

EDITORIAL

The masses have endured enough. It's time to cut loose the rotten heads.

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PAGBU[★]LAK

Opisyal na Pahayagang Pangkampus ng Unibersidad ng Pilipinas Visayas, Kolehiyo ng Agham at Sining

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The students and the Filipino masses shall continue to strike. We shall undyingly take to the streets because we refuse to let the same tyrannical forces trample the future they have already destroyed.

We shall refuse to surrender our country to leaders who have repeatedly proven unworthy of the trust and power they held. We shall choose a future free from the shadows of Marcos and Duterte. When their government rots from the head, the Filipino people must cut it loose.

As we march toward the streets of Iloilo, we join the nation in outrage of the failed leadership of Marcos-Duterte administration and the bureaucrat-capitalism they're desperately enriching through looting of national resources, funneling billions into confidential funds, and crushing dissent to protect their empire of corruption while millions of ordinary people sink deeper into hunger, poverty and floodwaters.

This administration has perfected the art of converting public office into a marketplace. They have successfully orchestrated the perversion of the government to operate like a syndicate rather than a public institution.

Marcos Jr. has failed the Filipino people. He has shown neither competence nor vision, only an insatiable appetite for power masked as unity. Under his watch, Marcos Jr. presumes to be anti-corruption but forgets he's inherited the corruption his clan has orchestrated decades ago. He refuses to take accountability on their ill-gotten wealth but continues to silence critics rather than answer people's demand for truth. His presidency is nothing more than a revival of the same legacy of plunder and repression that the Filipino people fought to dismantle under his dictator father's helm.

Three years since Marcos Jr., assumed presidency, millions and billions worth of flood-control infrastructure projects are now under investigation. Many of these have been flagged as "ghost projects," substandard constructions, or even non-existent.

These failures cannot be abstracted away as simple mismanagement: for a country prone to typhoons and floods, substandard infrastructures are a death sentence for the poor. He is not merely

guilty by association, as his leadership is directly responsible for enabling and perpetuating bureaucrat-capitalism that infrastructure meant for safety becomes easy access to bloat their pockets.

Sara Duterte is no different. Hiding behind choreographed silence and manufactured victimhood coordinated with their network of paid trolls and propaganda machine, she has perfected the art of underperforming and exploiting public office for personal gain. The scandal of confidential funds is only the beginning of the long trail of corruption she must answer for. Like her jailed father, she wields power with impunity and uses violence and loyalty politics as weapons.

The Filipino people will never forget how Duterte brazenly burned 125 million in just 11 days, a malformed monument to bureaucrat-capitalist greed. The impeachment complaints filed against her laid bare an even more disturbing chain of plunder: unaccounted millions, dubious fund allocations, and fabricated beneficiaries. A calculated theft of public funds ripped from the pockets of the workers, peasants, students, and the poor. The Filipino people will not be fooled with her political theatrics mocking the intelligence of the masses.

Together, Marcos Jr. and Duterte represent the worst face of bureaucrat-capitalism. They are not rivals; they are partners in plunder. Their falling-out

is nothing but a distraction meant to divide and weaken public resistance.

It is not enough to condemn only one. We must reject the false choice between two corrupt leaders and that the best and only choice is to demand that both resign. The nation cannot heal while either one remains in power. Anything less than their joint resignation is betrayal to the collective struggle of the Filipino masses.

With the ongoing division among the progressive ranks, the youth and the students shall utterly reject the option of silence and compromise. We shall refuse to dilute the struggle. We shall refuse to settle for symbolic protest while plunderers remain in power, laughing at our fragmentation.

There can be no middle ground between the oppressor and the oppressed. There can be no victory if we allow fear fracture our movement. We have already shown this government what it must fear from those it attempts to fool. The youth and the Filipino masses have proven time and again that no amount of intimidation or deceit can silence a people awakened to struggle. Last September 21, on the anniversary of the declaration of Martial Law, the 15,000 students and the workers of Iloilo flooded the streets to reject corruption and demand accountability.

And we shall rise again. We shall return to the streets with conviction sharpened by struggle. If Marcos and Duterte believe they can pacify us and buy our silence, they are gravely mistaken. The collective clarity and unwavering resolve that burned in the chest of the Katipuneros and of Bonifacio burns now in the hearts of the Filipino masses. Anything less is capitulation and betrayal of Bonifacio's struggle for genuine liberation. ✨

About the cover.

A decisive act of resistance takes center stage as the Filipino masses confront and cut loose the rotten heads of power. The people are angry for power-hungry Marcos Jr. and Sara Duterte and their collective resolve is to end the leadership marked by corruption and betrayal of public trust. What has long decayed must be severed so that the nation may break free from oppressive rule and reclaim its future through struggle and collective action.

Illustration by
KENNETH DE LA VEGA



REPULSE. UP Visayas students joined the Panay-wide mobilization against government corruption and abuse of power, coinciding with the 53rd anniversary of the declaration of Martial Law under Ferdinand Marcos Sr.

photo by KRIZELLE KATE BLANZA

ILONGGOS PUSH BACK.

Sept 21 protest draws 15,000 Ilonggos to streets to denounce gov't corruption

Around 15,000 people flooded the streets of Iloilo City on Sunday, September 21, in a Panay-wide mobilization against government corruption and abuse of power, coinciding with the 53rd anniversary of the declaration of Martial Law under Ferdinand Marcos Sr.

VOICES FROM THE STREET

Church leaders decried the persistence of graft and misuse of public funds while the peasantry and the indigenous people condemned the persistent land-grabbing incident often enforced by state forces.

Seminarian from St. Vincent Ferrer Seminary Pierre Urielle Nono, 23, said that the church's participation in the protest action brings good news and should be a role model for the masses. The church, he adds, plays a guiding role in the moral and ethical lifestyle of the society so it must be an active participant in social movements aimed at promoting the common good.

After almost three decades, Ramon Ramirez, 61, a freelance visual anthropologist and speleologist,

returned to the streets to participate in a large-scale protest. In the 1970s and 1980s, he joined protests against Marcos Sr. and once even hid in a pigpen to avoid the police.

He said he also stopped rallying for a long time because of trolls and political turmoil, but he returned now, believing it is his duty to participate in the change.

He is accompanied by Virgil, 59, a farmer, who said that the issues he faced in 1983 are almost the same as those today.

Juanito Liboon, a carpenter, said he joined the protest to amplify the voice of ordinary citizens amid the country's ongoing problems. For him, mass actions are a way to show the government the

people's true sentiments. He called for systemic change instead of what he described as broken promises. "The people voted for you, the people you also forced," he said.

Justin Paul Yap, a UP Visayas alumnus recalled his time as a student-activist. According to him, it is important to show disappointment by participating in a large-scale protest against government corruption.

"If not angry, disappointed." As taxpayers and citizens, we want a well-functioning government. This has nothing to do with political parties, but rather with the call for good governance for all Filipinos, said Yap.

He held his placard that read: "PWD 20%, DPWH

80% corrupt."

STATE SURVEILLANCE, ARREST

Students also raised concerns over alleged state surveillance. In UP Visayas, unidentified men were reportedly seen taking photos of students as they prepared to join the protest. The group was also intercepted by police while en route to Iloilo City.

In Manila, over 200 protesters, including student leaders and student journalists were arrested after a separate anti-corruption mobilization was violently dispersed, with riot police firing tear gas and water cannons as clashes broke out, according to reports by ABS-CBN and Al Jazeera.

Sunod-sunod na kilos-protesta, inilunsad; mag-aaral ng UP Visayas, nanguna

by STEPHANIE JUNTILLA

Umingay ang mga panawagan ng mga mag-aaral ng Unibersidad ng Pilipinas sa Visayas sa unang semestre matapos naglunsad ng sunod-sunod na kilos-protesta.

Ilan sa mga pagkilos ay isinagawa sa loob at labas ng pamantasan kaugnay ng mga isyu sa badyet sa edukasyon, korapsyon kaugnay sa flood control scandal, at lumalalang krisis pang-ekonomiya. Ipinawagan din ng mga mag-aaral ang pagpapanagot sa parehong Marcos Jr. at Sara Duterte.

Pinangunahan ang mga pagkilos na ito ng UP Visayas University Student Council (UPV USC) katuwang ang Sandigan ng Mag-aaral para sa Sambayanan (SAMASA-UPV) at iba pang progresibong grupo, na nagsilbing pangunahing hanay sa pagdadala ng mga panawagan ng mga estudyante sa loob ng pamantasan.

Sinalubong ng mga mag-aaral ang pagbubukas ng bagong akademikong taon sa pamamagitan ng First Day Rage noong Agosto 18, isang system-wide na pagkilos upang tuligain ang nakaambang budget cut sa sektor ng edukasyon partikular sa mga state universities at colleges kabilang ang UP. Hindi rin pinalagpas ng mga mag-aaral ang pagkumenda sa patuloy na paniniktik ng estado sa mga kabataang aktibista, mga progresibong grupo, at mga mamamahayag-pangkampus na anila'y panghihimasok sa akademikong kalayaan.

Sa parehong buwan, inilabas ni Ferdinand Marcos Jr. ang listahan ng labinlimang kontraktor na umano'y may kaugnayan sa mga palpak, substandard, at mahigit 400 "ghost" flood control projects – isang isyung muling nagpaliyab sa galit ng mga mag-aaral laban sa sistematikong paglulustay ng pondo ng publiko.

Dahil rito, nagsagawa at nakilahok ang mga mag-aaral sa magkakahiwalay na kilos-

protesta, kabilang ang Trillion Peso March noong Setyembre 21 kasabay ng paggunita sa ika-53 anibersaryo ng deklarasyon ng batas militar.

Kinundena ng mga pagkilos na ito ang deka-dekadang pandarambong sa kaban ng bayan, na iniugnay sa patuloy na pagbaha, pagkawasak ng mga komunidad, at sa patuloy na paglalagay sa sambayanang Pilipino sa peligro dulot ng kapabayaang at kakulangan sa serbisyong panlipunan.

Humigit-kumulang 15000 ang dumalo sa malawakang pagkilos na mula pa sa iba't-ibang bahagi ng Panay na kalauna'y nagtagpo sa Iloilo Provincial Capitol. Kulang-kulang 500 na mga mag-aaral ng UP Visayas ang dumalo sa naturang pagkilos sa kabila ng sunod-sunod na surveillance ng mga "di kilalang mga tao.

Bitbit pa rin ang parehong mga panawagan, nagkasa ng university-wide wokawit noong Oktubre 6, isang buwan nakalipas ang malawakang kilos-protesta. Dinaluhan ito ng mahigit 800 mag-aaral, guro, at mga kawani ng unibersidad kung saan mas lalong iginiiit ang mas mataas na antas ng suporta sa sektor ng edukasyon.

"Sa UP Visayas, nahihirapan ang mga guro at estudyante makahanap ng silid-aralan para makapagklase. Hindi sapat ang pagtugon sa transportasyon at espasyo," giit ni Michael Baylon ng UPV USC.

Dagdag niya, hangga't nananatili ang sistemang mapagsamantala, ang mga guro, manggagawa, at kabataan ang patuloy na magbabayad sa presyo nito.

Sa mga sumunod na linggo, nagsagawa ang mga mag-aaral ng mga piket na protesta sa Lean Alejandro Hall upang ipahayag ang maring pagtutol sa korapsyon at patuloy na pagkakait ng sapat na pondo sa edukasyon.

Kabilang dito ang piket rally noong Setyembre 25 laban sa halos P21 bilyong kaltas sa panukalang badyet ng UP System, ang lightning rally noong Oktubre 17 bilang bahagi ng National Youth Day of Action Against Corruption, at ang pagkilos noong Oktubre 23 na nanawagan para sa agarang pagsasabat ng SOGIESC Equality Bill na pinangunahan ng Samahan ng Mag-aaral at Kabataan-Kababaihan (SAMAKAKA-UPV).

Hindi rin nagtapos dito ang mga pagkilos, bilang paggunita sa National Students' Day noong Nobyembre 17, mahigit 300 estudyante mula sa apat na kolehiyo ng pamantasan ang nagmartsa patungong New Administration Building, na nagsimula sa malawakang pagkilos sa iba't ibang yunit sa Sistema ng Unibersidad ng Pilipinas.

Samantala, noong Nobyembre 30, Araw ni Bonifacio, muling inilunsad ang ikalawang Trillion Peso March bilang pagtuligsa sa patuloy na kawalan ng nakukulong at napapanagot sa mga anomalya sa flood control projects at sa bilyon-bilyong pisong nilustay sa katwalian.

Bukod sa mga kilos-protesta sa lansangan, nagpahayag din ng pagtutol ang mga mag-aaral sa pamamagitan ng sining sa Pagtib-ong: A Cultural Night, isang art-based protest at talakayan kung saan ginamit ang tula, musika, dula, at biswal na sining upang ilantad ang mga isyu ng karapatang pantao at edukasyon, at bigyang-diin ang patuloy na pagpasasantabi sa mga sektor ng katutubo at magsasaka na kabilang sa pinakaapektado ng krisis.

Ito ay bilang bahagi ng IP and Peasants Month na pinangunahan ng KARATULA-UPV. Sa pamamagitan ng malikhaing espasyo, iginiiit ng mga mag-aaral na ang protesta ay hindi lamang umiiral sa lansangan, kundi pati sa kultura at kamalayang panlipunan.

Sa kabila ng sunod-sunod na pagkilos, nananatiling malinaw ang tindig ng mga mag-aaral: hindi hihinto ang sigaw hangga't walang tunay na napapanagot, at hangga't patuloy na inuuna ng mga nasa itaas ang sariling interes kaysa karapatan ng mamamayan.



WHEN PUBLIC WORKS FAIL THE PUBLIC.

Ilonggos bear brunt of faulty infrastructure, flood control projects

by STEPHANIE JUNTILLA & JOSHUA TICOT

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Billions of pesos have been poured into flood control and infrastructure projects across Iloilo in recent years, yet for many communities, these public works have brought more frustrations than relief.

From ghost flood control projects, unfinished flyovers, to poorly constructed seawalls, citizens are left questioning whether these projects truly serve the people or serve as a profit scheme for contractors and government officials.

PUBLIC WORKS ACROSS THE PROVINCE

Across the province, major projects are underway: flood controls along river channels, seawalls and coastal defenses in Miagao, as well as new roads and flyovers in the city. Some of these contracts are connected to firms tied to the controversial Discaya family, which has secured multi-billion-peso construction deals.

Concerns escalated after Iloilo City Mayor Raisa Treñas-Chu ordered a halt and full review of the flood control projects tied to the controversial Discaya-owned firms. Residents in several barangays reported that instead of easing floods, the projects only made things worse.

To address these complaints, Treñas tapped specialists from the University of the Philippines (UP) and Central Philippine University (CPU) to conduct an independent study of the controversial projects, with results expected by November.

“Our project with UP will start this month. We want to review these projects so our judgment and solutions will be scientific,” [Treñas said](#).

FLOODED BY FLOOD CONTROL

In Mohon, Arevalo district, residents now say they endure deeper and longer inundation since a flood mitigation structure was built along the coastline of Iloilo River.

The project includes a huge portion of the Iloilo River taken up for a bike lane but the path is barely passable due to obstructions.

An investigation found that the P91-million project, implemented by one of the Discaya firms, does not appear in the official record of the Iloilo City District Engineering Office (ICDEO). Transparency boards at the site were missing key details, including contract IDs, timeline, start dates, and completion dates.

Mohon Barangay Chairman Francis Acap, along with Oton Mayor Sofronio Fusin, blamed the structure that submerged Mohon and seven Oton barangays during Crising, Dante, and Emong in July.



RELIEF OR RISK?

A flood control structure stretches along the river in Mohon, Arevalo, where residents report deeper and longer flooding following the project's construction.

photo from
RJAY ZURIAGA
CASTOR
/RAPPLER

The same unease is felt in Jaro. Along the Jaro River, residents remain wary of a flood control project that has yet to show clear benefits. In Barangay Tacas, locals discovered that the contractor handling the ongoing mitigation works is Alpha and Omega, another firm tied to the Discaya family.

On September 9, the Philippine Contractors Accreditation Board (PCAB) revoked the licenses of all 9 firms owned by the Discaya family, effectively halting their operations.

TWIN FLYOVER FIASCO

In Pavia, Iloilo, the infamous Ungka flyover has become a byword for botched infrastructure. Once touted as a P680-million solution to traffic, the project has since ballooned to P1 billion after repairs exposed major defects.

Not a kilometer away from Ungka is the Aganan Flyover. Costing around P800-million, the construction has been paralyzed since 2022 and now stands as a daily reminder of persistent inefficiencies and project bottlenecks in public works

Commuters endure gridlock and longer travel hours, while businesses along the route complain of dwindling sales as motorists are forced onto congested alternative roads.

Rather than offering relief, the two flyovers have become cautionary tales of poor planning and questionable governance.

COASTAL DEFENSE IN MIAGAO

In Miagao, Iloilo, seawalls were built to shield the coastal barangays from storm surges and erosion.

DPWH records show that the P49 million project was awarded to IBC in 2022, with another P49 million contract awarded to A.D. Pendon Construction & Supply, Inc. in 2023.

But barely a year after the seawall's completion, Typhoon Kristine damaged portions of the seawall in Barangay Baybay Norte, followed by severe flooding a week later in Barangay Sapa that affected about 85% of the residents during Typhoon Leon.

For fisherfolk, the project has been as disruptive. The seawall cut off their regular fishing routes, forcing them to move farther along the coast, near the University of the Philippines Visayas' Ocean Wetlab.

“Kung magpalawod garing ti mabudlayan gid eh kay ti to ron ang pumpboat ga ano sa UP, magduso [ng pumpboat budlay],” said Melvin Naciongayo, a fisherman and resident of Barangay Sapa.

Locals also claim the structure has made flooding worse in Sapa. Once knee-deep, floodwaters now rise to chest level during heavy rains.

“Sa baynte katuig namon diri, amo man lang na natabo [na hanggang liog]. Kay kang ligad, dangat lang sa tuhod,” a resident of Barangay Sapa told Daily Guardian.

“Halimbawa kung matapnan to kang mga kahoy nga dagkol ang mga tubig gapundo ridya grabe tubig kang ligad ang diyan kara ay sa jalousie dangat ang [tubig], taga ja namon ra ay [chest level],” Naciongayo added.

“Wara gane kami kamaan kara nga asta ra ja may seawall mong,” said Wilma Siarez, another resident. (We didn't even know that the seawall would extend this far.)

Locals further complained that they were not directly consulted nor engaged in dialogues about the said project.

“Locals also claim the structure has made flooding worse in Sapa. Once knee-deep, floodwaters now rise to chest level during heavy rains.”

ILONGGOS PUSH BACK

Discontent has since spilled into the streets. On September 17, Manibela launched a three-day nationwide transport strike to protest the PUV phaseout and corruption in government infrastructure projects.

The strike was short-lived after the group heeded appeals from transport agencies and commuters. The momentum carried to Iloilo. On September 18, Piston and multisectoral groups gathered under the stalled Aganan flyover in Pavia, where about 200 members of *No to PUV Phaseout Coalition Panay*, *BAYAN Panay*, and other progressive groups staged an indignation rally denouncing alleged corruption and misuse of public funds in infrastructure projects.

The protests reached their height on September 21, the 53rd anniversary of Martial Law, when progressive groups held major rallies nationwide linking current corruption scandals to the country's long struggle against abuse of power. ✊

6.9

Bogo City, Northern Cebu,
September 30

5.8

Bogo City, Northern Cebu,
October 13

4.4

Guimbal, Iloilo
October 15

COMMUNITY NEWS.

After the tremors, Miagao's fishing community faces layered crises

by GRACE ABIGAIL CHUA

At the seawall in Miagao, students gather almost every afternoon. They sit on the cold concrete, laugh over shared snacks, and take photos of the fiery sunsets that fall into the sea. From this vantage point, the town seems timeless as the waves keep their rhythm, the horizon stretches endlessly, and the sea offers a comforting illusion of permanence.

But behind this picture of calm is a reality that most of us never notice. For fishing families who live along the same coast, the sea is not simply a backdrop for leisure or Instagram posts; it is a daily gamble between sustenance and survival.

OVERLAPPING DISASTERS

The month of October began with the ground shaking across the Visayas. A magnitude 6.9 earthquake struck Cebu, its tremors rippling through nearby provinces including Iloilo. Just over a week later, another quake, this time at magnitude 5.6, rattled the region again.

In Miagao, walls cracked, boats were battered, and homes were left vulnerable. For Analyn, a wife of a local fisher, the fear of losing her house to the wind was as immediate as the worry of how to feed her children the next day. "Budlay gid ya, budlay. Pero amo lang gid na ang buhi. Kinahanglan mag-antos kag mag-ubra maayo," she said. Life for her family means endurance: her husband risks his life at sea while she sells her husband's catch under the scorching sun or pouring rain.

Even before the earth moved, the Visayas was still reeling from Typhoon Opong, which had swept through the islands a month earlier and left large swaths of farmland and communities in ruins. For coastal Iloilo, disasters overlap like waves crashing one after another. The typhoons had already flooded villages, storm surges had swallowed shorelines, and erratic weather had made fishing even more uncertain. Climate change has brought stronger winds, unpredictable rains, and longer "lean months" when the catch is too small to sell.

For families whose survival is tied to the sea, these disruptions deepen their poverty. Fishing offers no guarantee; on bad days, nets come up almost empty and there's little to bring home. "Wala kami kwarta kag pagkaon para sa masunod nga semana," Analyn admitted, describing how missing even a day at sea can mean no money and no food for the week ahead.

Her neighbor Rosalyn, also a fisher's wife, echoed the same exhaustion: "Ang iban wala kabalo nga lain gid ang kabuhi namon. Kahibalo ako nga madamo man ang pareho kabuhi sa akon, pero usahay makakita ako sang tawo nga klaro nga wala gid sila ya idea kun ano ang kaangay sini." (Others don't know how life for us is different. I know many people with lives like mine, but sometimes I see people who I know have no idea what it's like.)

'DANGER IS PART OF THE JOB'

On the surface, fishing appears to be routine labor. But the risks it carries are immense, and often invisible. Many small fishers head

out alone at night in small wooden boats with no radios, life vests, or tracking devices.

"Mas nami ang akon pangubra nga wala sina kay mas makalihok ako. Kabalo man ko mag langoy," one fisherman admitted. For him, life vests and radios were not safety tools but obstructions to the only thing he knew best: fishing with his bare hands, honed by decades of practice.

The dangers became undeniable when news broke of a Miagao fisherman who never returned. His boat was later found drifting near Oton and a week later his lifeless body at Iloilo City's port. For Rosalyn, the death hit too close to home. "Paano lang kun bana ko to?" she asked.

Since then, unease and fear have spread in the community. Some fishers go out less frequently, while others continue because poverty leaves no choice. "Wala man kami choice kay kinahanglan gid namon kwarta," another fisherman said flatly. For them, to stop fishing is to stop surviving.

MENTAL HEALTH STRUGGLES REMAIN UNSPOKEN

In recent years, conversations about mental health have gained traction in urban areas, particularly among students and young professionals. But in fishing villages, the concept is often dismissed. "Subng lang na nag-uso sa generation nga ni ang mental health kag depress-depress," one fisherman remarked. "Samon nga tion, wala na na samon, normal man lang na." For them, fear, grief, and exhaustion are part of life—nothing extraordinary, nothing to seek help for.

And yet, even in silence, cracks appear. Wives confess to sleepless nights waiting for their husbands. Families sometimes skip meals until the fisherman returns, uncertain whether he will return at all. In quiet moments, anxiety lingers like an unspoken companion. The psychological weight of disasters, earthquakes, typhoons, and deaths at sea is real but often hidden beneath a culture of endurance. To speak of fear is to admit weakness, and in communities where survival depends on persistence, silence becomes the default coping mechanism.

NEGLECT DEEPENS THE WOUND OF DISASTER

Adding to these burdens are structural inequities. Fisherfolk are entitled to fish within the 15-kilometer municipal waters, but the Mercidair Ruling made intrusion by commercial vessels a persistent problem. Small-scale fishers with wooden boats cannot compete with commercial trawlers that sweep through the same waters. It's an uneven fight—one that leaves small fishers competing not just against the sea, but against a system that seems designed to overlook them.

Government safety nets, too, are paper-thin. "Wala pa kami may gina-report, amo nga wala pa sila nagabulig," Rosalyn said, explaining that unless they formally seek help, assistance rarely arrives. For many, aid feels conditional, distant, or simply out of reach.

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Some fishers go out less frequently, while others continue because poverty leaves no choice. **“Wala man kami choice kay kinahanglan gid namon kwarta,”** another fisherman said flatly.

For them, to stop fishing is to stop surviving.

BEYOND THE SUNSETS

For students, residents, and visitors, Miagao's seawall will remain a place of gathering, laughter, and quiet sunsets, but behind every picturesque horizon is a family measuring the waves not by beauty but by danger. Every crack in a wall, every broken boat, every sleepless night is a reminder that while we enjoy the view, others live with its costs.

The fishermen's wives put it best. "Budlay, pero amo lang gid na ang buhi," said Analyn. Life, for them, is hard work with no guarantees.

By tomorrow at dawn, husbands and other fisher's boats will head out again, families will wait again, and life in Miagao's fishing villages will continue. In the end, the sea continues to feed and threaten, to comfort and to devastate the marginalized. For the rest of us, the least we can do is to see beyond the sunsets and recognize the labor, the fear, and the resilience of the people whose lives are tied to the tides. 🌅

On Peasants' Month, Masbate farmers struggle to recover as low prices compound Opong's damage

by BENEDICT MARAVILLA



LOSS.

Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) leader Ronnie Manalo, called for the government to provide immediate assistance to help Masbate farmers.

Photo by DA

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The onslaught of Severe Tropical Storm Opong has left Masbate farmers struggling to recover from million-peso agriculture losses, yet they continue to suffer from low farmgate prices.

From October 1 to 3, a week shortly after the storm's landfall in the province, the price of rice was recorded to be as low as six to nine pesos per kilo.

This is despite the fact that the rice sector was one of the heavily affected, with 487 farmers reporting losses of 256 metric tons, valued at P3.84 million, Department of Agriculture (DA) Bicol information officer Lovella Guarin reported.

Guarin said that 1,394 farmers and fisherfolk in total were affected by Opong, with over 1,000 hectares of farmland devastated. Production loss also totaled to 1,236 metric tons.

The National Irrigation Administration (NIA) also revealed that six communal irrigation systems were damaged, amounting to a total cost of P70 million.

The destruction of the irrigation system directly affected agriculture zones in four municipalities: Baleno, Milagros, Dimasalang, and Cataingan, that rely on the said infrastructure for water supply.

NIA regional manager Gaudencio De Vera revealed that approximately 350 meters of lined canals in the province, including essential irrigation components such as dam aprons, sluice gates, siphons, and intake structures sustained heavy damages.

"This level of destruction poses a threat, as it may disrupt the flow of water to farms during the upcoming cropping season. We are moving quickly to secure funding and deploy

repair teams to minimize the impact on local farmers," he said.

NOTHING MORE TO FREEZE

Adding to the burden of the farmers is the imposed price freeze on all basic agricultural products in Masbate province through the order of the DA and trade and industry department.

The price freeze order signed on Sept. 29, was issued in compliance with Republic Act (RA) 7581 or the Price Act, mandating an automatic price freeze in areas affected by calamities. Masbate has been placed under a state of calamity since Sept. 28 due to Opong's devastation.

Sellers in Masbate were compelled to maintain the prevailing retail and wholesale prices as of Sept. 25, the storm's landfall in the province. Since the order will remain effective until at most 60 days, farmers will be left struggling to make ends meet despite the impact of the storm on their livelihood, considering the price they sell their rice at.

CALL FOR ACTION

Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) leader Ronnie Manalo, called for the government to provide immediate assistance to help Masbate farmers recover, emphasizing that loans were not enough and that sufficient aid and compensation were necessary.

"Maraming magsasaka ang umiiyak ngayon dahil nasira ang kanilang pananim at mga kabahayan. Nawalan na naman sila ng ani at kita ngayong taon, may utang pa sila. Panawagang mabigyan sila ng agarang tulong upang makabangon muli; hindi sapat ang pautang, nararapat ang sapat na ayuda at kompensasyon," he said.

KMP also urged the government to address the long-term rehabilitation of irrigation systems, roads, and agricultural properties.

"Ang kabuhatan ng mga magsasaka at mangingisda ang gulugod ng lokal na ekonomiya sa Masbate at dapat bigyan sila ng agarang atensyon at tulong upang muling maibangon ang agrikultura at kabuhatan matapos ang pananalasa ni Bagyong Opong," the organization added.

PERSISTENT CHALLENGE

With many provinces in the Philippines experiencing rice price drop, KMP said that the crisis has persisted since the implementation of the RA 11203 or the Rice Liberalization Law.

"Current farm-gate prices range from seven to 11 pesos per kilo for new harvests and P12-14 per kilo for dried palay, with some areas like Masbate seeing prices drop to P6-8 per kilo after typhoons," the group said.

"This crisis has persisted since the implementation of the Rice Liberalization Law (RA 11203), leaving farmers unprotected from imports and without adequate government support."

Under RA 11203, the rice trade was liberalized to allow unimpeded imports, a policy that farmers' group say has driven down local palay prices and pushed small producers deeper into debt.

KMP also slammed the administration's P20-per-kilo rice caravans, calling them a 'publicity stunt' meant to deodorize the regime's corruption instead of addressing the roots of the rice crisis. ✨

Rain-soaked Panay farmers, advocates hit failed rice policies amid falling palay prices

by KICHI KYNA LIM



Soaked by the afternoon rain, farmers, advocates, and students marched Tuesday afternoon, October 21, from St. Clement's Church to the Iloilo Provincial Capitol carrying banners calling for justice and food security amid plunging palay prices.

Earlier, participants gathered inside the church's Jubilee Hall for the "Mangunguma: San-o Mapuno ang Gantangan Mo?" hosted by the Panay Network for Rice Sufficiency (PNRS).

Under the weight of plunging farmgate prices—reportedly as low as P8 per kilo in some regions—speakers including Lucia Capaducio, Raoul Manuel, and Kervin Bonganciso took aim at government policies they said have failed the country's farmers. They pointed to the Rice Tariffication Law, the underfunded National Food Authority (NFA) with its P9-billion budget, and the ineffective Registry System for Basic Sectors in Agriculture (RSBSA) as evidence of systemic neglect.

The forum also raised concerns over the alleged misuse of agricultural funds—issues that, they said, mirror a broader crisis of governance and corruption in the sector.

The forum drew on the energy of past mobilizations — including the 21 September march against corruption — underscoring the shared struggles of workers and agricultural producers. Participants pressed for concrete reforms: state-backed local production, stronger protections for farmers, and genuine public-service accountability — echoing calls to show unity through collective action.

The event concluded with the reading of a unity statement, "Maghugpong para sa Matuod-tuod nga Seguridad sa Pagkaon, Suporta para sa Mangunguma kag Kontra Korapsyon," affirming that food sufficiency can only be achieved through self-reliance, just compensation and integrity in public service. They asserted that the struggle for rice is the struggle for justice, dignity and the people's right to live free from hunger and corruption.

Despite the downpour, farmers and advocates took their message to the streets, marching from St. Clement's Church to the Iloilo Provincial Capitol. Soaked but resolute, they raised banners and placards in a picket protest to reinforce their message. ✨

IN NUMBERS

TYPHOON DAMAGES IN ILOILO

P1.7M

In Iloilo, **Bagyong Opong** caused **P1.4 million** in agricultural losses, damaging 141.5 metric tons of crops and affecting vegetable farms and several rice fields.

Source: DA - Region VI

P185M

Typhoon Tino inflicted an estimated **P185.25 million** in crop losses and disrupting the livelihoods of thousands of farmers and fisherfolk throughout the province.

9513 farmers and fisherfolks affected

damages in fisheries sector amounted to **P48.13M**

livestock and poultry farmers suffered **P1.43M**

THE PRICE OF PROGRESS?

Discounts not enough as 300% property tax hike triggers public outcry

by MARIELLA VILLODRES

Both Treñas defended the hike as long overdue, but critics point to its abrupt rollout driving up rental and commodity prices as landlords and businesses pass the RPT burden on consumers.



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The 300 percent increase in real property tax (RPT) continues to draw backlash, with critics arguing that the discounts offered by the city government fail to address the bigger problem: a tax burden outpacing the people's ability to pay.

The hike, first enforced by then-Mayor Jerry Treñas in 2024 and now continued by his daughter, Raisa Treñas-Chu, stemmed from the city's first update of fair market values (FMV) since 2006, along with a levy rate increase from 1.5% to 2.5%. Since RPT is calculated by multiplying the FMV with the levy rate, both adjustments sharply raised property taxes.

Both Treñas defended the hike as long overdue, but critics point to its abrupt rollout driving up rental and commodity prices as landlords and businesses pass the RPT burden on consumers.

DESPITE THE DISCOUNTS

In response to the backlash, the city granted a 40% discount on RPT for 2024-2025, with Treñas-Chu proposing an extension until 2028. But homeowners, small businesses, and consumer groups say the relief measure is not enough.

Critics point out that the issue is the mismatch between soaring property taxes and stagnant wages.

"The substantial property tax increases, when paired with slow wage growth, create a financial squeeze for ordinary Iloilo residents," said Panay Consumers Alliance in a statement

Western Visayas' daily minimum wage stands at around P520, updated November 2025, while homeowners report RPT dues rising by P1,000 to P5,000 a year.

"These assessments are completely out of sync with the financial realities of the average Ilonggo," the group continued.

CITY HALL'S DEFENSE

Treñas-Chu anchored the hike's necessity on the 2018 Mandanas ruling, which expanded LGUs' share in national taxes but transferred more responsibility for devolved services. She argued that Iloilo was caught unprepared, making higher RPT collections essential to sustain services.

But the PCA questioned why the city turned over key revenue-generating markets to SM Prime Holdings if revenue shortages were the problem.

Additionally, Councilor Sheen Mabilog, lone oppositionist, called the measure unnecessary, noting the city's strong fiscal disposition—with net takeaways having grown from P1.45 billion last year to P1.71 billion, alongside a surplus of P577 million. "We are punishing people for owning land, for staying in the city they love, and for simply surviving," Mabilog said.

CALLS FOR SOLUTION

PCA calls to retain the levy rate at 1.5 percent for residential properties and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), while ensuring large landowners and corporations shoulder more.

"We need a tax system that reflects both market value and income capacity," PCA said, adding that consultations with residents must be institutionalized for transparency.

As Iloilo positions itself as a rising regional hub for development, the debate over its property tax underscores a deeper question: can progress truly be called development if it prices out its own people? 📌

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The substantial property tax increases, when paired with slow wage growth, create a financial squeeze for ordinary Iloilo residents

Panay Consumers Alliance

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TIMELINE: Tracing Iloilo's Real Property Tax Hike

2006

- Last revision of Real Property Tax rates prior to the 2023 adjustment.

March 2023

- Commission on Audit cites Iloilo City for not updating property valuations for 18 years, noting potential revenue losses.

June 2023

- City Council approves revised schedule of market values, effectively increasing RPT assessments.

January 2024

- New RPT rates take effect under Tax Ordinance No. 2023-226.

January 10, 2024

- Council grants a 40 percent discount on RPT payments following public feedback.

October 2024

- City officials publicly defend the revision as compliance with audit directives.

December 2024

- 40 percent discount extended until 2026.

March 2025

- Ordinance passed offering RPT incentives for heritage-inspired commercial developments.



April 2025

- Full RPT exemption granted to certain BPO-dedicated buildings pending PEZA accreditation.

July 2025

- Iloilo posts 3.7 percent inflation; housing costs rise 5.3 percent year-on-year.

July 4, 2025

- Mayor certifies urgent proposal to extend the 40 percent discount through 2028.

July 16 & 30, 2025

- Proposed ordinance seeking 80 percent RPT reduction fails to secure second reading and does not advance.

August 6, 2025

- Motion for fiscal impact study on the RPT adjustment blocked.

August 13, 2025

- Privilege speech concerning the RPT-inflation link disallowed during council session.

August 14, 2025

- PSA regional briefing discusses potential indirect effects of tax increases on prices.

August 18, 2025

- PSA issues clarification stating no direct attribution of Iloilo's inflation to the RPT revision.

NEWSbriefs

Bite-sized news from Miagao and beyond

Loud music disrupts First Day Rage

"Walang makakapigil sa sangkaestudyantehan!"

As the new academic year began, the First Day Rage lightning protest of different UP Visayas organizations to clamor for student and societal concerns on Aug. 18, was disrupted by loud music from the tech booth of the university's opening program.

While the music's volume overpowered the students' calls, the protest continued with voices even more enraged over the incident.

This happened despite the UPV University Student Council formally requesting for five minutes to hold the said protest.

Students expressed disappointment towards the organizers, tagging their move as an attempt to suppress the heeds of the studentry.

It took over two minutes before the music was turned down as the UPV USC talked with the organizers.

First Day Rage is an annual tradition of UPV organizations every start of an academic year. ✨



Duterte Youth DQed, Gabriela takes seat

The Duterte Youth party-list has lost its bid to overturn the cancellation of its registration, as the Commission on Elections (Comelec) en banc voted 5-1-1 to uphold the Second Division's ruling and deny its motion for reconsideration. The 2019 petition filed by youth leaders argued that the group failed to meet the publication and hearing requirements necessary for registration.

Meanwhile, the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) formally added the Gabriela Women's Party to the House of Representatives, allotting it the 64th and final seat for party-list representatives in the 20th Congress.

The poll body increased the number of party-list seats from 63 to 64 to meet the constitutionally mandated 20% representation under the Party-List System Act (RA 7941).

The new representative for Gabriela will be former Kabataan lawmaker Sarah Jane Elago, who is expected to serve in the lower house following the proclamation. ✨



Iloilo vendors resist market privatization

Vendors, alongside progressive groups, displayed resistance as they staged a protest in front of the newly rehabilitated and privatized Iloilo Terminal Market on Oct. 28, citing fear of displacement, loss of income, and lack of consultation from the Iloilo City Government.

"Super", as the market is commonly as, has been leased to SM Prime Holdings as part of its public-private partnership (PPP) with the city government, allowing them to occupy the market rent-free for 25 years in exchange for redeveloping it.

Now, SM occupies a larger portion of the market at 60% (9,000 sqm), while around 1,625 vendors are cramped into the remaining 40%.

Vendors are now forced to sell their goods in much smaller stalls and left with no choice but to struggle in a space that is supposed to be theirs. Groups also tagged the move as an "anti-people development," as vendors bear the brunt of a capitalist partnership. ✨



After 7 yrs, 'Mabinay 6' walks free

After spending more than seven years in jail awaiting trial, the six activists collectively known as the 'Mabinay 6' are now free.

The Regional Trial Court Branch 42 in Dumaguete today cleared Myles Albasin, Randel Hermino, Carlo Ybañes, Joemar Indico, Joey Vailoces, and Bernard Guillen of all criminal charges related to alleged possession of high-powered firearms.

The Philippine Army's 62nd Infantry Battalion arrested the group on March 3, 2018, in Barangay Luyang, Mabinay, Negros Oriental, accusing them of carrying illegal weapons. Rights advocates consistently described the case as baseless and politically motivated.

Albasin, a journalist and UP Cebu mass communication graduate; Hermino, the son of sugarcane workers; Ybañes, from an urban poor community in Cebu; and the three peasant youth spent the entirety of the proceedings behind bars until today's acquittal. ✨



Sectoral reps decry bureaucrat-capitalism, urge pro-people development

Carrying the struggles of farmers and Indigenous peoples, speakers at the Bugtaw Sectoral Conference laid bare how bureaucrat capitalism continues to batter marginalized communities during the Oct. 29 forum at the CFOS AV Hall.

The event gathered former Kabataan Party-list representative Raoul Manuel, Lucia Capaducio of the Paghugpong sang mga Mangunguma sa Panay kag Guimaras (Pamanggas), and Aleksandria Padrones of Oikos Ecological Movement Panay.

In a roundtable discussion, Manuel drew from his experience in Congress, stressing how bureaucrat capitalism shapes development projects that enrich those in power instead of uplifting the people.

The conference, organized by the UP Visayas University Student Council with partner organizations, closed with a unified call: defend peasant rights and hold power to account. ✨



Triple quake hits Cebu, Iloilo in two months

A magnitude 6.9 earthquake struck offshore from the City of Bogo in northern Cebu at around 9:59 PM on Tuesday, September 30, according to the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (PHIVOLCS).

The tremor, which lasted nearly three minutes, was felt across the Visayas, prompting residents—including those in Miagao, Iloilo—to evacuate homes and dormitories. PHIVOLCS reported the quake as tectonic in origin at a depth of 10 kilometers.

Just weeks later, a magnitude 5.8 tectonic quake hit Cebu early Monday morning, October 13, occurring at 1:06 AM with its epicenter about 14 kilometers southwest of Bogo City, also at a depth of 10 kilometers. Students of UP Visayas again evacuated after feeling the sudden shaking.

Two days after, a magnitude 4.4 earthquake struck Guimbal, Iloilo, registering Intensity 4 in Iloilo City and nearby towns. ✨



Duterte indicted by ICC for three counts of murder

The International Criminal Court (ICC) has formally charged former President Rodrigo Duterte with three counts of murder as crimes against humanity linked to killings under his anti-drug campaign and earlier operations in Davao City.

In a publicly released redacted document, the ICC said Duterte is criminally liable for:

1. Murders in Davao City (2013–2016)
2. Killings of nationwide "high-value targets" (2016–2017)
3. Murders and attempted murders in barangay clearance operations (2016–2018)

The case cites 78 representative victims and lists nine co-perpetrators whose names remain redacted.

Duterte was scheduled for a confirmation of charges hearing on September 23, but it was postponed due to health reasons. The ICC has yet to announce a new date. ✨



Record-high UP budget for 2026, but funding gap remains wide

While the University of the Philippines (UP) System received a record-high budget for 2026 with P29.47-B, funding gap is still wide, considering the eyed building developments and improvements in all campuses.

From the proposed P46.85-B budget by the UP Board of Regents, the university is left once again with insufficient funding and with students struggling even more with the crisis in student spaces.

In UP Visayas alone, the P20-B cut from the proposed funding kills the students' dream of having a much bearable university.

For so long, UPV students have endured lack of student spaces, inaccessibility of campus buildings, and outdated laboratories.

UPV USC tied this lower-than-proposed budget to the persistent corruption in the country, led by the Marcos-Duterte administration. ✨



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Bisaya and Tagalog keyboard warriors assembled online like an Avengers montage—complete with Gloc-9’s “Upuan” or ABBA’s “The Winner Takes it All” as background music. Everyone united in roasting nepo babies and their beltline fashion as we waded through waist-high waters.

Memes revolved around flood control projects that turned Philippines into Venice, except without the romance or gondolas—just rancid water and rats (with no distinction made between the ones in the gutter and the ones in government).

These are what filled my social media feeds in the past few weeks. I figured then, that at least now, my doomscrollings are cushioned by the laughter. For we Filipinos simply did what we do best in times of crises. When the flood control fiasco unfurled, we flooded our own social media timelines feeds with outrage and humor. Trends and online gags became our outlets; our little pockets of solidarity. It’s a classic coping mechanism perfected only by a country so chronically online—and so chronically failed by its system—as ours.

GHOSTS IN FLOODWATERS

This fiasco rose from the tragic waters of last July’s back-to-back storms that left 8 million of our fellow Filipinos affected. With at least 26 dead, 300,000 displaced, and livelihoods flushed away, what remained was the familiar ache of loss. It lingered long after the floodwaters receded—just as it vividly lingered in me, in memory, the clip of a couple clinging so helplessly to the lifeless corpses of their carabaos. I may have since lost the link to the video in the endless churning of our algorithms, but the guttural cries of that couple still haunts me.

And along that collective haunting grief, came the fury. It came through the reminder that a P545-billion budget has been allotted for flood control projects just at the start of Marcos’ office. It made us question in anger: if so much money has been pooled into all these, why were lives and livelihoods still washed away? Where art thou flood control funds?

And the answer surfaced soon enough—ghost projects, padded contracts, and the obscene opulence of officials whose salaries could not explain their wealth.

THE MATHS OF PLUNDER

As a Math major, I don’t fear numbers, but the following made me sick: a whopping P100 billion of the flood control budget was revealed to have been divided



OPINION

Legacy, lies, and loots of the PH’s OG nepo baby

When the flood control fiasco unfurled, we flooded our own social media timelines with outrage and humor. Trends and online gags became our outlets; our little pockets of solidarity. It’s a classic coping mechanism perfected only by a country so chronically online—and so chronically failed by its system—as ours.

by MARIELLA VILLODRES | illustrated by KLYDE FACTES

the Marcoses—our nation’s original architects of extreme excess.

Today’s useless flood control projects and failed infrastructures echo the edifice complex of Marcos Sr.’ regime. From the Manila Film Center built in a rush, killing hundreds of workers, to designer hospitals that served only the rich—Marcos’ regime was all about spectacle in the guise of progress. He erected infrastructures for vanity and the display of power but never in service to the people.

Meanwhile, the material extravagance of our modern-day “nepo babies” and children of contractors recall Imelda’s infamous shoe collections. From diamond tiaras to palace-like mansions and impromptu international flights, Imelda was the prototype for today’s modern line of flood control disney princesses.

And while social media saw shortlists of Philippines’ top nepo babies, we have forgotten to include the biggest nepo baby of them all: Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr.

With the same plunder and shamelessness that runs in his blood, recall him racking up 20 foreign trips in less than two years—including where he jetted off to Singapore for a conference, only to stay just to watch racing cars in the expensive F1 Grand Prix with his entire family. All that while our jeepney drivers’ calloused hands raised placards under the noontime sun to protest against the PUVMP, asserting their right to work and live. Recall also how he’s so proud of his P20/kilo rice program. All while local farmers remain landless, unsupported,



Let the memes be more than momentary punchlines. Let outrage outlast algorithms. Let fleeting anger turn to sustained collective insistence of our rights.

among the poorest, and will be earning close to nothing with such a program. But most importantly, recall that in just under 20 minutes, while the nation was distracted by the flood control issues, his office’s budget of P27.3 Billion (a whopping 72% increase from last year) was swiftly approved with no issues. It’s an amount that could have easily gone to basic social services or at the very least towards reparations for the communities drowned not just by the recent floods but by his family’s legacy of corruption.

HAUNTINGS OF OUR PHANTOM PAST

This is more than just historical coincidences or just “history repeating itself”. Because history does not repeat itself simply because it was “fated to”—it haunts us because its unfinished businesses were never confronted.

These modern-day displays of corruption and the return of a plundering son all stemmed from a long legacy crafted by the Marcoses. It’s a legacy that was failed to be uprooted—even by the EDSA People Power revolution.

Because here’s the uncomfortable truth: what brought the fall of the Marcoses was not a revolution. It was a mass uprising, yes—truly noble and utterly necessary. But it was not a revolution. It did not dismantle the very systems that birthed Marcos in power. Landlords remained landlords. Dynasties entrenched. The military remained untouched. The Marcoses came back. And the people remain oppressed.

EDSA REVOLUTION’S UNFINISHED BUSINESSES

What were these unfinished businesses exactly?

One, it overthrew a dictator—not a dictatorship. When Marcos Sr. was ousted, the elites simply returned unscathed, scrambling over the spoils. They reshuffled among themselves to remain in power and guard their wealth: The Cojuangcos and Aquinos. The Enriles. The Romualdez. The Marcoses.

The same landlord clans, family businesses, and political dynasties that thrived under martial law carried on. In the Philippines, dictatorship has never been about the concentration of power in one man, but in an entire elite class committed to plundering even without Marcos Sr. at its helm.

Two, students and workers stood shoulder to shoulder in the fight for freedom—but their children still inherited their struggles. Unemployment is at a three-year high while the Senate junked the P200-wage hike as prices of commodities soar. Our education system is in crisis while classrooms crumble as the budget for education is slashed—all while billions are poured into the pockets of the powerful.

Three, the Edifice Complex lives on through build-loan-builds over nationbuilding. The Philippines has a debt of P15.3 billion from constant loaning from the World Bank and foreign investors. And where do they go? To mostly infrastructure-buildings (that are now widely known as viral sites for corruption). But worse, these loans come with international strings attached—all in the form of “recommended” policies that serve not the people’s interests.

Case in points: (1) Aquino’s K-12 Policy under World Bank’s recommendations which produced “job-ready” workers for export rather than strengthening local employment. (2) Ramos’ IPP contracts backed by the World Bank led to the privatization of energy—the origin of our sky-high electricity bills. (3) Duterte’s Rice Terrification Bill and “Build Build Build” saw agricultural dependence on foreign imports and loans from China. (4) Marcos Jr.’s “Build Better More” infrastructures like the notable Kaliwa Dam are just continuations of Duterte’s legacy of loaning from China. (5) All these while the farmers, the workers, and the fisherfolks—the sectors that are the very backbone of this nation—remain neglected.

The EDSA People Power revolution was unfinished business because the uprising stopped short of systemic change, because the enemy was treated as one surname, not the system that keeps producing people like them.

MORE THAN JUST A TREND

Let the memes be more than momentary punchlines. Let outrage outlast algorithms. Let fleeting anger turn to sustained collective insistence of our rights.

For if September 21 taught us anything: the struggle against tyranny shouldn’t be this one-time thing. The resistance shouldn’t end at certain surnames. The constant pulse of a people who will not be oppressed again should never die. Now more than ever, with the Marcoses back in power, the present bears a haunting resemblance to the horrors of Martial Law’s past. So if there is a trend worth reviving, let it not be the tyrannies of the Marcoses nor the cycles of corruption that continue to drown us. Let it be the unfinished business of People Power—this time carried through to its end. ✚

COLUMN by REA ELLEN BASTIAN

Once upon a time, we were heroes

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I believed that democracy had drawn a line, that cruelty would never cross without consequence, and if it dared, my fellow Filipinos would see it, resist it, and rise, again and again, to condemn it. I believed it even when a classmate leaned over and whispered, “Man-an mo man nga golden age ang Martial Law?” I laughed. There was no way silencing dissent, stealing from the nation’s coffers, torturing people in all its forms could ever be called a golden age. I assumed everyone shared that basic moral understanding.

When I was ten, democracy sounded like a fairytale. That was the closest I came to a love story — at least the way I understood it. It begins with promises that if you give yourself fully, even through struggle and heartbreak, it will not betray you. That was what my teachers repeated in class, the definition written in our textbooks: the people hold the power, leaders serve with integrity, the government is of the people, by the people, and for the people.

I believed this with the same innocence children believe in happy endings, in the good always winning in the end. My version of that fairytale was the day our teacher made us watch a grainy black-and-white video of the EDSA People Power Revolution. There I was, in my blue-and-white uniform, sitting on a wooden chair, watching nuns clutch rosaries and men perch precariously on lampposts. Millions of Filipinos filled EDSA from curb to curb, shoulder to shoulder, forming a human barricade against a dictator. Every step they took was a leap forward for democracy.

The facts came in bullet points: Two million Filipinos stood united. Epifanio de los Santos Avenue. February 22-25, 1986. Against a dictator, Ferdinand Marcos Sr. Martial Law declared on September 21, 1972. The dictator fled, and democracy was restored.

“We like to think we taught Filipinos democracy,” CBS anchor Bob Simon reported from New York in 1986. “Well, tonight, they are teaching the world.” I thought we were the good guys who had beaten the bad king. I felt a swell of pride and smiled. That was how the story began in my mind: once upon a time, we were heroes.

I believed it even through Arroyo’s scandals, the Pork Barrel scam, and the Mamasapano clash. I believed it during the drug war when men were gunned down in the streets, their bodies wrapped in tape and left on the road. Dare I say, I believed it even in 2022, when 31-million Filipinos returned a Marcos to the highest office, cheering for the very name it had once overthrown. I kept rationalizing, insisting like a mantra that this time would be different.

And I stubbornly believe it still, even here in a university long known as the forefront of activism and academic freedom. I should feel optimistic about the democracy’s promise. Instead, I see its cracks daily in the people who still find the grace to treat others with the dignity the state denies them.

The tricycle driver who hunches over his handlebars, waving me back to return the extra change I had forgotten, does not go home to a mansion. The vendor who slips an extra serving of kaldo into my cup when she hears I skipped breakfast still counts coins that will not last the week. The delivery rider who pushes through the rain to bring food to students like me earns barely enough to fill his gas tank. The security guard slumped on a plastic chair, eyes heavy from lost sleep, still manages a smile and a greeting, “Good morning, ma’am” – even as he takes double shifts to pay for his children’s tuition.

These are the people whom kleptocratic politicians rob. They are the faces I see each day. And if these few bear such quiet burdens, how much more for the countless others I do not see? I had to reconcile the belief I built at ten with the world I see now. Democracy is

no fairytale. More often, the good guys lose, and there are no happy endings. I was a kid when I believed in the certainty of a brighter future. I am here to report the murder of that dream — corrupt politicians and those who enabled them have killed it.

It gets even harder now when history can be rewritten with a well-cut video or a trending vlog. Memes, hashtags, viral clips. Our discontent circulates, but it dissipates just as quickly. Politics becomes theater, a spectacle of clowns who understand that publicity, good or bad, is still power.

We know something is wrong; we see it, for example, in the recent reports of the ghost flood-control projects. But why do the same names return, election after election?

How did we become a nation that forgot the price of our freedom? 70,000 jailed, 34,000 tortured, over 3,000 killed — more if you count the undocumented ones.

With rosaries and rage, two million Filipinos marched, scratched and clawed their way to victory, and forced tyranny to its knees.

Memory keeps the departed alive. To remember is to immortalize the dead, to honor what they fought for. To forget is to kill them a second time. A nation is only as strong as what it remembers.

And what, if anything, can save us, is the refusal to forget. Defiant. Unapologetic.

And yet, we let it slip away and every time we do, a part of ourselves dies with it. It settles heavy in my chest as I walk around the campus in my casual clothes, Sablay lanyard around my neck. I rage, even if all I can do is open my notebook, grip my pen, and write.

I look back at that grainy video of the EDSA People Power Revolution, and I understand now what I did not as a child: they were not people with superpowers. They were ordinary Filipinos who summoned extraordinary courage when it mattered most.

I sigh heavily, thinking: at least, once upon a time, we were heroes. ✚



Memory keeps the departed alive. To remember is to immortalize the dead, to honor what they fought for. To forget is to kill them a second time. A nation is only as strong as what it remembers. And what, if anything, can save us, is the refusal to forget.

COLUMN

by FRANCINE DAWN SALGADO

Grief doesn't end on November 2

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They say grief ends when you've fully embraced acceptance, yet no one tells you that oftentimes what you're grieving isn't a person, but a part of who you are. Every November 2, the nation mourns the dead. Yet, as I entered the University of the Philippines, I've learned that grief walks in many forms — and sometimes, it journeys with us while disguised as strength and resilience.

Hunched backs, loud yawns and eyes that trace crimson at 2 am, hearing the loud clatter of keyboards that reflects not restlessness but of silent panic. The trace of bitter grief as they mutter; "Kaya ko pa ah," even when their bodies feel like falling apart. A part of them dies with the dreams that merit alone cannot sustain.

I myself used to believe that everything in UP was a dream. A dream that lives on from the years of hard work and endless cycle of success, yet living through this, I saw how immeasurably life's sparkle died together with success I once owned. Now, I sit in the graveyard of aspirations — that the same system that prides itself on equality is quietly haunted by the same ghosts it tries to resist: privilege, connections, and the invisible safety nets that not everyone has.

The stories that arose were too naive, too deceiving. We believed the stories, that this was the place where hard work and passion could rewrite anyone's destiny. I was proud, too. Proud to have made it here, proud to be an Iskolar ng Bayan. But, the title comes with a price. The exhaustion drains from the bumpy tricycle ride back to the dorms, attached with the feeling of disappointment that hard work has not paid off. Midterm examinations have crushed students believing that this life was far from over.

During high school, we excelled in our classes. We possessed assurance, uniformity, and clarity. However, in college, the concept of excellence quickly seems relative. Striving alone isn't sufficient, and survival frequently relies on factors beyond just ability. I've witnessed it firsthand, the gap between those who learn while stressing over rent and those who can afford to stumble because they have safety nets available at home. The instilled motivation drives each person to their own graves knowing that no matter how much effort they put in, it will all be replaced by the stillness and silence in unmatched opportunities and resources.



At times, grief in UP isn't related to death. It's about witnessing dreams crumble under the pressure of fatigue, observing enthusiasm diminish as survival comes first. It's about understanding that not everyone is granted the same opportunities for second chances.

And maybe the harshest sorrow of all is realizing that while we exhaust ourselves to demonstrate our value, others never needed to. We mourn the idea that merit by itself could support us. We mourn the purity that used to believe in "Kapoy lang ni." We mourn the parts of ourselves that once thought this university was an equalizer, rather than a mirror revealing the struggles beyond its gates.

Grief appears uniquely for each individual — seen in sleepless nights that extend into morning, in students who laugh heartily yet bear invisible struggles, and in those who silently fade from classes without warning. For some, it manifests as burnout masked as productivity; for others, it's the silent acceptance of understanding that their best might never suffice in a system established on shaky foundations.

It resides in the tambayans where laughter serves as a survival strategy, in the artworks and organization initiatives that reflect desire, and in the activism that converts grief into unity. Grief resembles the student who continues to attend classes despite being weary, the individual who conceals their pain through high performance, and the one who discovers solace in minor achievements that no score can quantify.

Every narrative possesses its unique perspective — some mourn quietly, while others express their pain through defiance — yet they all embrace a shared reality: that existence and education in UP involve facing loss repeatedly, and continually rising anew from its weight.

Amidst the imbalance, I understood something raw but powerful. It felt as if something stronger than despair, sorrow turning into defiance and fatigue transforming to empathy. I watch students pass notes instead of competing with each other. I see organizations giving free tutoring and safe places for people who feel anxious. I see students speaking up, pushing back and demanding better. Or maybe that's the strange appeal of UP, it teaches you to grieve and counter-attack, you live, you dream, yet you die, grieve and survive often at the same time without extinguishing the candles that you lit on the gravestone.

So no, grief doesn't end on November 2. It lingers everywhere: in the slouched backs, the heavy sighs, the lamps on at 3 am, keyboard clatter and the silence that dies from within of students who keep pushing forward, in the remorse of those who cannot afford to stop, to take a pause. Yet, I believe that this is what makes this place both death and rebirth at the same time — that even when we grieve, we grow and even when we lose, we still continue to fight. ✦



OPINION

The dangerous comfort of play-safe politics

by JOENA BAUTISTA | illustrated by VENN ARCALLO

On September 21, 2025—marking the 52nd anniversary of the declaration of Martial Law—tens of thousands of Filipinos flooded the streets in one of the largest anti-corruption protests in Philippine history.

What began as a coordinated call for accountability quickly unraveled into a day of human rights violations and state repression.

Over 200 protesters were arrested, and armed clashes with law enforcement broke out at different points in Metro Manila.

The protests were sparked by mounting public outrage over the revelation of ghost infrastructure projects and flood control scams by government agencies.

Yet, instead of confronting their exposed corruption, officials responded by issuing subpoenas to student leaders all while calling for "peace," ignoring the very injustices that fueled the nationwide unrest.

This pattern of deflection was reminiscent of the previous protest at the St. Gerrard Construction firm, where citizens—in a desperate attempt to seek justice—hurled mud and painted "magnanakaw" across their company gates. Owned by Sarah Discaya, whose family is linked

to top DPWH contractors accused of siphoning billions through ghost projects and substandard infrastructure, their firm became a symbol of unchecked impunity. But even amidst this raw public outcry, just like the September 21 protests, many of our leaders chose the comfort of play-safe politics over upholding accountability.

Pasig Mayor Vico Sotto, often praised for his progressive-leaning reputation, disappointed many when he told protesters to "not resort to violence" and expressed how accountability has no shortcuts. While he promised legal action, his statement ultimately veered away from the rampant corruption and toward the behavior of the protesters. It was a familiar refrain—a politician has once again prioritized optics over outrage.

His statement faded into the usual chorus of "violence is not the answer" from many of our public officials. These, however, wrapped in toxic positivity, do little to address the rot at the core of our institutions. Instead, they redirect the spotlight from systemic abuse to the reactivity of those most harmed by it.

This isn't an isolated case. Even President Marcos Jr., while naming top flood control contractors in one of his speeches, failed to call out the political figures tied to them—like Zaldy Co and the Discaya family—opting instead for vague promises of reform.

The message is clear: protest is acceptable only when it's "peaceful"—hushed into whispers, subdued into meek faces, and stripped down to docile actions.

Play-safe politics thrive on ambiguity and performance. It's saying just enough to appear principled, all while putting little to no effort into eradicating the deeply entrenched evils within systems. It relies on shallow vows, sanitized language, and ironically, a lofty sense of morality that shifts the attention away from the urgency of action onto the grooming of their political image.

Politicians position themselves as simply being "objective" or "impartial," but all their moves are actually calculated survival tactics meant to manipulate the masses. By avoiding confrontation with the true perpetrators, they are able to preserve beneficial relationships, protect their reputations, and maintain their own political capital.

The comfort it offers goes beyond emotional security; it shields them from public backlash while enabling injustice to take root under a polished surface. But play-safe statements are not neutral; they are strategic. They allow politicians to appear "supportive" while avoiding the risk of alienating powerful allies. They pacify the public with platitudes, all while maintaining the status quo—preserving

the machinery of political mediocrity, personality cults, and strategic silence. Even worse, they subtly criminalize dissent, painting protesters appear uncivilized rather than people exercising their right to demand justice.

For example, Mayor Sotto's call for peaceful protest, though possibly well-intentioned, echoed a broader pattern: the tendency of public officials to treat protest as a public relations crisis rather than a symptom of institutional failure. His warning that protest actions may only cause harm to the workers or protesters—while technically true—ignores the deeper damage inflicted by the systemic corruption permeating the state.

Public officials should be at the forefront of the fight against systemic corruption. They should be the first to ask why a top contractor declared zero gross revenue to the LGU, not the last to react when citizens take to the streets. They should be the ones leading investigations, not issuing PR-trained statements that say protests are ineffective, unnecessary, or dangerous.

If we continue to accept play-safe politics, we normalize a system where the burden of accountability falls on the masses, not the perpetrators. We allow corruption to flourish behind a velvet curtain of civility, while those who push back are punished for being "too loud" or "violent."

“

For most, violent protest is not ideal. I deem it necessary. Faced by the blatant deception of our so-called public servants—who shamelessly wash their hands of guilt by stifling dissent and deliberately sabotaging investigations—**outrage is not just inevitable; it is justified.**

The real violence lies not in the protests, but in the stolen futures, the flooded homes, and the silenced voices.

For most, violent protest is not ideal. I deem it necessary. Faced by the blatant deception of our so-called public servants—who shamelessly wash their hands of guilt by stifling dissent and deliberately sabotaging investigations—outrage is not just inevitable; it is justified. The real violence lies not in the protests, but in the stolen futures, the flooded homes, and the silenced voices.

If institutions persist in sanitizing public outrage, these protests will escalate and grow more disruptive. When those in power refuse to face the root causes of systemic failures, they leave the marginalized, those most devastated by their corruption and abuse, with no chance.

To dismiss dissent as uncivilized acts or inconveniences is to ignore the very pulse of democracy. These expressions of anger should not be seen as mere "threats," they are signs of life in a system gasping for accountability. It is this kind of defiance, especially from those pushed to the margins, that preserves the essence of democratic ideals. Unless both the government and public begin to recognize the legitimacy of what these protests call for, the rupture between institutions and the people will only continue to widen.

Protest is not the enemy. But every time a public official chooses to pacify rather than confront, they become part of the machinery that keeps corruption alive in the country. ✦

COLUMN

by RESSA PALMA

A holiday for freedom fighting to break free

P

A Del Pilar of today is not remembered in history books but buried under headlines. Shot on the street, jailed, silenced by fear. Cumpio is a living echo of Del Pilar, revealing that the fight for press freedom has never ended but only evolved into new forms of repression.

This is why being a journalist in a nation that equates peace with sterile silence and the stifling of voices is a grim fate: you are forced to choose between your morals or your life. And in this scenario, silence becomes too tempting.

Maybe that is exactly what they want: to mute, to hush, to suppress ideals that ruin theirs. Then, like laying flowers on graves they themselves dug, they cover up their crimes through a declaration of a hollow holiday that barely honors what it stands for—thinking it would somehow justify the violence.

The state would like us to believe that August 30 is a day of pride. But to journalists, it is a reminder of what it costs to keep the truth alive. It is in this wretched hypocrisy and dishonesty that those in power seem to forget: Filipino journalists have always been at the forefront of every revolutionary change. The people and the media are in power, not them. Freedom, after all, is not granted by proclamation. It is claimed through resistance.

They have tried to control us, restrain our voices, and dry our pens. Yet, freedom has never been theirs to keep. Freedom exists within the ink-stained hands of writers, the sore-throated reporters, and the starving truth-seekers. They do not have the power to hold our freedom within the grasp of their greedy palms and their golden gates. Rather, these are merely obstacles we must overcome to hold the truth in its rightful place.

So, speak. Shout. Yell. Refuse the silence. There is no freedom in a nation that mutes its citizens—but it has always been and will always be within reach. Standing at the frontlines, the press will make it so by continuing to hold the pen and the megaphone, bringing forth the voice of a country that refuses to fall.

Today is not a holiday for mere commemoration. It is not for the sake of remembering alone. Now more than ever, we must demand that the words press freedom become more than just a symbolic charade, but a lived experience for every Filipino, every day. ✦

Press freedom does not exist in a nation that silences its citizens. Today, August 30, we celebrate National Press Freedom Day for the third year since its declaration in 2022. Yet, funny enough, the Philippines remains one of the deadliest countries for journalists, ranking 116th out of 180 in the Press Freedom Index for 2025.

How fittingly hypocritical that former President Rodrigo Duterte declared this holiday while presiding over one of the fiercest assaults on media freedom. Yet, this government refuses to acknowledge the importance of the Campus Press Freedom Bill or the lives lost in the fight for truth—turning this "celebration" into nothing more than an empty grand gesture, stripped of any worthy substance.

For so long, Filipino journalists have stood at the center of every revolution. Change, either documented or written, was fought with pen and paper. The press represents critical thinkers, those whose minds question power and systems. From our heroes of the past to our modern reporters who exposed corruption, injustice, and incompetence—the media has played a key role in the checking of power. The existence of National Press Freedom Day reflects that very distinction. However, this mighty power of the pen does not come without its sufferings.

Marcelo H. del Pilar, the "Father of Philippine Journalism", wielded La Solidaridad against Spanish colonial rule. More than a century later, to be a Del Pilar in this country is no badge of honor—it is a death sentence. His sacrifices directly mimic those that our modern-day writers face today. Where he once faced exile, today's journalists face red-tagging, false accusations, and bullets. To be a writer in the Philippines is to not only inherit Del Pilar's struggle, but also his suffering.

A Del Pilar of our time is being shot, intimidated, or harassed in every way possible. Writing critically about the government lands you in prison, as in the case of Tacloban-based community journalist Frenchie Mae Cumpio.

How deep must we sink?

Miagao's hidden fishing crisis

Over the years, we have witnessed another troubling change: the sea is no longer as generous as it used to be. Fisherfolk who once came home with buckets full of fish now return with barely enough to feed their families.

OP-ED

by AUDREY AURIELLE DAYATA



I

I was born and raised in Barangay Cabasi, a small coastal barrio in the town of Guimbal, Iloilo. My family, like many others in our community, has always depended on our seas. Some of my earliest memories are of the scent of saltwater in the air, the rhythmic creaking of wooden boats, and the laughter of children playing by the shore as their fathers and uncles prepared for another night at sea.

My father, like his father before him, was a fisherman. I grew up hearing stories of how he had to stop going to school from time to time to help my grandfather, Tatay Keke, fish. They would sometimes sail as far as the seas of Palawan, where the waters were richer and the haul was decent, just to bring home enough to sell at the market, preparing as meals for a family of eleven what was left of their catch. I also remember the story of my Uncle Randy, Tatay's younger brother, who once braved the wrath of Typhoon Frank. When the storm's powerful currents threatened to capsiz his boat, he had no choice but to leap out of his boat and into the sea to swim for his life, only to be reunited with it when the strong tides carried them both safely to the shores of Guimaras.

Even the very identity of our barangay is tied to the ocean. As a child, I often wondered about the fish depicted on our barangay seal. It was called Cabasi, and it had once thrived in our waters, abundant enough to give our community its name. But as I grew older, I learned the painful truth: that species no longer exists in our waters. It is a reminder of what was once plentiful, now lost to time and overfishing.

Over the years, we have witnessed another troubling change: the sea is no longer as generous as it used to be. Fisherfolk who once came home with buckets full of fish now return with barely enough to feed their families.

In a practice called panugbong, residents from the neighboring towns of Igbaras, Tubungan, and Tigbauan would also come to the coastal lines of Cabasi to purchase the abundant fish harvest. Now, that practice has nearly disappeared.

The once-bustling shorelines, where buyers from nearby communities eagerly awaited the arrival of fishing boats, are now quiet. The lively exchanges, the weighing of fresh catch under the dim glow of fluorescent lights, and the hurried bartering that once filled our coastal evenings have faded into memory. Instead, what we see now are disappointed faces—both of fisherfolk who barely have enough to bring home, and of buyers who return empty-handed.

The sea, which once sustained not just our own community but also those from the inland towns, now struggles to provide even for those who have depended on it for generations.

And with the Supreme Court's ruling in the BFAR v. Mercidar Fishing Corporation case, we fear that the little we have left will soon be taken from us as well.

On August 19, 2024, the Supreme Court's First Division issued a resolution in favor of Mercidar Fishing Corporation, allowing large commercial fishing vessels to operate within the 15-kilometer municipal waters that had traditionally been reserved for small-scale fisherfolk.

This decision reversed years of legal precedent that protected municipal waters for artisanal and subsistence fishing. The ruling stated that local government units (LGUs) do not have the authority to impose a blanket ban on commercial fishing, contradicting the long-standing Fisheries Code of 1998 (Republic Act 8550, as amended by RA 10654), which explicitly restricts large fishing operations in these areas.

In particular, the Supreme Court's First Division's Resolution effectively removes the jurisdiction of local government units (LGUs) with respect to municipal waters. Following the devolved functions of LGUs, cities and municipalities are mandated to enforce fishery laws, as well as monitor and regulate fishery activities in their municipal waters. The Local Government Code also provides that all local chief executives are tasked to enforce laws and regulations relating to pollution and environmental protection. At the same time, all local Sanggunians are responsible for passing ordinances aimed at safeguarding the environment and establishing suitable penalties for activities that pose a threat to it, including dynamite fishing and other destructive fishing practices. Furthermore, to highlight the vital role of local governments in prioritizing environmental protection as a devolved service to their constituents, DILG Memorandum Circular 2022-018 reinforces the responsibilities of local government units concerning projects governed by the Environmental Impact Assessment Act and related regulations.

For those unfamiliar with the intricacies of fisheries laws, this may seem like just another legal technicality, perhaps a debate over jurisdiction, rules, and economic policy. But for the communities that depend on these waters, it is a matter of survival. The municipal waters are not just lines on a map; they are the lifeblood of small fishing villages across the country. They are the areas where generations of fisherfolk have made their living, where traditional fishing practices have been passed down, and where the sea has always provided...until now.

ABOUT THE RULING

The Mercidar ruling refers to a landmark 2024 Supreme Court decision in the Philippines that upheld a lower court's declaration that the Fisheries Code's preferential access provisions for small-scale fishers were unconstitutional. This decision, which invalidated restrictions on commercial fishing within the 15-kilometer municipal waters, allows large-scale fishing in these areas, posing a threat to the livelihoods of small fishers and marine ecosystems.



We do not ask for much—only that our waters be left to those who have cared for them the longest.



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE BIG BOATS COME?

To understand why the Mercidar ruling is so alarming, one must first understand the difference between small-scale and large-scale, commercial fishing.

Municipal waters have traditionally been designated for the priority use of small-scale, registered municipal fisherfolk, as mandated by the Fisheries Code. This preferential right is rooted in the social justice principle enshrined in Article XIII, Section 7 of the 1987 Constitution, which directs the State to uphold the rights of subsistence fishers, particularly those in local communities, to priority access to communal marine and fishing resources, both inland and offshore. This principle embodies the ideal that "those who have less in life should have more in law," ensuring that marginalized fishers who rely on these waters for their livelihoods are protected from being displaced by large-scale commercial fishing.

Small-scale fishermen use barotos — narrow wooden boats often powered by paddles or small engines. Their fishing methods are simple: hand lines, fish traps, and small nets. They do not take more than they need, and because of this, the ecosystem has been able to sustain itself for generations.

Commercial fishing vessels, on the other hand, are massive. They use high-powered engines, deep-sea trawlers, and purse seine nets that can stretch for hundreds of meters. These methods do not discriminate; they scoop up everything in their path; large fish, small fish, even eggs and juvenile fish that have not yet had the chance to reproduce. The damage does not end here, apparently. Bottom trawlers drag heavy nets across the ocean floor, destroying coral reefs and seabeds where marine life spawns.

When these big boats enter municipal waters, small fisherfolk are immediately at a disadvantage. Not only do they have to compete with industrial vessels that can catch in one night what they struggle to gather in a month, but they also suffer the depletion of fish stocks caused by unsustainable fishing methods. The long-term effects are devastating: fish populations collapse, local fisheries decline, and the very communities that have depended on the sea for centuries are left with nothing.

Even in Guimbal and its neighboring towns, Miagao and Tigbauan, the "chilling effect" of big fishing vessels encroaching upon municipal waters is not just seen but deeply felt. For generations, these towns have thrived on small-scale fishing, with fathers passing down their knowledge to their sons, who, in turn, teach their own children the ways of the sea. But now, local fisherfolk speak in hushed tones



about how the catch has become more unpredictable, how some of them hesitate to sail out when they see the towering silhouettes of commercial vessels near the shore, knowing that the competition is not just unfair but unsustainable. The anxiety ripples through the community, not just among the fisherfolk but also among vendors in the markets, fish dryers, and all those whose livelihoods depend on the abundance of the sea.

We have already seen glimpses of this in other communities as well where illegal commercial fishing persists. There have been stories of municipal fishermen going out to sea at dawn, only to find that the waters have already been stripped clean by industrial fleets operating at night. Some have tried to resist by reporting illegal fishing activities to the authorities, but enforcement is weak, and the powerful always find a way to continue their operations.

Now, with the Mercidar ruling granting legal permission for these large vessels

to fish within municipal waters, the struggle of small fisherfolk is no longer just a fight against big-time actors; it is a fight against the law itself.

The implications of this decision go beyond just the livelihoods of fisherfolk. It is an environmental crisis in the making.

The Philippines is an archipelago with one of the richest marine biodiversity areas in the world. Our seas are home to thousands of species of fish, coral reefs, and marine ecosystems that sustain not just the fishing industry but the overall balance of our natural environment. Overfishing has already placed many of these species at risk. Allowing commercial fishing in municipal waters accelerates this destruction.

Beyond ecological damage, the economic repercussions will be severe. As of 2023, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources has reported that there are approximately 2.30 million registered fisherfolk engaging in various types of

fishery-related livelihoods across the different municipalities in the country, where capture fishing constitutes approximately 50.9% of the overall livelihood distribution. This simply means that the municipal fisheries sector provides employment to literally millions of Filipinos. When fish stocks decline, these workers are left with no choice but to seek alternative livelihoods, many of which are scarce in coastal communities. Some migrate to urban centers in search of jobs, while others turn to riskier means to survive. The collapse of local fisheries leads to increased poverty, food insecurity, and social instability.

NOW, WE ASK: WHO BENEFITS FROM THIS RULING?

Certainly not the small fisherfolk who have been safeguarding these waters for generations. The ones who stand to gain are the large fishing corporations, many of which have no personal connection to these coastal communities. For them, the ocean is just another resource to be

exploited until nothing remains.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Despite the bleak outlook, fisherfolk communities are not giving up. Organizations advocating for the rights of small-scale fishermen have already begun mobilizing against the Mercidar ruling, pushing for legislative amendments and stronger enforcement of municipal fishing laws. Coastal communities are banding together, calling on their local governments to take action.

This fight is not just for those who make their living from the sea—it is for every Filipino who values food security, environmental conservation, and social justice. The government has long recognized the importance of protecting municipal waters for small fisherfolk. After all, the Fisheries Code was created to ensure sustainability, and various local policies have been implemented to regulate commercial fishing. But laws, no matter how well-written, mean little if they

are overturned by decisions that favor corporate interests over the people.

The sea has always provided for us. But if we do not act now, there will come a time when it no longer can. If we let Mercidar go unchallenged, we risk losing not just the fish in our waters but the very culture and identity of our coastal communities.

We do not ask for much—only that our waters be left to those who have cared for them the longest. #AtinAngKinse ✨

An aspiring peoples' lawyer, Dayata is currently taking up her Juris Doctor degree at the UP College of Law – Iloilo Extension Campus





INTROSPECTION.

Resurfacing through Erasing

the widening of Miagao's seawall

by SHEINA ELIJAH PENETRANTE

"Ta puesto nalang ta. Para ma-brag ta nga naka experience ta nga wala ang seawall." It might be a casual thing to say for the students of the University of the Philippines Visayas to comment on the widening of the town's seawall but it elicits a deeper meaning cemented on both the structurality and subjectivity of what it means to be studying in the University. What do we do then, when bit by bit, sem by sem, LE after LE, these places will change? Altered in a way we cannot recognize anymore.

In the different nooks of Miag-ao, we have our signature spots with their designated purposes. Our non-negotiables where everything is shared. Where we've grown from the ceaseless hope of first year to the bittersweet aftertaste of fourth-year nostalgia.

Vineyard and Redtable.
Bangs and Puesto.
Lover's Lane.
Baybay.

However, time is a prerequisite of change. A course everyone takes but has no definite target outcomes that could guide us towards an uno.

Suddenly, the perfectly timed rush of waves are overshadowed by the mechanical revving of backhoes. The stinging scent of salt was replaced with the putrid smell of fumes. What was then a horizon overhanging is now demarcated not by the orange hues of afternoons but of the greyish undertones of steel in construction.

This brings confusion.

An array of deliberative comments; conflicting suggestions; and a resonance destabilizing the "used to's" and replacing it with "what do I do's?".

When our collective experiences are reduced to compromises that serves a system that is not just profit-driven but plundered by their contractors, senators, and project heads, what needs to be done?

We are again reminded that this small town is still part of that very system. Even if it has become the microcosm of analytics, activists, artists and scientists - all aiming to provide an avenue for the smallest whispers to the loudest of cries to be heard - is still overpowered by a silent mandate.

Time and time again, policies have been disguised. Even what it means to be an Iskolar is measured by bucket lists. By tasks checked in our 24-hour blocked google calendars and overdesigned notion pages to feel validated. The current education system is a factory for workers—incentivized wherein we are taught to survive not thrive. To compete because we are purposely given limited resources. To carefully count glass slides because we cannot afford an accountability and buy another one. To keep our essays with a minimum number of words and cage our ideas with this limitation. To have our mothers in contact with loan sharks because

there are not enough computers in TLRC. To be drenched in sweat after a hike because of the unavailability of dense student buses due to inaccessible student spaces. These inadequacies are only the tip of the iceberg in addressing the severity of studying the Philippines.

Likewise, subpar construction initiatives that put into the steeps public safety and intersectoral wellbeing while creating a deficit and depleting the public's hard-earned taxes are never to be bragged about nor flood control systems that in reality serves invertedly. Our coasts with not only our livelihood, but of lush biodiversity must be protected—more so our taxes.

When this systemic modus operandus that disguise profit-driven policies as "for the people", we cannot help but think that our collective interest is prioritized. But, this manipulation tactic erases our agency. Our identity. Not only is our agency erased. But our identity. Our ability to think. Our purpose. We are put into hunger and starvation. Bit by bit, redirecting the system just right. Tweaking the system just right because a nation confused is a nation bare: their bones bulging, stomachs growling, and eyes dimmed and ready to close.

The roads and waters of the Philippines need no change—only the corrupt politicians who selfishly profit off from pretending they do.

What must be inked into posters are not DPWH funds but the 20 percent cuts made as it goes lower and lower the triangle.

Do we just stay put and enjoy late nights at the seawall or do we raise our fists and march in hopes of its demolition? Or do we continue to grieve our lost shores?

Do we have the responsibility to preserve and to fight for markers of heritages or do we ignore these changes and let it be uprooted along with our collective history?

It turns out that in order to be accountable, we also must be sensible. Sensible to stories of not just ours. We will always be a plurality of narratives and what makes us one is not only the places where we've had our first drinks; where we've experienced our first heartbreaks; where we left a half-empty coffee cold; or where dreams were first imagined. But it is the continual sensibility of being one with the Filipino people that connects us not only as Iskolars ng Bayan but also to the masses we bear responsibility to. We attach ourselves not only to places but to people. To memories. To struggle.

Replacing will not be synonymous to erasing our voices and minds and the statements we have rooted our struggles with—only if we remember. are not synonymous to erasures.

Always, in all the ways Miagao can be traversed, there will always be you; an us—iskolars united by a bond that is

knotted due to struggle; and tightened by a universal need for equity and liberation from constant oppression and repression.

Maybe erasing can also mean the resurfacing of what is underneath: the inefficiencies due to the opportunistic motives for the acquisition of power covered up by distortions and edifices.

History reminds us that communities rarely accept erasure passively. Each disruption becomes an opening to reimagine and rebuild.

Institutions may frame modernization as liberation—yet, in actuality, it serves more as a means of incapacitation. But even then, we have always found something to pour our confined energies. We would always create something new to explicitly combat the system that cages us. Something tailored to our current realities. Specific. Inclusive. Non-invasive. Imaginative.

Every attempt to erase becomes proof of what cannot be destroyed—the will to adapt, endure, but to always remember.

The pricking by thousands of tiny pebbles might be replaced by the coldness of concrete with streetlights shining above; yet, what matters is the warmth adjacent to yours—a rhythm that steadies your uncontrolled heartbeats made by the certainty of uncertainties and continuity of probabilities. ✨



REGION FEATS.

Mother with a bared bosom and her son from Sibalom

by MARIELLA VILLODRES
graphics by KLYDE FACTES

Since time immemorial, Antique has always stood as a mother to her people. Her spine is the great mountain ranges of Central Panay where each arched slope bears centuries' weight of storms. But, even as she was able to brace against the turning of time and thrashing of tempests—against even the betrayal of some of her children—she's now only barely holding on.

With shoulders draped in the forests of Sibalom and Valderrama, she embraces the Iraynon-Bukidnon tribe in the shade of her canopies—their prayers rising with the morning mists of her breaths and returning as the midday rain. From her peaks, pour rivers like milk down into rice paddies.

There, where her skin is soft and fertile against calloused hands, a farmer bends low, hands caked in soil, planting rice to feed their family. At the same time, in the cradle of the Sulu Sea, a fisherman's sweat mingles with her brine—both mother and child laboring. And in her coves and coastlines kissed by the dawning sun, lie fishing families in wait.

But the hands that once caressed her soil, cast nets into her tides, and bowed in reverence for her blessings, now cling to what remains—some even turning to tear at her flesh. Because even in her gentle nurture, human ambition has learned cruelty.

Roads are carved through her ridges. Machines strip her off her forests. Mining drills pierce fractures into her spine—splintering her rivers that once pumped life to her lands. Her bosom is now bare and her creeks are now marred in state-sponsored corporate greed.

Antique, like a mother in a society that takes for granted her labor and autonomy, is both enduring and suffering. She lies waiting for her children—communities, governments, and prodigal sons alike—to come back to her, to fight for her, to stand with her before the storms return.

CARAWISAN: A CANARY IN THE COAL MINES

In San Remigio, lies a tributary of the

Sibalom River watershed called the Carawisan Creek. What once was alive and flowing is now a bare bed smothered under ten-feet deep mining waste, poisoned beyond recognition.

"Ang sapa kang Carawisan natabunan kang mga basura kag dali magbaha rudyá", laments farmer Bernie Valente, president of the Carawisan II Farmers and Irrigators Association.

Even when the mine closed, the land still remembers its violence. With the creek choked and twenty hectares of fertile farmlands lie ravaged, the people can only cling to what once was.

Farmers such as Bernie can only press their hands to where clear current used to run, experiencing in memory only the freshness of clean water and the sounds of carabaos splashing about.

It was a destruction heralded by the Emerald Mineral Resources, who to this day remains held unaccountable for their illegal use of heavy machinery, illegal logging, and open-pit stripping—for tearing San Remigio apart.

Carawisan is not just a scar on Antique's landscape—it's a warning. It's the canary in a coal mine, ringing the alarms. Every slope stripped bare, every creek clogged, is a death sentence when the storms come. And for the locals, the fear is visceral.

They remember how unstable slopes collapsed under 2008's Typhoon Frank. They remember how they buried neighbors and families after Typhoon Paeng's flash floods in 2022.

Yet today, in the very same fragile watershed, DENR's Mines and Geosciences Bureau is poised to declare a 3,700-hectare mineral reservation—opening the land for more extractive exploitation.

"We are rebuilding the same conditions that killed our people," warns Amlig Antique Alliance, a coalition of faith, academe, and civil society organizations working against the destruction of Antique.

THE SILENCE OF A SON

In the whirlwind of this all, stands DENR Secretary Raphael "Popo" Lotilla, who is not just a random out-of-touch bureaucrat flown in from far-off Manila—but Antique's very own son. Lotilla was born and raised in Sibalom, a town just downstream from the Carawisan creek. As a boy, his childhood would have unfurled alongside the river that once ran clear, feeding the farms and forests that shaped his community's way of life.

Now, as the DENR Secretary, he carries the constitutional mandate to protect our nation's environmental integrity. More than just abstract policy, this is now personal—a question of ancestral responsibility. With his family's roots stemming from the same soil now threatened by extractive greed, his fellow Antiquenos ask: will he honor or abandon the very land that raised him?

The Amlig Antique Alliance, frames this as a covenant. "When history asks what the son from Sibalom did when Antique cried for help, may your answer echo Christ's words: I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly." That "life", they insist, cannot mean poisoned rivers, fractured mountains, or displaced indigenous peoples.

Because nothing can be more deafening than a mother's cries of distress while her son presides in silence.

FROM MOUNTAINS TO COASTLINES

Antique's body is not the only one cut open. From Sierra Madre all the way to Mindoro, forests are uprooted, rivers dammed, and creeks destroyed. Antique's afflictions echo a nationwide pattern of desecration and hers extends far beyond mining and deforestation.

Her fragile mountains that are a part of the Central Panay Range are not only at risk of mining's destruction. The DPWH's Panay-West Lateral Road project seeks to carve roads on her slopes, an infrastructure with questionable ecological and practical merits. It's being spearheaded by Sunwest Corporation, a construction company that's co-founded

by Ako-Bikol Representative Elizaldy Co who is embroiled in the national flood control scandal. The project's construction skirted scrutiny through "project splittings" with the road itself serving little to no pressing need to the low-traffic farming-dependent communities in the area. And even her coasts are not spared: the San Jose Esplanade is being constructed dangerously close to marine protected areas and turtle nesting sites, while the Sabang West Turtle Beach parades as "eco-tourism" despite posing active threats to wildlife habitats.

VOICES FROM THE GROUND

But Antique's defenders have not been silent. Farmers, fisherfolks, academics, and church leaders have spoken out, organized, and petitioned. Through the Amlig Antique Alliance, they demand: (1) an end to destructive mining, (2) accountability from its violators, (3) radical transparency, and (4) long-term sustainable environmental protection.

Most importantly, they demand loyalty: not to corporations or contracts—but to land, water, and people. Lotilla, son of Sibalom, then holds the choice: to heed his mother's cries or remain silent while the machines desecrate the land that raised him.

Now more than ever, when storms threaten to ravage coasts, when the soil trembles with the anger of the mountains, and the climate crisis spares no soul—their calls cannot be ignored. In the end, Antique waits—wounded but patient.

As long as her river still runs and the wind still blows to carry the cries of a mother whose bosom has been bared and battered, and whose fate rests in her son's hands, her defenders are not silent. ✨

BANWA NARRATIVES.

SeeSig: Why small businesses are hiddenly underserved

by SHEINA ELIJAH PENETRANTE | Illustrated by ART ANTARAN



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Do you ever find yourself craving the aroma of freshly chopped white onions, harmoniously balanced with the succulent juiciness of beef, delicately topped with mustard and a hint of calamansi?

What if I tell you: your hunger can be weaponized? What if our collective affinities for food is a manifestation of the current systems that starve us?

FROM MOTHER TO MOTHER: A RECIPE WORTH REVISITING

Towards the heart of Miagao, beside the narrow streets of boarding houses, the familiar smell of Mom's Sisig guides not only the stomach but the hearts of everyone to enjoy its unique and addictive flavors. From mother to mother, the Kapampangan recipe resisted an abusive household and reflects the resilience of women and the family-centered chokehold of a Filipino household.

The flavors hold the struggles of a single mother to sustain her children—waking up each day with just the persistence of prayers as "puhunan." Mouths are filled and stomachs have stopped churning as Mom's Sisig became the town's nucleus for affordable yet portion-surplused meals.

"Dapat po Mommy Conching's Sisig pero nilagay ko nalang Mom's Sisig kasi halos karamihan sa atin mga Pinoy, bata man o matanda ay mahilig kumain ng sisig. Kahit ano [ang] okasyon, kadalasan may sisig."

However, the family's euphoric expansion was faced with backlash as a recent anonymous post in the UPV Community Facebook Group noticed the deficit to the

portion sizes in the current servings of the small stall. Just like their perceived portions, the number of customers, most specifically the sector of UP Visayas students also decreased.

While it was addressed swiftly by the business' official Facebook page, the anonymous user have established a disconnect between the food that once replenished the energy of students with its motherly warmth, leaving us unclad to perceive the underlying problem of the food industry—when the platter is opened, what awaits us is the mechanical prototype of what is food in the Filipino culture.

We are not only facing a food crisis. We

are facing an intersectionality of inadequacies in our industries that cascades in our everyday spheres.

CRAWINGS SATISFIED?

There is a common misconception that companies invest in their products or services. Yet in reality, it is in embedment of a craving to their target market population that leads to the symbiotic relationship, an insuppressible need, between the product and the buyer. There is a subtle knowing in buying a particular product—a joy in offering money to get a pair of Nike's rather than being offered a pair of Crocs; to enjoy a buffet in Vikings instead of enjoying caldereta and pancit during birthdays; and in indulging in

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The Filipino people are starved. Contrary to our abundant reserves of natural resources and fiestas, in our every meal, there is struggle.

WHOSE POCKETS ARE EMPTIED AND WHOSE BELLIES ARE FILLED?

In contemporaneity, the struggle is also found not only in the buyers but in the politician and the business owner. Devolved from its promise on empowering agrarian communities, giving our farmers the right funding and equipment, the current food systems in the Philippines focus on international monetary relationships and outcomes leaving our farmers with husks for dinner; our fisherfolk with the accumulated salt in their skin and heavy lungs after a 4:00 am dive traversing cold and guarded seas; and our karinderyas, that with every tawad there is a pocket undressed.

"Malaki [ang naging] epekto samin dahil sa kita namin nababawas pag tumataas [ang] presyo ng mga sangkap. Ayaw ko na itaas ang presyo at i-maintain lang para affordable pa din sa lahat. Dinadaan ko nalang sa volume at bilis ng pagbebenta. Basta maraming bumibili kahit maliit ang tubo kikitang pa din."

In small businesses, when labor is not only done by the owner and their close relatives, the locals in the community take on roles with less than minimum pay. While big corporations and fast food chains rely heavily on private ownership and incentivized labor, our local artisans sometimes live through leftover cash and most times through compassion or even "utang ng loob". These normalcies are apparent in the everyday dilemma of Mom's Sisig on whose deflated stomach to prioritize: theirs or their customers.

But, is it really a question on whose pockets are worth emptying? We are no different from each other. Customers, vendors, small business owners—we are all part of an encroached economic and political platter filling the bellies of pigs we cannot wait to butcher.

Beyond Business, Towards a Kind Caress In the peak of this hopelessness, what emerges is kindness. In a society where our basic needs are wrapped with powerplay and personal interests, the common Filipino still welcomes every customer with a smile and a warm hand—our farmers with cracked backs; our fisherfolks with liquefied lungs; our tiangges with overdue debts; and our street vendors with worn-out calves. They reflect an enduring purpose but also an enduring truth: as long as there is someone starving in the streets there will always be someone to share even a heap of their less than enough meal.

Compassion has always been the forefront of Mom's Sisig. It was not the recipe nor the price that kept people coming but the authenticity and commitment in serving whoever visits them: whether at the dawn of half-drunk Saturdays or at the dusk of hellweeks when exams pile up with no decent dinner in the dorm.

"Malaki ang naitulong ng UP students sa Mom's Sisig dahil malaking percentage ng sales namin halos puro students simula ng magstart kami magbusiness. Dahil sa pagtangkilik ng UP students sa Mom's Sisig nasustain ko ang lahat ng kailangan ng mga anak ko para sa pag-aaral at pang-araw araw na pamumuhay namin." Why then do we have an affinity to fast food chains rather than our own homemade meals? Why then do we view local products as lesser? Why then do we pit ourselves against each other when we all have a collective hunger?

There will always be manufacturers. There will always be fast food chains and restaurants. There will always be department and grocery stores. But there must not always be a disparity in surplus value—the hours we spend working are higher than the pay we get only to make the rich richer and the poor poorer.

UNDERSERVED BUT NOW HEARD

Small businesses just like Mom's Sisig are underserved because they are needed to be: the relatively lower option when the all time favorite question is asked: "Ano gusto mo kan-on?"

While food on the streets are considered cheap, big businesses thrive on how glorified and exclusive they can be, strengthening the borders of social classes and decreasing mobility to go against what is supposed to be a gradient now a rigid line.

Employing these ingredients, the ruling class maintains power sometimes not through force, but through consent as their secret ingredient—an heirloom passed through generations of political dynasties. In making exploitation through deception "normal" and common sense, we are the ones slowly being eaten.

With these concerted complexities, as scholars and as intellectuals, we must not always blame the establishments for a price hike in our favorite commodity. Now more than ever, there is a need for compassion and dissection of a 10-peso increase. Blaming Mom's Sisig does not make us woke for speaking up, it only justifies how passive we are even in our food choices.

The Filipino people are starved. Contrary to our abundant reserves of natural resources and fiestas, in our every meal, there is struggle. For every adobo, kare-kare, and lechon, we are yet again reminded of our colonial past and the revolutions that have gotten us to democracy—an induced hallucination: no nation is ever free. No mind is ever unbiased. No hunger is ever satiated.

"Teh, diin ta makaon?" ✨



Habi ng Sablay

mula Miagao patungong entablado

by PHIL LIAM NONO & SHEKAINAH LOZARITA



HABI NG INDAG-AN

Bagamat matagal nang umiiral ang Sablay at ang tradisyon ng paghahabi nito sa ibang lugar, noong 2015 lamang nagsimula ang paggawa nito sa Barangay Indag-an, Miagao, Iloilo, isang pook na kilala sa mayamang kultura ng hablon. Isa sa mga naging haligi ng pagtataguyod nito ay si Connie Atjion, 72 taong gulang at residente ng nasabing lugar. Aninmapung taon nang pangunahing kabuhayan ni Connie ang paghahabi, na siyang naging daan upang mapagtapos niya ang kanyang mga anak. Natuto siyang humabi noong siya ay walong taong gulang pa lamang at nakabuo ng una niyang hablon sa edad na sampu.

Bilang tugon sa tawag ng panahon at pagpapahalaga sa sariling kultura, sinimulan niyang ilapat ang sariling pamamaraan at kadalubhasaan sa paghahabi ng Sablay kasama ang kanyang labingwalong trabahador.

Nagsimula sila sa paglikha ng mismong Sablay na wala pang baybayin. Ayon sa kanya, bawat isa ay nagtatrabaho sa kani-kanilang tahanan at sinusunod pa rin ang "pakyaw system". Ito ay sistema kung saan nakadepende sa manggagawa kung ilang produkto ang kaya niyang mabuo kada araw.

Nabanggit niya rin na wala silang sinusunod na quota sapagkat may ibang inaaturap din ang bawat manghahabi. Mas maraming ginagawa, mas marami ang kita. Kung tatayain, nakakabuo naman ang bawat isa ng tatlong piraso ng Sablay kada araw. Kalaunan, sa tulong ng karanasan at patuloy na paghaha ng kasanayan, naging posible para sa kanila na makagawa ng mas marami pa.

Lumuluwag papuntang lungsod ang kanilang gawa at sa paglipas ng panahon, naging matatag itong pinagkukunan ng kanilang kabuhayan bukod pa sa tradisyunal na hablon na patuloy pa rin nilang pinangangalagaan. Pero dito rin nila natuklasan na mas hinahangad at pinahahalagahan ng merkado ang kanilang hinahabing Sablay. Mula sa rekomendasyon ng mga taga-lungsod, iminungkahi ang pagpapahusay sa disenyo ng Sablay sa pamamagitan ng pagdaragdag ng baybayin. Ang dating simpleng disenyo ay mas pinasalimuot, pinalalim, at binigyang diin.

Naging pagsubok ito kina Connie at marahil ito rin ang naging dahilan kung bakit inukol niya ang halos isang buwan sa paulit-ulit na paghahabi, pagtatasa ng bawat detalye, at pagkilatis ng bawat tusok ng sinulid bago niya nagawang perpekto ang pagsasalín-salín at pagbabaligtad-baliktad ng hibla sa Sablay. Ilang gabi man ang naging puhunan nila, nabalikan naman ito ng tagumpay. Tagumpay na hindi lamang nasusukat sa bilang ng nagawa, kundi sa lalim ng pag-unawa at pag-aaral sa bawat hibla bago ito matahi nang may dignidad. Dahil dito mas nagkaroon ng karakter at lumiyab ang pula nitong kulay.

HABI SA PANDEMYA

Nang panandalian huminto ang mundo sa panahon ng pandemya, nakita pa rin nina Connie at ng kanyang mga kasamahan ang

liwanag sa gitna ng dilim. Ginamit nila ang pagkakataong ito upang manatili sa loob ng kani-kanilang tahanan at higit pang hasain ang sarili sa paglingang ng kanilang mga obra. Bagamat hindi man naging madali ang pagkuha ng mga materyales at naging sagabal man ang pagkikita sa mga kasama, patuloy nilang itinaguyod ang kanilang trabaho. Aniya, naging blessing in disguise ang pandemya dahil mas nabigyan niya ng atensyon ang detalye sa disenyo at paghahabi ng Sablay. Sa kabila ng limitadong seremonya at online na pagtatapos, patuloy pa rin ang paglabas ng kanilang produkto at pagpasok ng kita.

HABI NG PAMANA

Sa katagalan ng karanasan, naging likas na bahagi ng buhay nina Connie ang gawaing ito. Kahit man hindi na kasing sigla ang galaw ng kanyang mga kamay sa paghimay ng bawat hibla, panatag ang loob niya sapagkat nananatili pa rin ang diwa ng sining sa kanilang komunidad. Sa kasalukuyan, may mga kabataan pa rin, gaya ng kanyang apo, na kusang natututo at yumayakap sa tradisyong paghahabi ng hablon at ng mismong Sablay.

Ngunit sa kabila ng lahat na pagpino ng tela at pag-ukit ng baybayin, may isa pang bagay na hindi pa rin niya nasaksihan. At iyan ang mismong seremonya kung saan ginagamit ang kanilang gawa. Ni minsan ay hindi pa nakadalo si Connie sa isang pagtatapos sa UP Visayas Miagao, o sa alinmang kampus. Gayunpaman, sa tawing siya'y naghahabi ng Sablay, taglay niya ang alab sa puso na siyang nagbibigay ng lakas sa kanya upang magpatuloy. Damdamin na kahit hindi man niya nasaksihan ang pag-akyat ng bawat nagsipagtapos, nakakaramdam pa rin siya ng karangalan at pagmamalaki. Taos puso siyang nalulugod na sa tahimik niyang paraan, gamit lamang ang kaniyang kamay at hibla ng tela, naibabahagi niya ang kanyang galing at ambag sa isang mahalagang yugto ng buhay ng bawat iskolar ng bayan.

Ipinapakita lang nito na ang Sablay ay higit pa sa isang simbolo ng pagwawakas ng pagsisikap bilang estudyante. Para sa mga kamay na humahabi nito, ito'y bunga ng matagalang dedikasyon. Para naman sa mga balikat na dumadala nito, ito'y taglay na paalala ng kinailangang paglakbay. Kaya bago ito makamit, kailangang pagdaanan ang parehong pagsisikap at pagpupursige—maging ikaw man ang taga-habi ng hibla nito, o ang magmamartsa sa entablado at susuot sa araw ng pagtatapos.

HABI AT ISKOLAR

Bawat buwan, mahigit 400 na Sablay ang hinahabi nila sa Miagao. At ito ay umaabot sa humigit kumulang 4,000 kada taon. Mula sa kanayunan, ipinapadala ang mga ito sa Maynila upang ibenta at ipamahagi ng UPBeat Merchandise sa buong kapuluan. Ngunit higit sa bilang at presyo, ang halaga ng Sablay ay hindi natatapos sa mga pagawaan, ito'y nakaugnay sa kuwento ng bawat iskolar na nagsusuot nito.

Bawat Sablay na tinahi sa Miagao ay dumadapo sa iba't ibang uri ng iskolar ng bayan. Maaaring ito'y sumayad sa balikat ng isang first-generation graduate; ng isang estudyanteng sabay na humahawak ng trabaho at pag-aaral; ng isang iskolar na tinahak ang hirap ng akademya hanggang manguna sa klase; ng isang lider-estudyante na laging nasa hanay ng mga kilos-protesta. Maari rin itong isinuot ng isang artistang ginagamit ang sining bilang anyo ng pakikibaka; ng isang atletang kumakatawan sa unibersidad sa mga paligsahan; ng isang kabataang katutubo na isinusulong ang karapatang makapag-aral; ng isang iskolar na nagtapos sa gitna ng matinding personal na krisis; ng isang estudyanteng lumalaban para sa karapatan ng LGBTQ+; ng isang anak ng OFW na nagsikap sa kabila ng distansya ng pamilya; at ng isang batang nangangarap lamang noon, ngayo'y ganap ang iskolar ng bayan.



Sa bawat tapik ng sinulid ay mayroong nabubuon ideya: magkaiba man ang pinagmulan, iisa ang hangarin. Makapagtapos, makapaglingkod, at makapag-ambag sa bayan.

Sa bawat guhit ng Sablay ay nakaugnay ang samu't saring kwento ng tagumpay, sakripisyo, at pag-asa. Ito ay mga kuwentong humahabi ng landas mula Miagao hanggang entablado. At sa bawat tapik ng sinulid ay mayroong nabubuon ideya: magkaiba man ang pinagmulan, iisa ang hangarin. Makapagtapos, makapaglingkod, at makapag-ambag sa bayan.

HABI PARA SA BAYAN

Hindi man natin personal na nakadaupang-palad ang mga kamay na humubog sa ating Sablay, dala rin nila ang bigat ng ating tagumpay, kasing bigat ng kanilang pag-aalay. Kaya sa pagsalin ng Sablay mula kanan na balik patungong kaliwa, bitbit natin ang marka ng kanilang paglikha. At sa pag-abot natin ng kamay para tumanggap ng diploma, nawa'y hindi natin malimutan ang nakadugtong na hibla ng ugnayan sa pagitan ng manggagawa at iskolar, ng pamayanan at unibersidad.

Sapagkat kahit taun-taong nagtatapos ang Sablay season sa UP, hindi kailanman natatapos ang paghahabi nina Connie at mga katulad niya—gaya ng walang patid na paninindigan ng mga iskolar sa buong panahong ginugol nila sa pamantasan para sa adhikain ng bayan. ✦

The Collective Memory of Forgetting

by RHEA NAVA | illustrated by KENNETH DE LA VEGA

It is always that familiar smile, the deliberate handshake, the practiced warmth in small exchanges, and the ever-present eco bag packed with the basic needs—a pouch of rice, cans of sardines, a few pieces of noodle packs, and on fortunate days, a discreet envelope slipped within, plastered with a sticker of a face and a name. Scenes that are so familiar not only every election season in most localities in the Philippines, but also in the in-between moments, now and then, whenever those in power come seeking favors.

The clamor for good governance has echoed throughout Philippine history, and it grows louder in times of crisis: when it is time for another typhoon to ravage homes and livelihoods, or when the cracks in government widen to reveal malpractice, corruption, and theft by those in power.

In moments of hardship and injustice, we find ourselves yearning for leaders who could have prevented, or at least mitigated, the burdens we now carry. It has become almost a pattern in our culture: that our homes must first be swallowed by floodwaters, that our children must endure cramped student spaces and inadequate facilities caused by budget cuts, and that workers, despite exhausting all means, must scrape by on meager wages just to feed their families.

However, throughout our history, Filipinos often suffer from what may be called a collective memory of forgetting—a tendency to selectively remember, misremember, and disremember stories of our history. In revisiting our colonial experience, for instance, the cultures imposed upon us by the colonizers once served as instruments of pacification. Yet today, we often choose to remember them in a flattering light, treating them as influences that enriched and shaped our indigenous traditions. But were these truly gifts from our colonizers, or were they more insidious tools of control?

Moreover, during the Marcos Sr. regime, the propaganda of economic progress and grand infrastructure projects became rallying points that continue to draw admiration from some Filipinos today. Yet what is often overlooked is that these so-called achievements were funded by the people's own money, resources that never truly belonged to the regime, and for which it deserves no credit.

What seems to endure instead is a selective forgetting of the darker truths, the imposition of Martial Law that silenced voices, stripped away rights, and inflicted entrenched scars on the people. But in this culture of misremembering, many still extend their support to the very family that enabled such peril in our past and even now, with Marcos Jr. in power. Loyalty still persists for some despite the glaring incompetence that continues to weigh upon the Filipino people.

Further, Duterte's "iron-fist" style of leadership drew support from many Filipinos who believed that such an authoritarian approach could finally address the country's most pressing problems. Yet even as the misdeeds and controversies surrounding his family resurfaced, much of the public chose to look past them, sustained by a kind of masochistic endurance and blind faith. Despite allegations against the daughter over questionable confidential funds, loyalty to their name endures, accompanied by a deliberate forgetting of the bloody trail of extrajudicial killings that claimed countless Filipino lives, guilty or not.

On a closer look, this cycle reveals itself most vividly at the local level. Communities are enticed by the illusions of a new flood control project, a freshly paved pathwalk, a refurbished plaza, or yet another multi-purpose gym rising in town. People are won over by ayuda, whether inside the ecobags or the envelopes, and their resolve often softens with nothing more than a warm handshake or a string of pleasing promises.

These gestures, though modest, sustain the illusion of progress and make it easier for traditional politicians to secure loyalty, showing how deeply ingrained and difficult to escape this cycle truly is.

Still, it would be unfair to fault Filipinos for accepting the pouches, whether or not they choose to support the politician behind it.

For many, these handouts are necessities, immediate lifelines to survive the everyday poverty. The issue lies with those in power who use these vulnerabilities, turning acts of supposed generosity into tools of manipulation. By framing basic assistance as personal favors rather than the people's rightful due, they therefore sustain a cycle that keeps citizens indebted while inequalities grow wider. The cycle persists, obviously not in the people's act of receiving, but in the leaders' deliberate use of aid as currency for control.

I constantly long for the day when Filipinos finally recognize that these warm gestures are, more often than not, mere facades. When the smiles that seem so sincere are unmasked for the self-serving intentions they conceal. I look forward to the time when people will no longer be misled by wolves in sheep's clothing, but will instead receive the support they deserve, offered not as favors to secure loyalty, but as rightful assistance rooted in genuine care and responsibility.

And I will always hope for the day when there is no longer a need to endlessly clamor for good governance because it has already been truly realized. ✨



You can't sit with us *(like, literally)*

by YONA **HONRADO** | illustrated by ART **ANTARAN**

Lights, camera, action! Ang eksena: Ikaw, papasok ng CUB, kumakalam ang sikmura at desperado sa kahit anong makakain. Gagalugarin ng mga mata mo ang kabuuan ng 'di-mahulugang karayom na cafeteria, nagbabakasakaling may bakanteng puwesto. Ang iba kumakain, ang iba nag-aaral, karamihan parehong nagpapakaproduktibo sa kakarampot na break habang nilalabanan ang gutom sa P45-peso meal ni Manang Betch.

Pero ang tunay na drama? You can't sit with them. Hindi dahil "plastics" sila o dahil hindi ka belong sa grupo. You just can't sit with them, literally. Wala na kasing talagang bakanteng puwesto. As in zero. None. Waay.

Dito kasi sa UPV, kahit walang Mean Girls na magsasabi sa iyong hindi ka pwedeng umupo kasama nila ay mahirapan ka pa ring maghanap ng puwesto. Dito, parte ng curriculum ang pakikipag-Trip to Jerusalem sa mga kapwa mo Iskolar para lang panandaliang makahalik ang iyong puwit sa monobloc chair. Dito, soundtrack din ang "Upuan" ni Gloc-9—mula sa "so near yet so far" na bagong University Library at always and forever jam-packed na TLRC hanggang sa CUB na cafeteria-slash-working space, applicable din ang kanta sa 'di pa rin nasosolusyunang isyu ng kakulangan ng espasyo sa kampus.

THAT IS SO NOT FETCH

Flashback muna sa nakaraang akademikong taon. Dito matutunghayan

ang rising action ng pelikulang lalong nagpalala sa matagal nang hindi student-friendly na sistema ng unibersidad at yumanig sa mundo ng mga tambay ng Old Library: ang pag-aalsabalutan ng silid-aklatan patungo sa tuktok ng bundok.

Objectively speaking, better naman talaga ang New Library. Bago, kumpleto, at mas malaki kumpara sa luma, kaya naman mas maraming estudyante ang kaya nitong mapaunlakan. Mas maraming shelves, study areas, at aesthetic ang view. Kaso nga lang, bukod sa mga regular na empleyado, mabibilang mo sa dalawang kamay ang mga bumibisita rito. Ang espasyo kasi in ito na para naman talaga sana sa mga mag-aaral ay 'di naman basta-bastang napupuntahan.

Sa usapin ng New Library ay hindi pwedeng hindi mabanggit ang kakambal na isyu nito: ang transportasyon paroon. Sementado man, dahil sa matarik na daanan ay mahirap pa rin itong manumanuhing akyat, lalo na kapag ayaw din magpatalo ng haring araw o kaya ay ng ulan.

Ang tanging solusyon bukod sa maghiking nang wala sa plano ay maki-hitch ride sa scheduled service ng mga taga-SoTech at RRC. Pero, sabi nga sa isang entry sa freedom wall, kung hindi pagod, konsensya ang papatay sa'yo kapag nakiagaw ka pa ng puwesto para sa kanila. Idagdag pa ang recent notice Campus Maintenance and Development Office (CDMO) na dysfunctional na ang

apat na university buses. Kaya naman, siksikan sa puting L300 at green van muna ang kanilang everyday eksena. Ano, dadagdag ka pa ba?

GET IN LOSER, WE'RE GOING TO FIND A VACANT SPACE

Fast forward to today. Dahil sa pagkawala ng Old Library, gaya ng alimangong nawalan ng shell ay matik na maghahanap ang mga estudyante ng bagong bahay para maka-survive. Bahay, as in bagong mapagtatambayan. At saan pa nga ba? TLRC. Ang laging puno, laging malamig, laging desirable (sanao!), pero lagi ring missing-in-capacity na TLRC.

Bago pa man magdesisyong mag "new year, new me" ang paboritong silid-aklatan ng lahat, punuan na talaga ang TLRC. Sadyang ang Iskonita, air conditioned na silid, o mga dilaw na desk-benches lang kasi ang pwede mong pagpiliang pamahayan. Ngayon, mas dumami pa ang enrollees, kaya mas kumonti ang accessible spaces. Kahit maya-maya ay mag-abot na ang pinto ng basement at ang mga lamesa ay hindi pa rin ito sasapat sa dami ng estudyante.

Kaya naman, kapag sumuko ka sa TLRC Hunger Games, ang choices mo na lang ay:

- CUB mushies (na palagi ring puno),
- CAS Park (na malamok at zero Wi-Fi),
- CAS Garden (may Wi-Fi pero pang-10th Circle of Hell ang init), o
- Mga bakanteng klasrum sa CAS

Building (kung makatsambang on ang aircon at abot ng Wi-Fi).

At oo, hindi ko nilagay sa options ang umuwi, kasi:

- May allowance na kailangang i-budget;
- Tutostahin ka muna bago makauwi kung maglalakad ka lang; at
- Babalik ka rin naman, so why bother?

May bahid din talaga ng sarkasmo ang mga sitwasyong kagaya nito; na para bang jino-joketime ka lang ng mundo. Hindi mo na nga alam kung saan ka patungo figuratively, pati ba naman in a literal sense ay mamomroblema ka pa.

But then (na para bang divine intervention), maaalala mong may isang lugar ka pa palang hindi napupuntahan. Ang tambayan to end all tambayans. Saan ka nga ba makakakita ng lamesa at upuan bukod sa mga silid-aralan?

Tama. Sa hapag-kainan.

YOU COULD TRY CUB?

Ganito pala sa UPV Cafeteria: maingay, magulo, mainit, pero puno ng pangarap! Nitong mga nagdaang buwan kasi ay nagsilbing kainan, pahingahan, at review center ang cafeteria sa CUB, all-in-one. Sa dami ng tao, may mga estudyanteng magsa-standing ovation muna bago makakain. Ang iba ay dinadala na sa labas ang kanilang pinggan. Ang mga may badyet, maglalakad patungong Box 1 para

doon na lang mananghalian. At ang iba na wala nang choice, mag-OMAD na lang.

Normal na ang ganitong mga pangyayari sa pelikula ng buhay ng mga estudyanteng umaasa sa mga pasilidad ng institusyong ito. Iyong mga nanghihinayang sa kinse na pamasaha, walang sapat na badyet para mag-aral sa mga cafe, at ang mga may tanging pagkakataon lang para makabawi ng tulog ay sa bakanteng oras sa pagitan ng kanilang klase. At kagaya ng bawat kuwento, ang isang ito ay may moral of the story rin: na hindi dahil normal ang sitwasyon ay tama ito. Ika nga nila, don't settle for the bare minimum, 'di ba?

Kaya naman ngayong wala nang bakanteng puwestong maupuan at salat na sa espasyong pwedeng mapag-aralan at mapagpahingahan, baka panahon nang muling ipaalala sa administrasyon na may mga estudyanteng walang mapuwestuhan. Kung talagang para sa atin ang institusyong ito, hindi ba't hindi na dapat tayo nag-aagawan ng espasyo?

Kung wala nang maupuan, e 'di tumayo tayo—hindi para maghintay, kung hindi para ipaglaban ang espasyong dapat ay atin na mula sa simula. ✨



"In the people's need for land and desire to control their own lives lies a revolution."

It begins quietly. A rustle, something subtle enough to overlook. Yet what rustles in Nettie Wild's A Rustling of Leaves: Inside the Philippine Revolution (1988) is not simply foliage in the forests where guerrillas hide, but revolution and history itself, tangled in the turmoil of hope, oppositions, and terrible violence in the turbulent heart of post-Marcos Sr. Philippines.

Every year we bow to stone statues of heroes who once unsettled the status quo. Yet, Wild confronts us with a harder truth. Yesterday's heroes were once branded disruptors, just as today's revolutionaries are still cast in the same light.

The film dismantles the illusion that history is a settled account. Instead, it shows that the fiercest battle is not only on the ground but over narrative—over who gets

FILM REVIEW

The battle for narrative in a country that erases

by IVAN ENTRAMPAS

to be remembered as hero and who is condemned as enemy. Red-tagging, impunity, and violence are deployed not just to silence dissent but to reshape the story itself: who is victim, who is criminal, who is hero.

Wild first places us inside a historical moment defined not by resolution but by contradiction. In one telling cut, Cory Aquino's boast that the Philippines will be "one of the greatest countries in the world," is followed by a garbage dumpsite, with people from the slums scavenging for money and purpose in a place laden with waste. Aquino, celebrated for "restored democracy," presided over the 1987 Mendiola Massacre, where nearly 10,000 farmers demanding land were met with state gunfire.

All of the symbolic weight of Cory Aquino's presidency crumbles as this violence under her watch makes it evident that state and military brutality did not die with the dictator but simply changed color and uniforms. The Marcos dictatorship has

Nettie Wild
Canadian filmmaker

with a focus on documentaries that highlight marginalized groups and discrimination that these groups face, including people in Canada and around the world.



The very acts of defiance that once defined the making of this nation are now recast as threats. The same cries for land and dignity that were once celebrated as patriotic and heroic are today answered with bullets and erasures.

fallen, but the underlying social dilemmas, the oppressive Western imperialist entanglements, class hierarchies, and land inequity remained.

Elsewhere in the film, we meet the paramilitary vigilantes—Jun Pala's "Alsa Masa" and Bato dela Rosa's "Tad-tad"—central figures who stand brazenly in their merciless acts of terror and violence against those they brand as "communists", speaking of killing with a grin as if it were amusement. Their casual cruelty, raw and unfiltered, prefigures the brutalities decades later in the Duterte administration. These admissions show a cycle of impunity stretching from Marcos through Aquino and beyond. The violence here is not hidden; it is performed. It is boasted of.

As layers of stories are laid bare, one realizes that rather than a static chronicle, this film is a work of political clairvoyance, anticipating today's historical distortion and unending battle for narrative as the same patterns of inequality and repression rebrand over and over again. Scenes of common Filipino people confronting tanks and armed soldiers contextualize the notion that the revolution is not an abstract belief system but as an everyday uprising for survival.

The patterns are painfully familiar today. Dee "Ka Dahlia" Supelanas, a trans woman activist and UP Cebu alumna, was among seven killed in Kabankalan this year. In 2022, volunteer Lumad school teacher and environmental activist Chad Booc was slain in Davao de Oro after the military claimed he died in an encounter—despite witnesses and colleagues insisting he was targeted for his work with indigenous communities. In 2020, UP Visayas alumnus Malvin "Ka Lean" Cruz was killed in Miagao, his life dismissed as "wasted."

What connects these names and places is not only grief but distortion. Power ensures that activists are remembered not as defenders but as casualties of a "false revolution", their humanity effaced by the labels imposed upon them.

"Democracy must have as many colors as the rainbow; and there is no rainbow without red," Ed Dela Torre says in the film. However, the state insists on erasing red entirely. By casting activists as terrorists and communists, by silencing humanitarian laborers, and by revising textbooks to glorify Martial Law, power wins not only through artillery but through stories.

This can be seen in Cagayan de Oro early 2025, when posters red-tagging progressive party-list nominees Kabataan, Bayan Muna, and the Alliance of Health Workers to the CPP-NPA-NDF suddenly appeared. This tactic is recycled from the 1980s and is continuously being utilized in subsequent years.

The rustling of leaves, then, evokes something so faint that it can be easily unnoticed. Yet the rustling here symbolizes something deeper: the movement in the undergrounds, the unrest that trembles even the most rooted foundations.

Wild invites us to listen closely to these small sounds and to recognize that revolutions do not erupt fully formed but are born of accumulated grievances, ignored clamors, and unseen labor. It insists that heroism does not begin at monuments. It begins in the refusal to be invisible, in the courage to resist silence, in the daily struggle for land, bread, and dignity.

This is the disquieting truth we face. The very acts of defiance that once defined the making of this nation are now recast as threats. The same cries for land and dignity that were once celebrated as patriotic and heroic are today answered with bullets and erasures.

A Rustling of Leaves is both a documentary and a prophecy in hindsight on how revolutions die and rebirth everyday and everywhere—in military crackdowns, media narratives, bullets fired on forests and bridges, people's hunger, and in the quiet decisions of individuals confined by larger and more powerful forces. Wild knows that all of these are not separate narratives but are interconnected and breathing within the same ecosystem of struggle. With this, the truth is revealed which is more disturbing than the ceaseless occurrence of inequality and injustice: that this injustice never dies but evolves, transforms, and reshapes itself beneath the changing banners of new leaders and hollow promises.

Inside this revolution, Nettie Wild found not only stories but a mirror, reflecting the Philippines and, perhaps, any nation caught in the never-ending cycle of violence and forgetting. Over thirty years later, its echoes have only intensified.

The leaves still rustle. The struggle continues. And so does the battle for narrative in a country that erases. ✨



A Rustling of Leaves: Inside the Philippine Revolution

1988 | Documentary

A chronicle of the three points of a political triangle—the legal left, the illegal (armed) revolution, and the enemy which threatens them both; the armed reactionary right. It is 1987. The dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos has just been overthrown. Newly elected President Corazon Aquino struggles to wrench control of the country from her own military.

from the Letterboxd crowd



Moosa Hamad



Nuanced look at post-Marcos Philippines and I honestly found it crazy how up close and personal she was with armed NPA guerrilla fighters. It captures the political climate but also the realities of so many Filipinos during the 80's and what leads people to take up an armed struggle. Lots to chew on with this and I love how she also captures the beautiful landscapes of the Philippines showing the potential of the people, but also the land. Love how it shows though the cycle of never ending conflict and how the result of oppression and ignoring people creates armed struggle and then as a result creates more oppression.



zach carter



this is real documentary work! reminds me of guzman's 'la batalla de chile' in that it doesn't shy away from the underlying imperialist financing of the military counterinsurgency, and it also gives the microphone to the revolutionaries rather than opine on their motivations and actions.



Josh Deveras



The filmmakers have become the curious third-party on the fight for a Philippine Revolution. The convoluted issue is elaborated and channeled in discussion and dialogue through interviews, casual interactions, experiences and stories with the people and the political sides. Nettie Wild and the Canadian film crew involved have been able to give an astounding, unflinching account given the access and dangerous circumstances underlying the matter.



Nico Quejano



Essential viewing. I literally gasped when I saw familiar faces and names that resonate especially today... Franco Calida (Jose Calida's older brother) was "cleaning" Davao of communists. Bato dela Rosa leading a vigilante group called tadtad killing suspected communists. And the media being used (with admission) to brainwash the people. It's depressing that even after 30 years, we haven't progressed that much. Found a new hero tho, Ed Dela Torre.

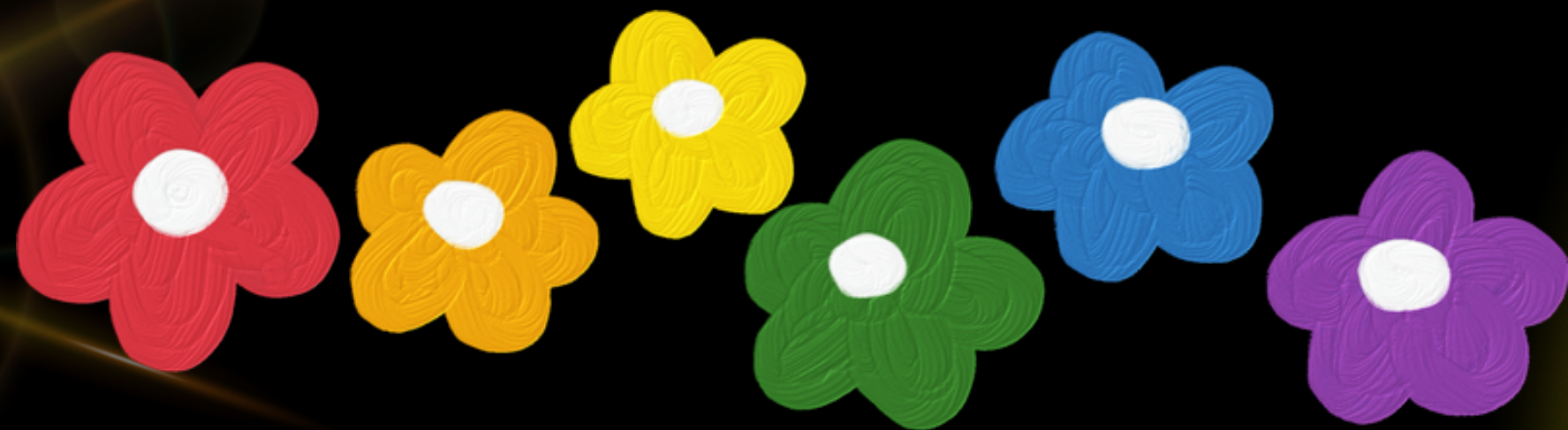


Neil Bungcayao



ganda ng pagkabuhol-buhol ni nettie wild ng kwento. mahusay 'yung ending, si dante buscayno, pauwi sa kanyang pinanggalingan, i-assess ang sariling patutunguhan pati na rin ng rebolusyon.

nakakalungkot, 30 years na ang lumipas pero parang ganoon at ganoon pa rin ang mga issue. hawak pa rin ng mga banyaga ang bansa natin, walang tunay na reporma sa lupa, maraming exploited at nananatiling oppressed.



LIBERATING THE UNLIBERATED

How local film screenings illuminate unseen narratives

by IVAN ENTRAMPAS | illustrated by ART ANTARAN

Every time I step into these small or makeshift cinemas, I am greeted by darkness, illuminated only by the soft glow of a screen projecting a local film I know nothing about. I sit and wait to be transported, to be stirred and momentarily freed from the outside world by whatever emotion the film chooses to awaken. As the audience settles, the faint light catches their glimmering eyes, which are also curious, expectant, and ready to be carried into another timeline that lasts no longer than twenty minutes.

At Pelikulaya, what is spotlighted at the front before the audience is not just the bright projection of the films but also the colorful presence of written protest. Placards line the stage and around the projection, clamoring for an end to violence and inequality against women, children, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community. This is an explicit reminder that no true art is only for art's sake. Art is political, personal, and deeply intertwining with the collective pulse of society showing all its sorrows, hopes, and quiet defiance.

The films featured in Pelikulaya are poignant yet courageous tellings of queer lives, with some using comedy not to trivialize and make fun, but to reach the audience with warmth and thus making the dramatic moments all the more heartfelt, as seen in *May Kulay Rosas ba sa Bahaghari* (2024).



Colorful, vibrant, and filled with heart, the film directed by Marian Jayce Tiongzon follows a young boy who knows early on that he is unlike his peers of the same sex. While other boys are hardened by the pressure to conform to masculine expectations, he remains soft yet steadfast, strengthened by his father Lino's unconditional love—who, as the story unfolds, is revealed to be a drag queen.

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The title speculates, "May kulay rosas ba sa bahaghari?", and as the boy peers at the world through his heart-shaped, rose-colored bag, what echoes are his father's words: "Basta makita mo kag gapati ka, wala gid may madula sa imo." These queer children are victims of violence at a young age, and the film does not suggest that

we view these injustices through rose-colored glasses; rather, it urges us to let these children see the world in undaunted and unashamed hues, not drain it into the mundane gray of denial.

Many of these films weave religious imagery into their storytelling as a truthful reflection of how the Philippines' Catholic conservatism continues to shape, and sometimes suffocate, identity. The characters were imprisoned in these conservative expectations, yet through the telling of their stories, the audience finds liberation.

In *A Catholic Schoolgirl* (2023) by Myra Angeline Soriaso, the protagonist Kaya, a model student in an all-girls Catholic school gifted with a beautiful talent for singing in a choir, embodies perfection within the rigid walls of a heteronormative institution. However, the film knows that perfection is fragile when one's love does not align with expectation.



Through meaningful allegory, the film portrays concealment like being in the "closet" as both a sanctuary and a prison. In a moment as Kaya hides to watch Sister Agnes change clothes, the audience in the cinema and Kaya become reflections of each other—silent in the dark and watching as lives unfold, undress, and reveal their truths.

Three of the showcased films center on same-sex relationships, unfortunately with two ending in sorrow, one on a lighter note. The *Ballads I Wish You Listened To* (2024) by Vic Arroyo is a realistic and heartbreaking story of Miko and Wesley whose affection falters under the weight of reality. "Indi na ko magkanta kung indi ikaw ang piyesa," Miko confesses, but he could only hope as his life continued, his ballads left echoing for a muse no longer there to hear them.

"Through a love for the arts—and in this case, for film and cinema—the stories of the unliberated and the unseen find their medium, weaving threads of connection among those who share the same struggles."



Heatwave (2024), directed in General Santos City by Henri Marie Belimac, tells the realistic yet tender story of Rhea and Erich, whose love is tested by disapproval of Rhea's family—a familiar pain for many sapphic couples. One side faces rejection from the family, and then love becomes a beautiful act of defiance. In real life, some of these relationships end in heartbreak, while others lead to family's acceptance and realization that love should never be restrained. *Notes, Beer, and Everything in Between* (2025) by Jozhed Reyes tells the painful story of two former lovers still haunted by what once was. Time may heal wounds for some, but for sapphic love where bonds tangle deeply and intimacy is woven into the soul, some wounds linger as beautiful ghosts.

Lastly, in *Agi-Agi* (2024) by Sean Dominguez, breathtaking shots of rivers and rice fields witness a young man's coming-of-age and becoming amid a turbulent family. Jiro's mother may love him, but her affection can never make up for the abuse he endures from his father. He is isolated and withdrawn not only because of this harsh circumstance but also from the alienation that comes from being queer in a conservative home. The film's stillness speaks louder than words: the silence of isolation, the yearning for freedom.

Through a love for the arts—and in this case, for film and cinema—the stories of the unliberated and the unseen find their medium, weaving threads of connection among those who share the same struggles, reminding them that they are not alone. They remind us that pity must not end in pity, but to empathy and action.

These local indie films often seen by only a few dozen or a few hundred people tell stories of injustice that deserve to reach thousands. It is a paradox that tales of oppression are often confined to intimate screenings, while the box-office charts are dominated by formulaic productions driven by propaganda. Yet, film screenings and festivals like Pelikulaya and Cinematahum persist, giving these narratives the dignity of being seen.

Director Myra Angeline Soriaso also understands this, as it was said that she expressed her desire for her film to be screened freely. As filmmakers like her use their craft as sanctuary for oppressed voices, local film screenings allow these voices to echo farther beyond their small beginnings and resonate with audiences who might finally see themselves represented.

Hindi kailanman paluluhod ang Pagbutlak

Mahigit limang dekada na ang Pagbutlak, ngunit sa mas malawak na tanawin ng kasaysayan, ito ay isang kakarampot na yugto lamang.

Ang Pagbutlak ay hindi isang tahimik na saksi ng kasaysayan—naging mahalagang bahagi ito ng pakikibaka para sa tunay na kalayaan. Ang kasaysayan ng pahayagan ay hindi maaaring ihiwalay sa mga alon ng militanteng pakikibaka ng mga iskolar ng bayan sa UP Visayas. Sapagkat, isinilang ito hindi upang maging tagamasid, kundi upang maging armas ng masang-api at tagapagningas ng diwa ng militansya—sa loob man ng pamantasan, sa lansangan, o sa kanayunan kung nasaan ang masang pinagtutungkulan.

Bagama't may mga sandali ng pananahimik at pansamantalang pagkawala, hindi ito naging tanda ng pagkatalo, kundi patunay ng panunumbalik—mas matatag, mas matalas, mas radikal. At sa pagdiriwang nito ng 51 taon, ipagpapatuloy ng Pagbutlak sa bagong yugto nito ang peryodismong nakaugat sa tradisyon ng pakikibaka.*

PAGLANTAD NG SUGAT

Sa kabila ng mayamang kasaysayan ng Pagbutlak bilang bahagi ng militanteng tradisyon ng pahayagang pangkampus hindi lamang sa rehiyong Kabisayaan, kun'di maging sa buong Pilipinas, hindi maikakailang hindi ito laging matalas, hindi ito laging radikal, at hindi ito laging mapanuri sa sarili.

Hindi maitatangi ang mga panahon ng pananahimik, pagkaatrasado, at kakulangan sa mas masigasig na pagsusuri ng kalagayan ng mga estudyante at masang anakpawis. Siguro nga'y may mga sandaling naging reaksiyunaryo imbes na mapanguna, tagapag-ulat lamang imbes na tagapaglaya, at naging biktima rin ng mismong sistemang dapat nitong binubunyang at nilalabanan.

Sa ganitong konteksto, hindi kataka-takang nagkaroon ng mga panahon ng pananahimik at pagkawala ng direksyon ang Pagbutlak. Nabalot ito ng kawalang-kibo sa mahahalagang isyung nakaapekto sa pamantasan at sa mamamayan. Ang direksyon ng publikasyon ay naging pabago-bago rin sa bawat termino—minsang matalas at kritikal, ngunit sa ibang pagkakataon ay mistulang lumalayo at naging lulan ng abstrak na diskurso na malayo sa konkretong kalagayan ng sektor na dapat nitong pinaglilingkuran.

“

Kasaysayan na mismo ang nagdikta na susulpot ang midyang naglilingkod sa masa, at walang umid na pag-uulat ang magiging sagot nito sa taktika ng estado.

Sa kabila nito, hindi nito hinayaang mabaon sa limot ang layunin nitong maglilingkod. Hindi naging kimi ang publikasyon sa pagbunyang sa mga anti-estudyante at anti-mamamayan na mga polisiya ng estado, at lalong 'di ito tumigil sa pagmamatyag sa mga pangako ni Chancellor Camposano sa unang termino nito.

Sa muling pagharap ng Pagbutlak sa mga papel nito sa loob at labas ng kampus matapos ang matagalang pandemya, patuloy nitong pinanghahawakan ang mga paninindigan. Sa pagiging bingi ng estado sa hinaing ng sangkaestudyantehan na ibasura ang Mandatory ROTC, isabatas ang Safe Reopening of Schools Bill, pagbuwag sa NTF-ELCAC, pagbalik sa UP-DND accord, maging ang kahingian ng masang-api gaya ng pagbasura sa pekeng jeepney modernization program, charter change ni Marcos Jr., kakulangan ng sapat na trabaho, at iba pa, hindi nagpatinag ang publikasyon at lalong itinambol ang boses ng mga nasa laylayan.

Ngayong sistematikong inaatake ang kalayaang magpahayag kahit pa man sa loob ng pamantasan, hindi kailanman paluluhod ang Pagbutlak. Sa laganap na huwad na naratibong ipinamana sa atin ng nagdaang pasistang rehimen, mas lalong tumitindi ang pangangailangan.

Kaya maniningil ito kasama ang masa; babanggain ang paninindigan, wawasakin ang pasismo, at hindi kailanman tatalikod.

ANG BAGONG PAGBUTLAK

Sa piliit na paggupo ng estado sa kredibilidad ng midya, nilulunod nito ang mamamayan sa ingay at sinasalaula ang kakayahang magpasiya batay sa katotohanan. Ngunit kasaysayan na mismo ang nagdikta na susulpot ang midyang naglilingkod sa masa, at walang umid na pag-uulat ang magiging sagot nito sa taktika ng estado.

Makikipagtuos ang pahayagan, hindi lamang sa administrasyong Marcos-Duterte, kun'di sa buong makinarya ng karahasan at panunupil na kanilang pinatibay.

Sa pagsisimula ng ika-51 taon ng publikasyon, magbabagong anyo ang Pagbutlak. Hindi lamang ito pagbabago ng mukha, kun'di pagbabagong-anyo sa mismong paraan ng paglilingkod sa kapwa estudyante at masa. Mula sa tradisyunal na pamamaraan ng paglilimbag, tuluyan nang yayakapin ng Pagbutlak ang ganap na digital na operasyon— isang hakbang upang higit na maabot ang mas malawak na mambabasa sa loob man o labas ng pamantasan.

Sa bagong anyo ng Pagbutlak, mas yayakapin nito nang buo ang multimedia content, paigtingin ang presenya sa social media, at magsasagawa ng sistematikong daloy ng paggawa—mula sa pagpili ng mga isyung tatalakayin hanggang sa mahigpit na proseso ng pagsusuri at pagpupuna.

Nananatiling malinaw at hindi matitinag ang aming paninindigan: ang Pagbutlak ay hindi magiging tahimik sa harap ng kasinungalingan at lalong hindi magiging sunod-sunuran sa kapangyahirang ginagapos ang midya sa takot, red-tagging, at intimidasyon.

Higit sa lahat, nangangako kaming mananatiling kasama ng masa sa gitna ng kanilang pakikibaka, hindi lamang bilang isang pangkampus na publikasyon kun'di bilang kolektibong paninindigan —*para sa kamatuoran, katarungan, kag kahilwayan.*

Ang "Pagbutlak: A Tradition of Struggle" ni Karlo Mikhael Mongaya ay isang artikulong inilathala sa Pagbutlak na tumatalakay sa kasaysayan ng militanteng tradisyon ng publikasyon.

"Sa pagsisimula ng ika-51 taon ng publikasyon, magbabagong anyo ang Pagbutlak. Hindi lamang ito pagbabago ng mukha, kun'di pagbabagong-anyo sa mismong paraan ng paglilingkod sa kapwa estudyante at masa."

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