

The folly of remembering martial law on September 21

Last Wednesday, Sept. 21, hundreds of activists wearing black shirts took to the streets holding up banners condemning Ferdinand Marcos' declaration of martial law 50 years ago and chanting "never forget, never again." Martial law survivors took part in a "conversation express" at the Bantayog ng mga Bayani in Quezon City. They later joined the 8,000 or so people gathered in the University of the Philippines campus to pay homage to the thousands of Filipinos who were arrested, abducted, detained, tortured, or killed during the martial law period.

A parade of floats depicting issues under martial law kicked off the protest rally. Images of Filipinos who died during the period were shown. A billboard poster demonizing Ferdinand E. Marcos was also displayed. A documentary film, *11,103*, which features the stories of survivors directly countering many of the false narratives peddled online, premiered on the campus. The title of the film is based on the number of human rights victims who were officially recognized by the government and who received compensation from the Marcoses' ill-gotten wealth.

On the same day, a "Barikada Laban sa Historical Distortion and Disinformation" was held at the Commission on Human Rights main office in Quezon City. Journalists paid tribute to the people from the industry who risked their lives in fighting for press freedom during martial law. The National Union of Journalists of the Philippines issued this statement: "On the 50th year since the declaration of Martial Law, Filipino journalists remember those who remained loyal to the truth and who did so despite a lack of resources and at considerable risk to themselves. It is in this spirit that we stand today with them [the Mosquito Press] and with each other to join the country in saying Never Again."

Those who participated in the protest activities last Wednesday, Sept. 21, including the survivors of martial law, did so in the belief that martial law regime began on Sept. 21, 1972. But Sept. 21, 1972 was like any ordinary weekday. Business, slowed down by continuous rain and floodwaters the past weeks, was buzzing again. Government was functioning normally. Schools were open. Newspapers were delivered to homes and sold in the streets. All broadcast stations were airing their regular programs.

On Sept. 21, 1972, democracy was vibrant and functioning magnificently. Congress and the Constitutional Convention were in animated session. Senator Benigno Aquino even delivered a privilege speech before his fellow senators, reminding them of their true role in the event martial law was imposed. In the afternoon of that day, the Movement of Concerned Citizens for Civil Liberties, headed by another bitter critic of President Marcos, Senator Jose Diokno, held a huge rally, estimated between 30,000 and 50,000, denouncing the plan of the president to suppress democracy.

The next day, Sept. 22, all the daily newspapers featured the Movement's rally. In the afternoon, Senator Aquino was guest speaker of the graduating class of the Asian Institute of Management. There were as many as 16 military officers in the school that day. They were not there to secure the school or to arrest the senator. They were there as regular students of the Master in Business Management program of the Institute.

Among them were Air Force Major Jose Comendador and Army Captain Angelo Reyes, who both belonged to the graduating class. Comendador would become Commanding General of the 2nd Air Division but joined the rebels in the December 1989 attempted coup d'état and held Mactan Air Base hostage. Reyes would become Armed Forces of the Philippines Chief of Staff but withdrew the support of the

MUSINGS OSCAR P. LAGMAN, JR.

military from President Joseph Estrada during the EDSA Revolution of January 2001.

I remember distinctly that talk of Senator Aquino because I was conducting class in the room next to the lecture hall where he was sharing with the students his vision of "The Philippines after Marcos." After his harangue against President Marcos, Dean Gabino Mendoza invited him to the Faculty Lounge. There he told us that he didn't think Marcos would place the country under martial law, not until 1973.

From the Institute, he went to the Hilton Hotel for a meeting with other senators. There at past midnight, or in the wee hours of Sept. 23, 1972, he was arrested — at about the same time

other critics of Marcos were being rounded up and media establishments shut down.

By 1 a.m., Senators Diokno and Ramon Mitra had also been arrested. Also taken into custody that early morning were newspaper editors Amando Doronilla of the *Daily Mirror*, Luis Mauricio of the *Philippine Graphic*, Teodoro Locsin, Sr. of the *Philippines Free Press*, Ernesto Granada of the *Manila Chronicle*, and columnists Maximo Soliven of the *Manila Times*, Luis Beltran of the *Evening News*, and former senator Francisco "Soc" Rodrigo who had a political commentary program in ABS-CBN.

Free Press Associate Editor Napoleon Rama and Associated Broadcasting Company TV-5 (the *Manila Times* TV station) anchor Jose Mari Velez, who were Constitutional Convention delegates, were also arrested as were the other outspoken delegates

— Heherson Alvarez, Alejandro Lichauco, Voltaire Garcia, and Teofisto Guingona, Jr. By dawn of Sept. 23, 100 individuals were in detention centers.

Martial law took effect in the first hour of Sept. 23, 1972 but was declared by President Marcos himself on Channel 9 of Kanaon Broadcasting System, owned by his crony Roberto Benedicto, only at about 7 p.m. of that day.

It was only much later that Marcos said he signed Proclamation No. 1081 on Sept. 21, 1972. But on another occasion, he told a group of historians that he signed it on Sept. 17. Some say he signed it as early as Sept. 10, 1972. Others say Marcos did it on the night of Sept. 22, immediately after the staged ambush of Defense Secretary Juan Ponce Enrile that justified the imposition of martial law in the first hour of Sept. 23.



Bearing witness: #11,103

By Menchu Aquino Sarmiento

THE DOCUMENTARY *11,103* had its Philippine premiere on Sept. 21, the date of Presidential Decree 1081 which placed the Philippines under Marcos' Martial Law. There were screenings in Quezon City, Cebu, Dumaguete, Iloilo, and Bacolod as well as in American cities. The number 11,103 represents the number of claimants officially recognized by the Human Rights Victims' Claims Board and thus granted reparations through R.A. 10368 [An Act Providing for Reparation and Recognition of Victims of Human Rights Violations During the Marcos Regime, Documentation of Said Violations, Appropriating Funds Therefor and for Other Purposes]. Reparations were determined through a points system, with 10 being the most severe to one being the least. In this film, 11 survivors share their harrowing accounts of torture and rape individually suffered, the murders and forced disappearances of idealistic family members and innocent neighbors, the burning down of their homes, farms, and villages by the Marcos Martial Law police, military, and vigilante forces. Their accounts are interspersed with disconcerting scenes of the UniTeam presidential campaign.

For *11,103*, producer Kara Magsanoc Alikpala and director Jeanette Ifurong reprise their roles in the 1997 documentary *Batas Militar*. The earlier film was co-directed with Jon Red while *11,103* was co-directed with Mike Alcazaren.

The film also highlights the essential work of the Human Rights Violations Victims Memorial Commission (HRVVMC) whose gargantuan task has been to preserve and to present the painful memories, not just of the 11,103, but of approximately 75,000 victims whose records are in their safekeeping. Many of the victims were unlettered peasants from the hinterlands who could not present documentary evidence of decades-old atrocities, or corroborative witness accounts. This is expected, as the rapes, tortures and other acts of state-sponsored terror were perpetrated by much-armed military, police, or government-sanctioned armed vigilantes, like the *laga* or the Lost Command, in military camps, prisons, and safe houses. Even if the criminals could be identified, it would be difficult to find other brave souls willing to testify against them. Thus, HRVVMC Executive Director Chuck Crisanto believes that there may be well over 200,000 victims of human rights violations during Marcos' Martial Law.

On this the year of Marcos' Martial Law's 50th anniversary, the cornerstone was laid for the Free-

dom Memorial Museum which would permanently memorialize the history of Marcos Martial Law's victims. However, under the present administration, it is doubtful that the funding provided by law for the construction of this museum will materialize. It is some consolation though that the 75,000 case files for claims by victims of Marcos Martial Law human rights violations have been digitized. There are copies in two Philippine universities and also in an American university.

Two years after Marcos declared Martial Law, there was the Palimbang Massacre in Sultan Kudarat, perpetrated on the fourth day of Ramadan, when the men were weak from fasting. The Moro Women's Center records show that: 1,500 male Moros aged 11-70 were killed inside a mosque. 3,000 women and children aged nine to 60 were detained separately — many women were raped. Three hundred houses were razed by the government forces. For the Kanda Family, this filmed account was their first time to speak openly about the terror they had suffered as children during the Palimbang Massacre. For 44 years, they had been silent — a common effect of severe post traumatic events. Fourteen-year-old Haj Mariam Kanda was with the other women held on a navy ship that had shelled Palimbang. Fortunately, she was not violated, but saw other young girls were gang-raped, then drowned in the sea. The boys saw their fathers shot, and were themselves severely beaten. Madaki "Daks" Kanda spoke Ilocano, which probably saved his life. Mohammad "Max/Ustadz" Kanda believes that throughout Marcos' Martial Law, several hundred thousand Moros and *lumad* (indigenous peoples) in far-flung, isolated areas were similarly killed or otherwise brutalized by Marcos' Martial Law forces. The Kanda Family interviews take place in the shelled mosque. The bloodstains are gone, but the bullet holes in the concrete walls are still there.

Purification Viernes' forever scarred and mangled body is living proof of her ordeal. Her husband, a mere copra farmer, and their two youngest children died when they were strafed by paramilitary troops in the dead of night as they lay huddled together on the family *banig* (woven mat). Their humble wood and *nipa* home stood alone in a field in sparsely populated Brgy. Carmen, in the 4th class municipality of Jimenez, Misamis Occidental. Mrs. Viernes' leg was so riddled with bullets, that she was permanently crippled. She had shielded her 13-year-old daughter Cecilia with her body during the assault. They were the only survivors and moved away after that night of terror. After nearly 40 years, it was only during the filming of *11,103* that Mrs. Viernes and Cecilia

were able to return to the hollowed-out ruins of their home, where Mr. Viernes and the younger children had been killed by state paramilitary forces. Cecilia later worked with Task Force Detainees. Her mother has found comfort in the Church. Often, the religious and catechists have been in solidarity with the millions of Filipinos who suffered from violent hamletting and displacement, or were deprived of their farms and forest lands during Marcos Martial Law.

Hilda Narciso was such a church worker and teacher in 1983, when she was forcibly taken from a pastor's home in Davao during a military raid. While blindfolded, she was gang raped for weeks, and kept imprisoned under dehumanizing conditions for another six months. Her rapists have never been brought to justice. She founded the Women's Crisis Center, and works with other women's advocacy groups. Now she has transformed herself into a wounded healer, applying therapies and alternative modalities to help other survivors of rape and violent dehumanization, to find their way forward, as she is doing. Still, she longs for the healing of our land.

Eduico dela Torre's being an SVD priest did not protect him from a beating when he was imprisoned. His own healing has come through art. He rendered the animated pen and ink wash portraits and the sketches of re-enactments interspersed throughout *11,103*. As president of the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement, he continues to work with farmers and fisherfolk who are among the most impoverished sectors in our society.

A UP-PGH (University of the Philippines-Philippine General Hospital) medical doctor, Aurora Parong, was imprisoned for a year and a half for treating suspected NPA (New People's Army) members. Her lawyer brother was abducted in plain view by the military from a restaurant. His tortured, lifeless body was later dumped along the highway. Despite what she and her family have been through, she continues in her healing vocation and is teaching other medical students in Nueva Vizcaya. She has hope that the younger generations will carry the torch, and reminds us that the quest for a just and equitable society is not a sprint, but a relay.

11,103 lets us see the humanity and courage of these ordinary Filipinos, in the context of their early struggles, hardships and up till the present. Now we must all face the nightmare of history repeating — *11,103* is a wake-up call.

Those who would like to organize a screening of *11,103* in their own community or institution can fill out [#1103Film #NeverForget #NeverAgain](http://bit.ly/1103ScreeningRequest). ■



His diary entry for Sept. 22 was, "Sec. Juan Ponce Enrile was ambushed near Wack-Wack at about 8 pm tonight. It was a good thing he was riding in his security car as a protective measure. This makes the martial law proclamation a necessity." His entry for Sept. 25 indicated that the date of Proclamation 1081 is Sept. 23, 1972.

So, even "September 21" is a date of dubious significance. Marcos had a fetish for the numeral 7. He won over President Diosdado Macapagal by 777 votes in the presidential election of 1965. That is why he was undecided for a while between 17 and 21. The number 21 is divisible by 7, unlike 23. The numerals 2 and 3 did not add up to 7. Marcos chose 21 over 17 because September 21 coincided with the dismissal in 1939 of the Nalundasan murder charge against him.

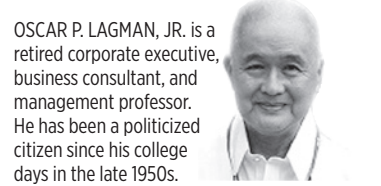
Sept. 21 was only a product of President Marcos' penchant for romanticizing events. Political pundits believe that Marcos wanted martial law remembered on Sept. 21 to erase from memory the events involving Senators Aquino and Diokno on that day. In 1973, he issued Proclamation 1181, designating Sept. 21 as Thanksgiving Day to coincide with the establishment of his so-called "Bagong Lipunan" or New Society.

The New Society was supposed to be similar to the "Great Leap Forward" of Mao Zedong in China and the "New Order Administration" of President Suharto in Indonesia. The apologists of the martial law regime point to the improvement of peace and order, reduction of violent urban crime, suppression of the Communist insurgency, neutralization of the Muslim separatist movement, collection of loose firearms, and instilling discipline into citizens.

The propaganda effort was so successful that is why up to the present, many Filipinos — particularly those born after September 1972 and those who were then too young to know the implications of Proclamation 1081 — labor under the misimpression that martial law was declared on Sept. 21, 1972.

As Marcos wished, people remember martial law, "the golden age," every Sept. 21. To place significance to that date is to submit oneself to the manipulation of President Marcos' shrewd mind. Remembering martial law on Sept. 21 is like celebrating the benevolence of President Marcos.

Remembering martial law on Sept. 23 is commemorating the beginning of "the darkest chapter in the history of post-colonial Philippines." Remembering martial law on Sept. 23 is committing to memory the malevolence of Ferdinand E. Marcos. ■



OSCAR P. LAGMAN, JR. is a retired corporate executive, business consultant, and management professor. He has been a politicized citizen since his college days in the late 1950s.