

Philippines - Leni Robredo, The Long Game

Saturday 28 May 2022, by [DALISAY Jr. Jose "Butch"](#) (Date first published: 2 May 2022).

Sol Santos [1] and his wife Doods live in Naga City (Camarines Sur, Bicol) where Jess Robredo, Leni's husband, was for a long time mayor. They published after his death in a plane crash, a collective book in his memory [2]. He suggested that I post the article below, on Leni who they knew very well, along with a poem that expresses the shock that his generation, which fought against the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos, feels at the return of his clan to power.

Pierre Rousset

NOT SO long ago, before the groundswell of popular support grew into a towering pink wave behind the presidential candidacy of Vice President Leni Robredo, it seemed like she had embarked on a quixotic quest. For a moment back there, even her running was in doubt, spurred on only by the encouragement and faith of a coalition of upright citizens seeking a way out of the darkness of the past six years.

In front of her was ranged a phalanx of formidable and even monstrous adversaries, flush with money, dizzy with power, armed with the most sophisticated weaponry on the market—data science and mass communications in the service of disinformation. The surveys declared her candidacy dead from the get-go, her campaign futile; her ceiling was this low, and she was bumping her head against it. For her enemies, it was enough to brand her a “woman” to render her incapable: “As a woman,” said the trolls, “she cannot be trusted with the responsibilities of the presidency. She is weak, and she cannot think for herself. She will always be subject to manipulation.”

It is not difficult to find parallels in history and myth for Robredo's crusade. The foremost image that comes to mind is that of an armor-clad Joan of Arc, riding off to battle against those who had turned their backs on France to support the English. There is a long, long list of women who took up the sword to fight for freedom and justice. In 1521, after her husband fell in combat, Maria Pacheco took charge of the defense of the Spanish city of Toledo in a popular uprising against the monarchy; later that century, Guaitipan or La Gaitana led Colombia's indigenous people against the invading Spanish; the 17th century is replete with accounts of women going into battle dressed as a man, so they could join the armies. And of course we cannot forget our own La Generala, Gabriela Silang, who fought the Spanish after her husband Diego was assassinated in 1763.

But many if not most of these stories end with defeat and death for the heroine, as it did for Joan of Arc and Gabriela Silang. They are immolated, hung, imprisoned, abused, punished in the most horrific ways for the temerity to rise above their lot as mothers, wives, daughters, and servants. It would seem as though the lesson after all is not to rebel or resist, or otherwise be punished.

But martyr or not, the effect has only been to inspire emulation all the more. That Joan of Arc died at

the stake at age 19 makes us, in our senior years, ask if we have achieved something even barely comparable—to live, and live on after death, as a symbol of resistance to tyranny.

If Leni wins on May 9, it will be a historic and hard-won triumph, but one that will be immediately fraught with danger, as she will now have to fend off a spiteful and tenacious many-headed hydra that will not slink into the shadows. Her enemies will hound her every day of her presidency, bark at every move she makes, make it extremely difficult for her to govern properly, so they can substantiate their portrayal of her alleged inefficacy.

If her adversary musters more votes, she will have lost a battle, but not the war this has become. Mind that just having celebrated her 57th birthday, Leni Robredo will only be 63 in 2028—younger than even Marcos Jr. is today. If she loses this election, it will not be the end, but only the start of the next stage of a protracted campaign to bring us back to good and honest governance.

Six years may seem a long time, but it doesn't feel like it was that long ago when Rodrigo R. Duterte came to power. These past six years have been among the most difficult and dismaying we have had to endure, not only because of the pandemic but also because of an equally devastating malignancy at the heart of government—leadership by fear, terror, and impunity; the patronage and enrichment of friends; the repression of dissent; and the subornation and corruption of the uniformed and civil service.

In another six years, should the Marcos forces now prevail and if they stay true to form, they will have unraveled and self-destructed. We will not be surprised, but their followers will be, when the promised manna never rains, when the Palace is ruled by incompetence, indecision, and intrigue, when No. 2 chafes at her humble station, when China attacks and the First Family rushes off to Paraguay with half the treasury (nothing is too absurd in politics today), when citizens cry out for simple answers to urgent questions and are told, "The President is busy," in a dull echo of his excuses for avoiding the debates.

But guess what—here we are; we endured, we survived, and we fight on. The ones behind us are even much younger and stronger, and more knowledgeable about the intricacies of digital and house-to-house persuasion. "Pink" is already being demonized as some mutation of the Reds and Yellows, but it will not fade away. Unless they are outlawed, or painted over by the newly reconstituted Kabataang Barangay, the "Kulay Rosas ang Bukas" murals will stay on as reminders of what could have been and could yet be. There may not be an EDSA IV—having once lost to peaceful protest, they will not hesitate to arrest and fire at the slightest signs of a new uprising—but the Internet will not be muted, nor will the mounting clamor of the disappointed poor.

The Marcos forces have waited almost forty years for this moment. What would six more years be to a resurgent opposition? We can play the long game.

And then again, we Filipinos just might surprise ourselves next Monday, and decide that the opportunity for change, for a real "moving on," is not to be delayed but to be claimed at once. That will be sweet victory for the woman they made the mistake of calling "incapable."

Jose Dalisay Jr., aka Butch Dalisay

• "Hindsight No. 16: The Long Game", Hindsight No. 16: The Long Game

Posted on May 2, 2022. Pinoy Penman 3.0:

<https://penmanila.ph/2022/05/02/hindsight-no-16-the-long-game/>

“PITY THE NATION”

“Pity the Nation” A Poem for our Time by Lawrence Ferlinghetti

*Pity the nation whose people are sheep
And whose shepherds mislead them*

Pity the nation whose leaders are liars
Whose sages are silenced
And whose bigots haunt the airwaves

Pity the nation that raises not its voice
Except to praise conquerors
And acclaim the bully as hero
And aims to rule the world
By force and by torture

Pity the nation that knows
No other language but its own
And no other culture but its own

Pity the nation whose breath is money
And sleeps the sleep of the too well fed

Pity the nation oh pity the people
who allow their rights to erode
and their freedoms to be washed away

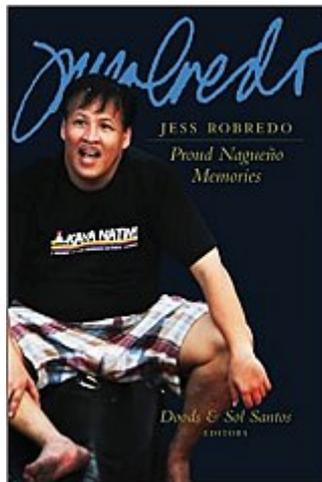
My country, tears of thee
Sweet land of liberty!

copyright Lawrence Ferlinghetti

The poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti has long been a favorite of mine. He turned 101 back in March. Here is a poem for our time.

Richardl Floyd, November 22, 2020

- <https://richardlfloyd.com/2020/11/22/pity-the-nation-a-poem-for-our-time-by-lawrence-ferlinghetti/>
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Footnotes

[1] His articles on ESSF:

http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?page=auteur&id_auteur=194

[2] Jess Robredo. Proud Nagueño Memories, Anvil Publishing, Inc. (January 1, 2013)