcoses), but other people (the anti-Marcos) destroyed them with political issues that have no meaning. This is why I don't believe them (the anti-Marcos) because their actions led to our country's poverty. Many had no houses.

The conversations neither sparked any debate nor questioned the notion of the golden age. The thread instead became a space for discussing how

the nation could revert to the golden age of Marcos Sr. and how Marcos Jr. could help restore the country's supposed former glory. A comment also included a picture quote of Marcos Jr., "we shall make this nation great again," suggesting that Marcos Jr. and the people could bring back the prosperity they all remember.

## 2. Framing the Marcos Golden Age

Following the narrative of those who fervently believe in Marcos golden age, the New Society that Marcos Sr. built was aborted (Figure 4) when Filipinos fell for the so-called yellow propaganda. What followed was a long period of social and economic decline (Figure 5)—a dark era caused by former President Corazon Aquino, the oligarchs, church, media, schools, and other groups' connivance to "usurp" Marcos Sr.'s power (Bautista, 2018, p. 287). The reign of yellows was blamed for Filipinos' ignorance and poverty, hence the need to enlighten them about Marcos Sr.'s "unknown secret" (Figure 6). As the Marcoses and their supporters bitterly look back at the rise and fall of the Marcos-led society, they, at the same time, look forward to a better tomorrow, asserting that all that was supposedly lost may be regained. They raise people's hope by painting in broad strokes the prosperous life they would enjoy once liberated from the rule of the evil yellow oligarchs.

As mentioned, this golden age nostalgia appears to follow a tripartite *light-darkness-light* view of history (see Salazar, 1983). Filipinos who first adopted this framework were the late nineteenth century propagandists and revolutionaries whose aim was to liberate their people from the colonial bipartite *darkness-light* view of Philippine history—one that pictured the precolonial years as a period of primitivity and barbarism (*darkness*) and the colonial years as a period of civilization (*light*). Adopting a



**Figure 4** A YouTube video from Sangkay Janjan TV promoting the idea that the Philippines would have surpassed the United States' economy if only Marcos Sr.'s plans were continued. The author took the screenshot in 2020.

tripartite perspective allowed the propagandists to reverse what *dark* and *light* signified and add a third dimension that concerns the future. Similarly, narratives that manifest a nostalgia for a Marcos golden age employ a tripartite approach to transform the signification of the Marcos years (*dark* to *light*) and the revolution that ousted the dictator (*light* to *dark*). And since the nostalgia is shared within the Marcos propaganda network, these narratives mobilize the third dimension of *light* to make people wish to return to a glorious past—a dream that the Marcoses vow to achieve once they complete their return to power.

Below are a few examples from an episode in Sangkay Janjan's YouTube Channel ("May naabuso ba talaga noong martial law?" [Was there really abuse during martial law?], March 21, 2019), which paint the martial law as an era of *light*:



Figure 5 A misleading article from a blog site that uses a news-like interface. The author took the screenshot in 2018.

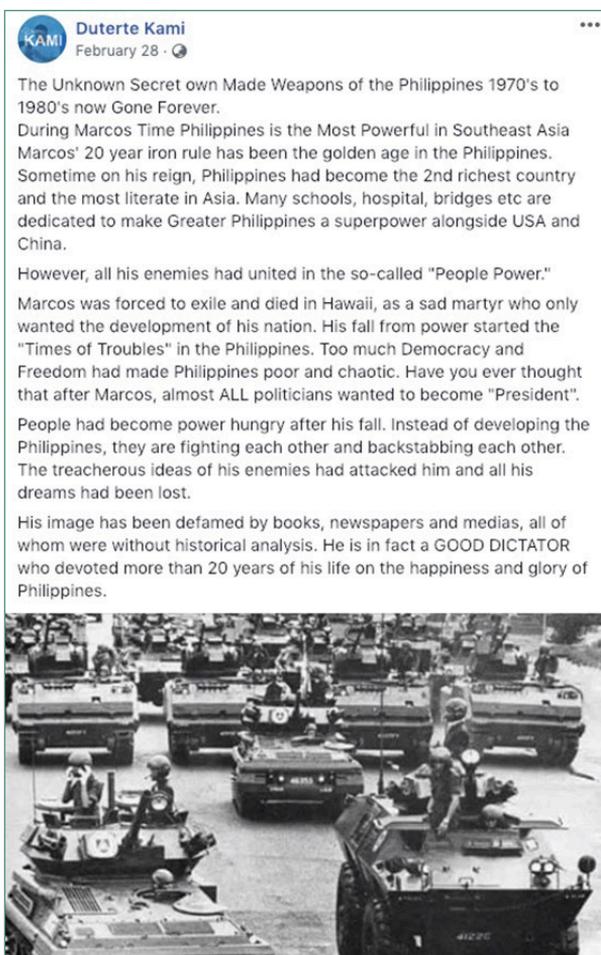
Based on my research on the true history of the Philippines, when martial law was declared, the Philippines experienced the most peaceful era... If you were law-abiding, you would surely not be scared to walk in the streets; you would not fear being mugged or experience any other crime, my friends.

These blogs also use pro-Marcos individuals as resource persons for their interviews:

Sangkay Janjan: Why did you like Marcos back then?

Person A: Because the country was peaceful.

These claims are partnered with attacks on yellows, arguing that Marcos was a victim of his enemies' black propaganda:



**Figure 6** Post from Duterte Kami (We are Duterte) Facebook page shares the Marcos regime's "unknown secret." The author took the screenshot in 2018.

But, my friends, how did this kind of news or black propaganda that there were tortured people during the martial law period spread? This was part of the rumors spread by Ninoy Aquino and the communists in which they insinuated that President Marcos and his people were the perpetrators of torture during the Martial law era. But that is not true.

In another episode titled “*Karen Davila nagpakalat na naman ng fake news | Nagsorry sa Iglesia Ni Cristo*” (Karen Davila spread fake news again | Apologized to *Iglesia Ni Cristo*, June 3, 2020), Sangkay Janjan claimed that:

During the Marcos regime, the Philippines was recognized not only by countries in Asia but also by countries in Europe and even the United States. In Asia, we were next to Japan when it came to the armed forces because, during the Marcos era, we had our own jet fighters, such as the Philippine F5 squadron and Blue diamonds. We also had a parade of force in Luneta similar to the parades conducted in Korea, China, Russia, and the United States to showcase our armed forces and intimidate Malaysia. We were also the first in Southeast Asia to have a rocket named Bongbong rocket and other various military equipment. We will discuss them in the following videos. We were also the first to build a nuclear power plant in Southeast Asia, and because of our advancements when it came to armed forces, the Philippines was then named the Tiger of Asia.

These narratives, which picture the Marcos dictatorship as a period of *light*, provide the foundation for depicting the present as a period of *darkness*. In the case of Sangkay Janjan, the projection of the present as a period of *darkness* is commonly accomplished in subsequent videos (not in the videos that present the Marcos regime as a golden age). While these three periods (past-present-future) are, in most cases, covered in separate videos, repetition of content and subscribers’ continuous viewing allow the various narratives to come together and generate a *light-darkness-light* view of history.

Within the *light-darkness-light* framework, nostalgia for Marcos golden age provides a structure for the expression of people’s longing, discontent, frustration. Taking another excerpt from Sangkay Janjan’s Youtube Channel (“*Mga sekretong pangdigma noong panabon ni Marcos | Imbentong Pinoy*” [Secret weapons in the time of Marcos | Filipino inventions], August 9, 2019), bitterness are manifested

through such statements:

If the development of the submarine pushed through, it is very likely that our country's navy would be stronger today, and there would probably be more submarines today. Actually, we do not have submarines; my friends, if the development of submarines were continued, our country would probably have its own submarines, and the Philippines would have had more submarines at present. But since it is lost, well, the Philippine navy would have been stronger at present and we would not be bullied by any country and we may be even stronger than China at present.

The anti typhoon rocket is one of the most amazing inventions developed by the Marcos administration that was designed to destroy typhoons of any strength when they enter our country. If the development of the anti typhoon rocket was continued, no one would have died, or fewer people would have died because of typhoons in our country, such as during Ondoy. There would not have been Ondoy; Yolanda would not have happened or passed our country. No one or not many Filipinos would have been negatively affected if there had been an anti typhoon rocket. But since President Marcos was removed, the anti typhoon rocket that was being developed was shelved by the administrations after him, and I will repeat once again that if only the development of the anti typhoon rocket had been pursued, we would not have been hit by big typhoons in our country like Ondoy and super typhoon Yolanda that claimed thousands of lives.

One may observe from these statements that frustration and bitterness are structured in “what ifs” and “what would have been” sentiments. Such structuration of sentiments encourages people to feel that they lost something that never existed.

Nostalgia also sets the stage for polarizing phrases, hate speech, and conspiracy theories, which complete the grammar of the Marcos

propaganda. Alongside the advancement of a pro-people Marcos dictatorship is the consistent promotion of the idea that the economic and intellectual elite, and more importantly, the yellows, are all anti-people. Simply put, Marcoses' enemies are branded as people's enemies. To further establish the "we" feeling among those who believe in the Marcos golden age, content creators, influencers, and viewers supporting the Marcos and Duterte regimes claim to represent the Filipino people. They follow the populist *us-versus-them* narrative and often speak the vernacular of the impoverished people (*taumbayan*, *mabibirap*, or *masa*). They use words that appeal to ordinary Filipinos. They also use a conversational tone and common street language. At times, they even use profanity to demonstrate truthfulness and authenticity in engaging their viewers (Talamayan, 2020). As the *us-versus-them* narrative follows a conspiratorial logic, in the expression of nostalgia, the Marcoses and their supporters portray their enemies as evil, shady, and corrupt. Their promotion of an alternative recollection of the past demonizes Marcos' political enemies by posting unverifiable accusations of corruption and malicious political maneuvering (Figures 7 and 8).

Narratives that share nostalgia for the Marcos years also claim that "biased" historians and journalists knowingly silenced accounts that prove the greatness of the Marcos rule. In their posts, they often introduce conspiracy theories, which they phrase as facts or God's words, and use phrases such as "untold history," "hidden truth," "unknown secret," among others (Figures 9 and 10). These catchphrases may have been used to pique a person's curiosity (click-bait). To Bautista (2018), the utilization of these phrases presents an attempt to embody a sense of correctness concerning the supposed fabrications of existing past narratives. Extending this argument, this study observes that phrases hinting at an alternate past intend to either reclaim history from the intellectual elite or enlighten those



Figure 7 A post “revealing” how the late President Benigno Aquino III (son of the late Senator Ninoy Aquino and former President Corazon Aquino) profited from government property. The author took the screenshot in 2019.



Figure 8 A post from a Facebook page that presents itself as a news outlet. The caption reads, “Oh! That’s how, Oh no!” The post claims that the yellows paid “anonymous detractors.” The author took the screenshot in 2019.



**Figure 9** A YouTube video titled “Marcos—The Hidden Truth.” It presents itself as a primary source (archival video) that showcases Marcos Sr.’s “brilliance.” The author took the screenshot in 2018.



**Figure 10** A 2016 click-bait video published in a news-like blog site. The title reads: “This is it: the whole secret and truth about ex-President Ferdinand Marcos that will make us love him more! Watch!” The author took the screenshot in 2018.

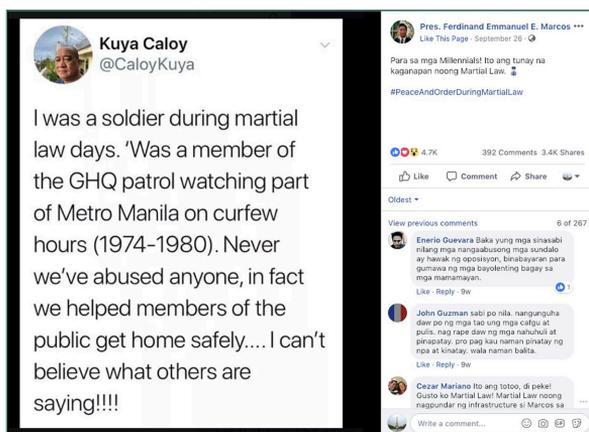
that were supposedly made ignorant by the yellows.

### 3. Claiming Truthfulness, Projecting Virtuousness

Posts claimed truth by arguing that only those who personally experienced martial law have the truthful recollection. Such posts present

themselves as primary sources (eyewitness accounts), arguing that they know what really transpired during the period because of their supposed proximity to the event. For instance, a post from *Kuya Kaloy* (Brother Kaloy), an alleged soldier during the martial law, claimed that it was absurd to accuse them of human rights abuses. He further asserted that what they did when on duty was to ensure people's safety (Figure 11). The post received comments supporting and promoting martial law. Some made accusations that the opposition remunerated military personnel who committed violence. Other posts (Figure 12) justified the imprisonment, torture, or murder by the military, arguing that those who suffered during the martial law years were either disobedient or involved with the communists. They say that law-abiding citizens even benefited from martial law. They also argue that Marcos Sr.'s job was to preserve democracy and protect the nation from imminent communist threats.

Infrastructure built during the martial law years, which benefits the public until today, is also invoked for these are regarded as physical testaments to the said glorious past. For instance, a Facebook page *Pres.*



**Figure 11** *Kuya Kaloy's* post shared in *Pres. Ferdinand Emmanuel E. Marcos*. The author took the screenshot in 2018.



**Figure 12** A YouTube video of an elderly sharing her good memories of Marcos’ martial law. Her recollection was mixed with accusations that the murdered Senator Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino, Jr. of being the “king of N.P.A” (New People’s Army, the armed wing of Communist Party of the Philippines). The author took the screenshot in 2018.

*Ferdinand Emmanuel E. Marcos* invited people on a road trip while showcasing a bridge constructed during the late dictator’s time (Figure 13). The post subtly boasts that the Marcos-constructed bridge has withstood several typhoons. Like other posts about infrastructures built by Marcos Sr., the video commonly receives comments that touted Marcos Sr. projects as well-constructed (in contrast to the “inferior” infrastructure projects of the yellows) or claimed that only a Marcos could achieve such a feat.

Apart from personal testimonies and infrastructures that attest to Marcos-led prosperity and development, the lack of gatekeeping lends credibility to those who share the nostalgia for the Marcos golden age. It prevents them from being branded as *bayaran* or sellouts. As the democratization of the digital public sphere opened up opportunities for amateurs to participate in public political discourse, Flichy (2010, in Mahlouly, 2013) explained that amateurs “acquire an influence that, not so long ago, was the exclusive privilege of professionals and experts” (pp. 10–11). While “experts” believe



**Figure 13** A post from the *Pres. Ferdinand Emmanuel E. Marcos* Facebook page featured Marcos Sr.'s Patapat bridge in Northern Luzon. The author took the screenshot in 2018.

that the absence of any form of control is detrimental to the reliability and rationality of amateurs' statements and arguments, consumers of amateurs' contents, on the contrary, perceive otherwise.

In YouTube, the performance of an amateur identity is often coupled with attacks on mainstream media. Pro-Marcos and pro-Duterte bloggers like Sangkay Janjan and Mr. Riyoh present themselves as ordinary citizens who take on the role of delivering news and information that are otherwise silenced or marginalized by mainstream media. They also describe mainstream media as sellouts, arguing that media personnel generally serve their companies' economic and political interests. To some extent, they deliberately describe specific networks such as ABS-CBN, the most prominent Filipino media company in the Philippines, as being run by

oligarchs (see for context Talamayan and Pertierra, forthcoming). Some even suggest conspiracies by linking some reporters and journalists to local communists. These claims are also present in several comment threads in different media-related social media posts. In this light, pro-Marcos and pro-Duterte bloggers' performance of virtuousness is welcomed by many, for it offers an alternative to those generally skeptical and distrustful of mainstream media.

## V. Conclusion

Empirical evidence from various social media posts and comments showed that the nostalgia for Marcos' martial law helps turn the Marcos propaganda into a grammar that frames people's articulation of their frustrations, discontent, and aspirations. These nostalgic narratives promoted by the Marcoses and their supporters follow a tripartite *light-darkness-light* view of history. The framing of the Marcos authoritarian regime as the country's golden age and the post-Marcos regimes as a period of political chaos and economic decline aids Marcos propaganda in evoking a desire to return to the glorious mythic past.

The study also exhibited how the *light-darkness-light* perspective is embedded in a Marcosian *us-versus-them* narrative. This narrative portrays the yellows, oligarchs, church, media, and other Marcos and Duterte critics as the enemies of the people. Defending the Marcoses is perceived as patriotic and pro-people, and to some extent, made synonymous with speaking the truth. Their posts and comments promote justice, believing that yellows' greed victimized the Marcoses. Because of this framing, nostalgia can set the stage for expressing polarizing phrases, hate speech, and conspiracy theories, which complete the grammar of the Marcos

propaganda on social media. Most crucially, nostalgia aids not only the sanitization of the Marcos regime but also the promotion of the living Marcoses' political agenda.

The proliferation and replication of the nostalgia for the Marcos golden age are fueled, at least in part, by people's anger over the unfulfilled promises of the revolution that ended the authoritarian rule. Despite nostalgia being harnessed as a propaganda resource, this study emphasized that people's current needs and demands affect their recollection and response to various articulations of memories. After several post-Marcos administrations failed to fulfill people's desire for economic prosperity and genuine change, exasperated individuals tend to remember the Marcos regime warmly and express a desire to return to that purported era of prosperity. Thus, they welcome the idea of a Marcos reclaiming the presidential seat.

Memories are all but arbitrary, for several technological, social, political, and even individual cognitive processes influence them. The arbitrariness of memories is best manifested in today's internet, where recollections' veracity has become increasingly contextualized within echo chambers and filter bubbles. However, by realizing the underlying logic that operates in framing, articulating, and proliferating contentious memories, deciphering truth and determining truthfulness behind every past recollection becomes possible.

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