

**HUMOROUS COMIC ART AS CRITIQUE OF THE
MARCOS DICTATORSHIP: AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED SERIES
OF PILIPINO FUNNY KOMIKS FOR CHILDREN
AFTER THE FIRST EDSA REVOLUTION**

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Abstract.

Pilipino Funny Komiks for Children, popularly known in the Philippines as *Funny Komiks*, is the oldest Filipino-made comics magazine for children. From its first issue in 1978, during the authoritarian regime of President Ferdinand E. Marcos, it featured humorous stories that aligned with industry-imposed censorship in the Philippines. However, after Marcos was deposed from his position due to the First EDSA People Power Revolution in 1986, this created an opportunity for comic contributors to express their views without any restrictions from the government. This led to the publication of stories that criticized the former Marcos regime. Using selected *Funny Komiks* series as primary sources, this research highlights how the use of humor acts as a form of critique of an oppressive regime when comic artists no longer had to fear any possible consequences. Furthermore, this study also assesses the changes and repercussions that occurred in the Philippine comic magazine industry when Marcos was ousted.

Keywords: komiks, comics magazines, martial law, Marcos dictatorship, EDSA Revolution

INTRODUCTION

Comics magazines have been considered a primary form of entertainment for Filipinos from the end of the Second World War until the 1990s, when their readership began to decline (de Nobili et al., 2021, pp. 23-39). As a matter of fact, during the peak of the implementation of Martial Law by President Ferdinand E. Marcos, when the dissemination and circulation of information and entertainment were restricted through stringent control of mass media in 1979, *Expressweek Magazine* (1979) estimated that one out of three Filipinos was a regular reader of the medium. Locally known in the Philippines as *komiks*, each issue of this entertainment medium contained an anthology of stories with illustrations, published weekly or biweekly, that captured the interest of Filipinos. Renowned scholars of comics magazines in the Philippines have remarked on the scarcity of studies that utilize the medium as a primary source. For instance, Lent (1998) has pondered that comic art is an example of a media form that has not received much attention in Philippine scholarship (pp. 236-248). But, despite its status in the academe, the graphic medium was once known as a main form of entertainment for the Filipinos. Some scholars, such as del Mundo and Magpayo (1986), have even labeled it as the *national book* of the Filipino masses.

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One of the most popular *komiks* was *Pilipino Funny Komiks for Children*, also known as *Funny Komiks*. First published by *Islas Filipinas Publishing Co., Inc.* on June 26, 1978, it became the oldest and longest-running Filipino-made *komiks* for children (Dayo, 2015). Favorably received by its readers due to its humorous stories and colorful images, *Funny Komiks* catered to the preferences of Filipino children. From its inception until its last issue in 2007, *Funny Komiks* witnessed the societal events that affected not only its readers but also the comics magazine industry.

This signifies that *Funny Komiks* can be utilized as a primary source for study to analyze important events in the Philippines and their impact on society. From the height of the Marcos dictatorship in the 1970s until its demise due to the EDSA People Power Revolution in 1986, these events were felt not only by Filipino readers but also by the reading material. However, as stated above, existing studies regarding Philippine cultural studies scarcely used *komiks* as a primary source. This means that while *Pilipino Funny Komiks* is considered the longest-running and one of the most popular *komiks* titles, it has been rarely used as a primary source in uncovering information about the past, specifically the changes after the Marcos dictatorship.

To resolve this, this study employed a selected series of *Funny Komiks* as primary sources in order to examine how humor was used to criticize the Marcos dictatorship shortly after its fall in 1986. In addition, this paper discussed how the reading material was reflective of the events that unfolded during that period. Specifically, the researchers aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What factors influenced the creation of *Funny Komiks* during the self-censorship of the industry during the Marcos dictatorship?
2. What were the changes that occurred after the EDSA People Power Revolution that were reflected through *Funny Komiks*?
3. How was humor used in *Pilipino Funny Komiks* to criticize the Marcos dictatorship after the events of the EDSA People Power Revolution?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Using specific series found in *Pilipino Funny Komiks for Children*, a comic magazine known for its humorous contents, this study looked into the transformations and consequences that occurred in the *komiks* industry when Marcos was ousted in 1986 after the EDSA People Power Revolution. As a result, the writers gathered significant secondary sources that are related to the effects of the censorship imposed by the authoritarian regime of Marcos on mass media and the use of humor as a form of criticism.

2.1 Marcos Dictatorship and Media Censorship

One of the most explored topics in the Philippines academia is the censorship under the Marcos dictatorship and its effects on mass media and freedom of expression. One example is a journal article written by San Juan (1978) that focuses on media censorship that Marcos imposed and the measures, actions, and exploits that heavily restricted media during his regime. In addition, Ubaldo (2022) wrote an article concerning the censorship in the film industry during the dictatorship of Marcos. Marcos' affinity for cinema paved the way for the state to implement not only initiatives but also censorship in the cinema industry.

Based on the existing studies about media censorship during the Marcos dictatorship, there has been no study that solely focuses on censorship in comics magazines. While the researchers recognized that this paper concentrated on the effects of the demise of the Marcos dictatorship on the comics magazine industry, it also addressed the gap in research on this topic as this research also highlighted the impact of censorship in comics magazines during the Marcos era.

2.2 Use of Humor as a Form of Criticism

A professor pointed out that Filipinos, who are renowned for their unwavering optimism despite various barriers and difficulties they face in their life, may use comedy and wit to criticize those in power and to discuss societal problems that affect them. As stated by Nuncio (2002), humor is important to Filipinos as it serves as a mechanism for them not only for therapeutic relief but also for social commentary (pp. 65-77).

The proposed idea by Dr. Nuncio led to the publication of different studies that investigated the correlation between the use of humor and criticisms against those in power. An example is a journal article written by Concha and Autor (2021) about the use of short films as a way to tackle social issues in a comical and parodic way. Their study focuses on the use of ranting with humor in the short films produced by *VinCentiments* as a means to express or point out concerns and shortcomings in different social systems. Through the lens of ordinary citizens, topics expressed through inner monologues reflected various realities that these characters faced while using humor to cope with the situation. While there were other studies that had analyzed humor as criticism in various forms of media, there had been a scarcity of studies that utilized *komiks* as a primary source for such topics. Due to this, this study deepens the information needed to analyze humorous *komiks*.

METHOD

3.1 Research Design

Komiks can be used as a primary source for understanding realities by uncovering hidden meanings in their stories and subjects. According to Santiago (2024), the stories contained in *komiks* are merely fictional, but the stories and their characters are inspired by the events of reality. This means that there can be underlying messages in these works that are relevant during the creation of said *komiks* and are connected to sociopolitical situations.

In order to understand the hidden messages in *Pilipino Funny Komiks*, the researchers utilized hermeneutics as the primary research design. To continue, the interpretation of works through the lens of hermeneutics requires knowing the sociopolitical climate that made its inception, as this approach suggests that art is a reflection of the values, struggles, and ideologies of its time. As discussed by Gardiner (1999), “the hermeneutic approach stresses the creative interpretation of words and texts and the active role played by the knower. The goal is not objective explanation or neutral description, but rather a sympathetic engagement with the author of a text, utterance or action and the wider socio-cultural context within which these phenomena occur” (p.63).

3.2 Research Participants

While this paper utilized *Pilipino Funny Komiks* as a primary source, the researchers also conducted interviews in order to supplement missing information and gain clarification. Accordingly, the

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researchers interviewed people who were directly involved with the comics magazine industry during the periodization of the study. For this paper, interviews with two people were incorporated: Leopoldo Dayo and Roni Santiago. Both Dayo and Santiago worked as *komiks* illustrators in *Funny Komiks* during and after the Marcos' dictatorship.

3.3 Instruments

For this study, the researchers utilized a selected series of *Funny Komiks* published in 1986 as primary sources, namely *Planet op di Eyys* by Roni Santiago, *Niknok: Dilaw* by Pat V. Reyes and Vic Geronimo, and *Bing, Bam, Bung: Flower Power* by National Artist for Visual Arts Lauro Alcala. In addition, interviews were conducted to satisfy the missing information from the primary and secondary sources that had been collected. In historical studies, interviews are called oral history. Oral history is a qualitative research design that involves gathering information by means of interviews (Foronda, 1991, pp. 25-28). With the said approach, the researchers compensated for the inadequacy of data by directly obtaining the information as the interviewee recalls his or her experiences and prior knowledge about the subject matter. In conducting oral history, questionnaires were given in advance to the research participants so they could prepare for the interview. While pre-determined questions were given through the questionnaire, additional questions were asked to the interviewees for the enrichment of information that could not be gathered through the prepared questions, making the interview semi-structured.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

In order to understand how humor was used to criticize the Marcos dictatorship after the EDSA People Power Revolution, a select series of *Funny Komiks* were obtained from Alfonso Lagrisola, a *komiks* collector. In considering the comic strips that were featured in this study, the researchers chose the aforementioned series of *Funny Komiks* as the main themes of said works depict the Marcos dictatorship both explicitly and implicitly.

In conducting oral history, the aforementioned interviewees were invited formally through letters sent electronically. When the interviewees agreed to participate as resource persons, the participants were given a questionnaire a few days before the interview. Before the interview started, informed consent forms were handed to the participants to ensure that they were informed about the topic, and were willing to participate, as well as consent to the dissemination of their statements through the paper and other research studies as primary sources. During the actual interviews, the proceedings were recorded through audio and video devices. Afterward, the recorded interviews were transcribed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Censorship During the Marcos Dictatorship and the Creation of *Funny Komiks*

For an authoritarian figure, one of its priorities is the control and suppression of mass media to prevent the dissemination and circulation of information critical to the government. When President Ferdinand E. Marcos declared Martial Law in 1972, he ordered the control, seizure, and/or closure of private media (Marcos, 1972). Furthermore, due to the heavily restricted media, he took advantage of it by monopolizing it due to the liquidation of his competitors, created his own media network, and created councils that supervised the media. In response, and to avoid stricter government-imposed censorship, publishers and editors of *komiks* established the *Kapisanan ng mga Publisista at Patnugot*

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ng mga Komiks-Magasin sa Pilipino or KPPKP, which formulated a self-censorship code aimed to support Marcos in enhancing his image and to prevent the publication of series and titles disfavored by government. As a matter of fact, the first five general guidelines of the self-censorship code emphasize the prohibition of tarnishing the image of Marcos and the country, highlighting the priority of the association of *komiks* contributors to make the reading material compliant with the government (Marcelino, 1977).

Pilipino Funny Komiks for Children can be considered as one of the examples of the *komiks* titles created during the Marcos dictatorship period that featured themes that are aligned with the desires of the president. According to Dayo (2015), with its content aimed at entertaining the young population, it contained themes and stories that featured animals, robots, and ordinary people in humorous situations that were considered safe and consistent with the rules and regulations under the Marcos government. If not humorous, a series would revolve around a superhero as a reflection of the battle between good and evil or a story with moral lessons.

Due to the dissatisfaction of the Filipino people over corruption issues and human rights abuses during the dictatorship of President Marcos, a nonviolent uprising called the EDSA People Power Revolution occurred (Human Rights Foundation, 2024). Because of the revolution, Marcos was toppled in power and democracy was restored under the presidency of President Corazon Aquino. After the revolution, mass media outlets regained their freedom and censorship was reduced. This event provided an opportunity for the *komiks* contributors to express their views through their works without fear of possible consequences (Dayo, 2015). According to Santiago (2024), during the Marcos era, the stories in *Funny Komiks* featured stories that were considered safe and compliant with the rules and regulations of the government. After the EDSA People Power revolution, comics contributors could now feature narratives that are not only comedic but also expose the realities of the people and societal issues when democracy was revived.

4.2 Humor as a Form of Criticism against the Marcos Dictatorship after the EDSA People Power in 1986

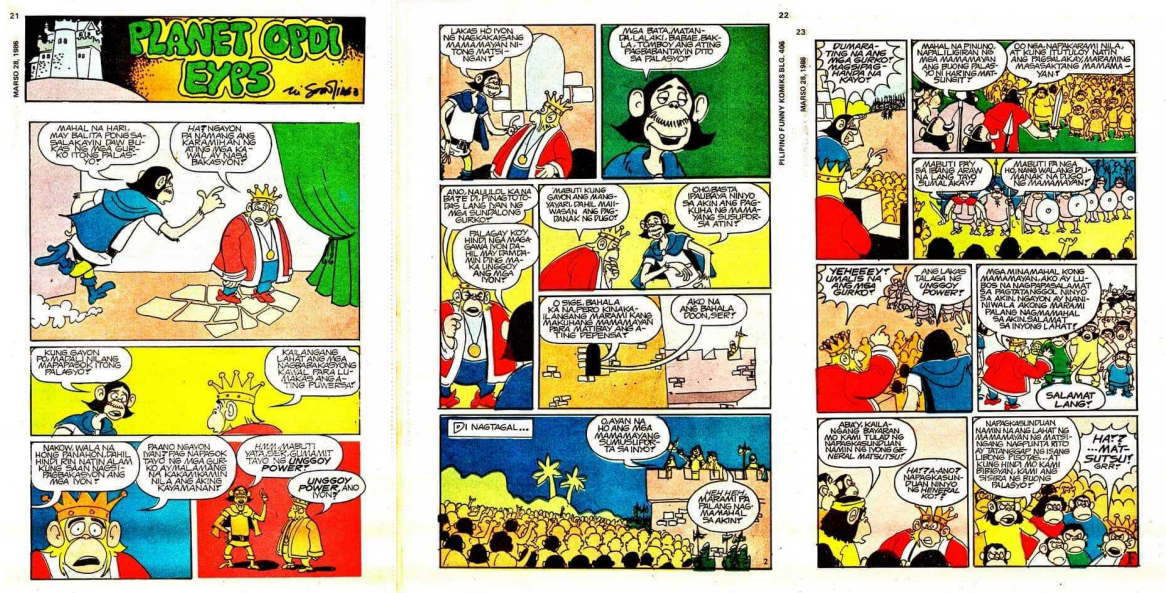
Due to the EDSA People Power Revolution, the Marcos administration was overthrown. In effect, censorship was lifted as the comics magazine industry did not need to comply with the expectations of the previous regime (Dayo, 2015). Consequently, the writers and illustrators immediately gained the freedom to express their criticisms by means of humorous content in comics. As the name suggests, *Funny Komiks* is evidently humorous. Therefore, it was inevitable that the publication depicted actual events, such as the EDSA People Power Revolution and the criticisms of the people against Marcos through comedic means.

As an example of comedic material featured in *Funny Komiks*, Santiago (2024) shared that he has depicted the EDSA People Power Revolution and the Marcos regime in a comedic manner in a series named *Planet op di Eyps*. One of the issues called *Unggoy Power*, loosely translated as *Monkey Power*, was published through the *Funny Komiks* publication on March 28, 1986, a month after the EDSA People Power Revolution. The characters presented here are *King Matsungit*, the main character of this *komiks* strip and king of the monkeys, *Matsutsu*, the general of the king and the one who proposed the idea of *Monkey Power*, the citizens that protected the palace, and the plunderers that wanted to invade the palace. The story started when General Matsutsu brought urgent news to the king and he said that the plunderers will invade the palace tomorrow, but most of the palace guards are on vacation. Then

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proposed *Monkey Power*, which means the unified power of the monkey citizens and utilizes that power to defend the palace from plunderers. The next day, the citizens arrived in front of the palace to defend it, and then the plunderers arrived, but they left the premises because of the sheer amount of people present (Santiago, 1986a, pp. 21-23).

According to Santiago (2024), real-life events may serve as sources of inspiration for creating the topics featured in *Planet op di Eyps*. The particular strip featured in <Figure 1> was related to the EDSA People Power Revolution due to the similarities shown in the *komiks*, like the concept of *Monkey Power*, which was the collective protest of the monkeys. During the EDSA People Power Revolution, a massive crowd of people protested in the middle of *Epifano de los Santos Avenue*, and due to the unity of the people, they were able to topple President Ferdinand Marcos. It is very akin to the *komiks* when the citizens were able to make the plunderers leave. This criticizes Marcos because this *komiks* symbolizes the events that happened during the EDSA People Power Revolution, in which the people forced him to leave and go to the United States like the monkey citizens were able to make the plunderers leave the premises. The depiction of Marcos in the *komiks* is of the plunderers because during the EDSA People Power Revolution, Marcos left the Philippines due to the massive crowd in the protest and has gone to the United States, very similar to plunderers that left due to a massive crowd.



<Figure 1> The entire issue of *Ungoy Power (Monkey Power)* of *Planet op di Eyps* series by Roni Santiago
Source: *Pilipino Funny Komiks for Children*, Issue #406, from the collection of Alfonso Lagrisona

Similar to the previous *komiks* strip, another series of the same publication named *Bing Bam Bung*, written and illustrated by National Artist Lauro Alcala, depicted the participation of the Filipino people during the EDSA People Power Revolution. The characters featured were involved in a love triangle between a couple and a mischievous third-wheeler. The male protagonist, *Bing*, is an intelligent and crafty man who does anything to rescue *Bing*, his significant other. Finally, the infamous antagonist, *Bung*, employed a variety of tactics and gadgets to separate the two lovers apart. In the issue of the series named *Flower Power*, *Bung* used a plethora of flowers to divide the couple and take *Bam* all for himself. His schemes started successfully but immediately faltered due to the use of *Kids Power*, the

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sheer amount of children that effectively caused *Bung* to drive away, which depicts how former president Ferdinand Marcos was ousted from his position through the uprising.

Relating *Kids Power* to the peaceful uprising, this issue was about the EDSA People Power Revolution, the utter goal of which was to overthrow the oppressive rule of the Marcos regime with the use of a massive crowd to revolt peacefully against the government. In addition, it highlighted the initiatives and protests done by Filipinos to oust President Marcos in the final acts of the nonviolent uprising, which resulted in the dictator fleeing from the country. This comic strip, featured in <Figure 2>, even stated that the People Power was an event that overthrew the oppressor, President Ferdinand Marcos (Alcala, 1986, pp. 26-29).



<Figure 2> A page of the *Flower Power* issue of *Bing, Bam, Bung* series by Lauro Alcala
Source: *Pilipino Funny Komiks for Children*, Issue #408, from the collection of Alfonso Lagrisola

Furthermore, another untitled issue of the *Planet op di Eyps* was published on May 2, 1986. In addition to the previously established characters (i.e., *King Matsungit* and *Matsutsu*), new ones were added and named as *King Mao* and *Queen Tseng*, which featured the characteristics of the deposed first couple, President Ferdinand Marcos and his wife Imelda Marcos. The story began when *King Mao* and *Queen Tseng* visited *King Matsungit*'s kingdom to find a place to reside, as the couple had been exiled by the people from their hometown. After the visitors resided in the kingdom, eventually, they stole the *King Matsungit*'s treasure and left the place (Santiago, 1986b, pp. 21-23).

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have personally experienced from the government. But, the overwhelming negativity towards the central vices and corruption of the government led the majority of people to instead side with the Aquino administration and frown upon the loyalists.

The story criticizes Marcos by showing disdain for his loyalists through the discourse of *Niknok*'s family. They are very critical of the actions of the former president's supporters, arguing that helpful factors like tourism and potential foreign investments would be negatively affected by these groups, which could lead to instability in the country. They also note that many people only want chaos in their lives, further contributing to their perspective against the loyalists. Marcos had been depicted in a negative light. Most of the characters present in the strip had shown dissatisfaction with the previous government through their criticisms of the loyalists. The perspectives of the characters show that the loyalists are considered bad in this rebuilding society. Since this is the sentiment that the public has about these supporters, this would also extend to Marcos himself. He is considered destructive by many in the country. As a result, most people would not want Marcos to be the leader of the country. This led to immense discouragement in siding with the Marcoses due to the horrible events that transpired during the dictatorship. Any person who sides with the infamous family would be met with criticism and frowned upon.



<Figure 4> The first page of the *Dilaw* (Yellow) issue of the *Niknok* series by Pat V. Reyes and Vic Geronimo
Source: *Pilipino Funny Komiks for Children*, Issue #423, from the collection of Alfonso Lagrisola

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CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while *Funny Komiks* was known for its contents aimed brought entertainment and learning to children, it enabled criticisms against the Marcos regime through the use of humor after the EDSA People Power Revolution. During the Marcos dictatorship, *komiks* writers and illustrators were initially mandated to create safe pieces of work to prevent suppression by the government. As the reign of terror ended, criticisms sprawled in different issues of the publication, which reflected the liberation experienced by Filipino society after the nonviolent uprising. Thus, the peaceful revolution became the main catalyst for the creation of these critical pieces, thus brewing immense creative freedom to its writers and illustrators. While the paper focused on the utilization of *Funny Komiks* as a primary source in analyzing the changes in the comics magazine industry after the Marcos dictatorship, the reading material can also be used to study the significant parts of Philippine history that affected not only the entertainment medium but also the society. For example, since *Funny Komiks* circulated until the late 2000s, it can be used to discuss the decline and demise of the traditional comic magazine industry.

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