

The Marcoses vs. The Women

By Alex Amansec

After a regime controlled by an oligarchy and rife with human rights violations, here we are again at the electoral crossroads. At the polls, only two recognizable kinds of people come out on top: a Marcos and a woman.

In a broadcast during the 1986 snap elections, President Ferdinand E. Marcos used gender as an issue against his rival for presidency, warning that “a woman would not be able to handle the challenges of the post.”¹ A few months ago, in urging his daughter not to run for the top post, President Rodrigo Duterte declared that, because of the difference in emotional setup between a man and a woman, this job “is not for women.”²

But who is a woman to the electorate?

The women have names: Corazon “Cory” Aquino and Maria Leonor “Leni” Robredo. On the shallow surface, we could initially compare the both of them with an easy and unmistakable analogy. The parallel of both being women; of both having a credibility that has been tested by men because of their womanhood³; of how neither one ever had plans of becoming the president⁴; and of them being widows, propelled into the political arena because of the deaths of their husbands, Ninoy Aquino and Jesse Robredo⁵. It’s an easy fun fact to circulate. But Filipinos, from what I’ve seen in online circles, have been diligent enough to know that Leni is not a Cory.

Their educational backgrounds have enough to spell about what makes them different. Aquino began her education in a private school in the Philippines before graduating college in the United States. She returned to the Philippines to study law at the Far Eastern University, but she soon left to raise a family.⁶ Robredo’s education was set entirely in the Philippines, graduating elementary and high school from Unibersidad de Sta. Isabel, and earning an undergraduate degree in Economics from the University of the Philippines - Diliman. She pursued law in the University of Nueva Caceres, and passed the bar in 1997.⁷

¹ Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines. “The Fall of the Dictatorship | GOVPH.” Accessed May 10, 2022. <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/featured/the-fall-of-the-dictatorship/>.

² “Robredo Hits Sexist Duterte Jab vs Female Presidents,” January 17, 2021. <https://www.rappler.com/nation/robredo-reaction-duterte-sexist-remarks-woman-as-president/>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Inquirer Research, Philippine Daily Inquirer. “PROFILE: Who Is Leni Robredo? | Inquirer News.” Inquirer, June 29, 2016. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/793139/profile-leni-robredo>; Alexander, Kerri Lee. “Corazon Aquino.” National Women’s History Museum. 2019. www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/corazon-aquino.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Alexander, “Corazon Aquino.”

⁷ Office of the Vice President. “Biography - Office of the Vice President of the Republic of the Philippines.” Accessed May 10, 2022. <https://staging.ovp.gov.ph/content/biography>.

They were considered “reluctant” politicians early on, but the timeframe of their careers is an important context: from being a housewife who symbolically coalesced the opposition against Marcos through the People Power Revolution, Aquino’s reluctance was in taking oath as the next president of the country.⁸ Robredo’s reluctance was in representing her late husband’s old constituency in the 2013 congressional elections, the third district of Camarines Sur, which she eventually won.⁹ It’s also worth noting that, unlike Aquino, Robredo has been active in the legal sphere for more than a decade before becoming a congresswoman, and has since built her experience in politics after being elected as vice president of the Philippines in 2016.¹⁰

It was also then that Robredo had narrowly defeated Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in the vice-presidential race. And tomorrow, Robredo, as a present-day symbol of democracy and honesty, will be, once again, going head-to-head with the same man at every precinct nationwide.

The comparison between Aquino and Robredo may be a political sin to objectively brandish. But we cannot set aside the similar spark of hope that both these women have presented to the Filipino people at the crossroads: the snap election of 1986, and the presidential election of 2022. We are, undeniably, where history repeats itself: under the masks of different colors and different names, we are rallying the same streets, we are raising the same hand signs. Thirty-six years apart, but we still find ourselves wanting the same kind of freedom from the same criminal oligarchy, the unchanging history haunting our people from a common past. We keep saying *never forget*, but it will take a wise electorate to truly mean that on the ballots. We keep saying *never again*, but it will take a brave electorate to truly mean that on the streets.

Leni is not a Cory, and Cory is not a Leni. But, in these extraordinary times, they are both answers to the longing for hope of the Filipino people.

Note: This piece was written on May 8, 2022, a few hours prior to the 2022 Philippine presidential elections.

⁸ Editors, Biography.com. “Corazon Aquino.” Biography, April 2, 2014. <https://www.biography.com/political-figure/corazon-aquino>.

⁹ Inquirer Research, “PROFILE: Who is Leni Robredo?”

¹⁰ Office of the Vice President, “Biography.”

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