

# Philippines Marcos times: Detention, ‘town arrest’ under martial law

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**It was a humid night in July 1974 in Zamboanga City when I was arrested by agents of the National Intelligence Security Agency (Nisa). I was then in my hometown for the funeral of my grandmother, Isabel Cortez Climaco. The warrant for my arrest cited me for “subversion” and I was flown back to Manila.**

I was detained at the 5<sup>th</sup> Constabulary Security Unit (5<sup>th</sup> CSU) in Camp Crame in what was once an ammunitions depot. My house was raided and various reading materials confiscated. Nisa and CSU officers interrogated me intensely for hours a day. At no time was I physically harmed, but I was abused verbally and psychologically. The first two nights, I slept on a table in an office and almost froze with the air-conditioner running full blast. A glassy-eyed CSU agent hit my knees with a pair of handcuffs and threatened to “pulverize my chest.” The 5<sup>th</sup> CSU chief remarked how good-looking I was, and this had a chilling effect on me. One time, I was sure I was going to be “summarily executed” when I was taken out for a long drive while being berated for “noncooperation.” I was held incommunicado and disallowed visits by family members and friends.

But many other detainees recounted to me how they were heavily tortured and brutally beaten. This raised dire thoughts of when it would be my turn to undergo such atrocities. Later, a CSU officer told me I was not tortured because I was arrested in the company of prominent relatives and city officials. These included two uncles, former city mayor Cesar C. Climaco and Court of Appeals Justice Rafael C. Climaco, Ferdinand Marcos’ classmate at UP Law. One other detainee also escaped torture because his father was also a Marcos classmate and a top businessman. But he was handcuffed to his bed the whole day and had to shout to the guards if he needed to go to the toilet.

My detention period lasted a short three weeks since nothing could be pinned on me and pressure was exerted by my family connections for my release. But it was only a “temporary release” and I was put under “town arrest.” I had to seek permission from military authorities if I had to leave Manila. I also had to regularly report to Camp Aguinaldo and each time submit a written account of my daily activities. The first year, reporting was weekly, then every fortnight the following year, and monthly on the third year. Failure to report would result in a “re-arrest.” I was also repeatedly refused a passport. After three years, I was finally granted “permanent release” and freed from reporting to the military. But I was still denied the right to travel abroad. When a consular office opened in Zamboanga in 1983, I finally secured a passport — nine years after my arrest.

My martial law experience, of course, pales in comparison with that of other victims. In 1995, 10,000 Filipinos won a class action suit in a US court against the Marcos estate for “torture, execution, and disappearances.” Historian Alfred McCoy cites 3,257 extrajudicial killings, 35,000 torture victims, and 70,000 incarcerations. Rape and other forms of sexual abuse were rampant. In 2014-2015, the government’s Human Rights Victims Claims Board received 75,730 claims for compensation. These

are on top of the massive theft of \$10 billion of public funds by the Marcos couple and the bankrupting of the economy in the 1980s by regime technocrats that caused untold suffering in ordinary households.

Today marks the 45<sup>th</sup> year since Marcos declared martial law in 1972. Many Filipinos have either forgotten or never learned about the horrors of that dark period of our history. It is thus fitting that Peta, or the Philippine Educational Theater Association, will restage Chris Millado's 1985 musical play "Buwan at Baril" on Sept. 26-27. It depicts the Filipino people's plight and struggles during the martial law years. If only to empathize with the thousands of victims and their families, this performance should not be missed.

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\* Philippine Daily Inquirer / 05:24 AM September 21, 2017:

<https://opinion.inquirer.net/107296/detention-town-arrest-martial-law#ixzz5LkQqo8Ub>

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