

Human Face

‘Subversive Lives’

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I am sure many reviews, reflections, analyses and comments will be written about this book. It will be dissected, critiqued and deconstructed. If reading is one of your preoccupations this super hot summer, “Subversive Lives: A Family Memoir of the Marcos Years” (Anvil, 2012) should be on your list. It is, you bet, better than fiction.

A book like “Subversive Lives” comes in a rare while. Or, I should say, it is a book like no other that I have read. It is a family memoir, big on family, yes, but it is also about the lives of individuals who happen to have come from the same womb and been cradled by the same arms. But these separate lives with a common origin had an uncommon almost-common direction—the protracted communist revolution—to which they were drawn separately and for which they poured out much of the substance of their young lives. And—let me promptly add—from which they would later turn away, one by one, upon reaching the crossroads.

“Subversive Lives” is a compilation of autobiographical pieces by and about the Quimpo family mainly during—but also before and after—the martial law years under the Marcos dictatorship. The stories are packed with colorful details and drama—triumphs and tragedies, love and loss, awakenings and disillusionings.

The Quimpo siblings, 10 of them, are the story weavers. Although two brothers lost their lives during those dreadful years, they come alive through their letters and the recollections of their siblings, friends and comrades. Susan and Nathan are the main authors of “Subversive Lives,” but the book also contains pieces written by the rest of the brood. Through their stories, the essence of family stands out.

Here are the Quimpos in chronological order: Elizabeth (Lys) Q. Bulatao, Norman F. Quimpo, Emilie Mae Q. Wickett, Catherine (Caren) Q. Castaneda, Lillian F. Quimpo, Nathan Gilbert (Sonny) F. Quimpo, Ronald Jan F. Quimpo (+), David Ryan F. Quimpo, Ishmael (Jun) F. Quimpo Jr. (+), and Susan F. Quimpo.

Vicente L. Rafael, professor of history at University of Washington, said in the Foreword, “Radiant Hope, Dark Despair”: “Written as a family history, ‘Subversive Lives’ furnishes us with powerful testimonies on the era of Ferdinand Marcos and Jose Maria Sison, along with narratives on the vicissitudes of the revolutionary movement. Each Quimpo sibling bears witness to the events they and others (helped) so much to shape.

“From aborted attempts to smuggle weapons for the NPA to heady times organizing ‘spontaneous uprisings’ and general strikes in Mindanao, from the cruel discovery of the cause of one brother’s death at the hands of a kasama (comrade) to the near hallucinatory tales of imprisonment and torture at the hands of the military, these stories remind us of the personal costs and the daily heroism of those who joined the movement.

“But they also bring forth its messy and unresolved legacies; of sons alienated from their father;

daughters abused and victimized by the military and deluded by a religious cult; brothers lost to the war; friends betrayed, comrades purged, and revolutionary affection soured and then destroyed by intractable ideological differences. Such stories are much less about an unfinished revolution as they are about an inconclusive one.

“To read these accounts, each so rich and distinctive in its tone, is to hear the rhythm of the revolution.”

How this book came about is a story in itself, as recounted in the Preface. How the siblings pulled it off was indeed a feat.

I began reading the book from the end and by examining the pictures. I couldn't wait to find out what had become of the Quimpos. The last chapter, “Aftermath” has each of the eight surviving siblings reflecting on the hills and valleys of their past lives and on the present landscape where they dwell. One of them, a former Opus Dei numerary, provides an interesting finis to her own rocky journey.

“One by one, the siblings dropped out of the revolution. Those who tried to see it through, despite the CPP-NDF's continued misreading of political events in the mid-1980s, were finally forced out in bitter recrimination, in the midst of a Party split that effectively ended the revolution. In February 2009, on the island of Siquijor, the Quimpo family held a reunion. The last time the family was complete was in the late 1960s prior to Lys' leaving for the US for graduate studies.

“The Siquijor reunion brought together the surviving eight siblings, their spouses, their children and two grandchildren from four continents. For the Quimpos, the revolution was a memory that evoked mixed feelings. Each one reflected and wrote a brief account of how things unfolded in their lives, and what has remained with them of the revolution.”

Now back to the Preface: “At the Bantayog ng mga Bayani we have scrutinized the names... on the Wall of Remembrance, checking ourselves when we see familiar names and remembering what little we knew of their stories... After the failed revolution and its price in fragmented lives, here stands a Wall with the names of young heroes and martyrs who were among the best and truest of their generation...

“So we hope our family memories serve to commemorate a generation of kasama, who, out of unfettered love for the country and its people, gave all they had.”

“Subversive Lives” is more than just a page turner. The stories in the book are not mere historical vignettes, or footnotes to a revolution. They give the nationalist struggle a human face and heart—and more. Historians, social and behavioral scientists, political analysts, freedom fighters, ideologues and revolutionaries will find in the book something that would speak profoundly to them.

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P.S.

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<http://opinion.inquirer.net/27989/%E2%80%98subversive-lives%E2%80%99>