A Comparative Analysis Of The Poems: Desaparecido And I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings

This essay will discuss the juxtaposition of the poems written by H. Francisco V. Peñones Jr. and Maya Angelou entitled Desaparecidos and I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings respectively. The use of figurative languages, symbolisms presented, themes, message pertaining to social issues and allusion to history by the poems will be highlighted and individually discussed.

These two poems speak heavily about their respective authors making it important to discuss the background of the poems and the authors. Inspired by the events during the Martial Law era under Ferdinand Marcos, H. Francisco Peñones Jr. started writing poetry in high school as a sign of protest against the suppression of campus press freedom by the Marcos dictatorship. Desaparecidos which is one of the poems included in his book Cancion ng mga Tawong–Lipod: Song of the Unseen published in 2014, is an evidence of how Martial Law influenced his writings. On the other hand, Maya Angelou having been a witness and victim of the racial discrimination against black people was motivated to write I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings in 1969 as a way of protesting and bringing into light the oppressive acts of westerners have committed against her people. Aside from apartheid, black people also greatly suffered from slavery which the poem effectively emphasizes. It is evident that this poem holds great significance to the author since one of her autobiography books is also entitled I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings.

The two poems were both able to showcase oppression although each tackled it in different forms. While Maya Angelou's poem is a protest against oppression against black people, H. Francisco V. Peñones Jr.'s poem talked about oppression of the Filipinos under the Marcos regime in which "desaparecidos" was the term used to refer to those people who were secretly imprisoned or killed during Marcos's dictatorial government. In the poems, the personas paint a clear imagery of the events that they are describing. For instance, lines from Desaparecidos like "You're a big scrawl on a wall, a mosquito droning in their sleep" give the readers an idea of the importance of the persona being referred to by the narrator in the poem. Furthermore, his poem utilizes the beauty of brevity in such a way that he is able to convey much expression despite the length of the poem and the last stanza was able to substantiate the theme of the entire poem. Maya Angelou takes it on higher level as she describes the personas actions in her poem such as "The free bird leaps on the back of the wind and floats downstream…the caged bird sings with fearful trill of the things unknown". These lines allow the readers to imagine how the events unfold in the poem and to juxtapose the lives of the free bird and the caged bird which also gives a better way of understanding the message behind the poem. Compared to Desaparecidos, the poem is quite lengthy as the author constantly shift from creating a picture of the free bird and the caged bird while at the same time providing emphasis on the caged bird by the use of repetition in stanzas 3 and .

For both the poems, the setting has not been specifically identified, but it can be inferred that Peñones's poem takes place during the Martial Law era given his background as well as the title of the poem. At the same time, Maya Angelou's poem places the persona in a cage although the exact time of the events has not been specified. The relation of the two poem's settings is that it takes the personas in specific parts in history in which both showcase the main

theme of the poems.

H. Francisco V. Peñones Jr. and Maya Angelou did an exemplary work in the use of figurative languages specifically symbolisms and metaphors. The two poems showcase the extensive use of metaphors to convey the theme and message and create a story that will pique the readers' interest and encourage them to delve deeper into the poem. The use of metaphors and symbolisms such as "…a mosquito droning in their sleep" and "a big scrawl on a wall" from Desaparecidos give readers a better understanding and explanation of the meaning behind the poem. In addition, it also made use of rhetorical questions which allows the poem to connect more with its readers because it is as if the author is talking directly to the readers through the questions. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, however, utilizes alliteration, personification, metaphors and symbolism throughout the poem. Symbolism is shown in this poem when she made the persona of the caged bird as a representation of the black community and the racial discrimination and slavery they have experienced and this is also how personification is used by referring to the caged as "he/his". Alliteration is present in several lines of the poem such as "seldom see through", "worms waiting", and "shadows shouts" (Literary Devices, 2019)

Both poems are suggestive of the theme revolving around the suppression of human rights and freedom. Applying the sociological approach, the poems both depict societal issues in relation to people of power. In Desaparecidos, the persona is painted as the victimthe one who has experienced the wrath of the unidentified oppressor. Although the oppressor has not been directly named, Francisco Peñones's background pave for the conclusion that it was meant as a protest against Marcos's government. The poem gives a picture of the human right abuses that the Marcos administration had committed by the use of words that suggest that their freedom of speech has been violated. Meanwhile, Maya Angelou's poem gives a glimpse of the state of the society she grew up and lived in which slavery and discrimination against black people were prevalent and rampant. Her poem shows that the people of power as represented by the free bird are able to exercise their human rights and even more while her people are in despair. Both poems show how society has an oppressive relationship with the personas because their demise was brought about by society in the form of a dictatorial government and xenophobic Westerners. Furthermore, the societies that the personas exist in are the hindrances to the personas freedom in which in the case of Desaparecidos, freedom of speech is suppressed while in I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings talks about the suppression of the personas right to live a free life.

Using Marxist criticism, both poems tackle discrimination. The work of H. Francisco V. Peñones Jr. demonstrates classism or discrimination between the privileged and the underprivileged while Maya Angelou's work is about racism wherein people of color seems to be restrained from enjoying their lives. In Desaparecidos, the persona talks about the situation of the oppressed, how frustrating it is that after the difficulty in convincing their fellow citizens to help each other, the government uses a brutal way to silence those who took courage in speaking up about the reality of the Philippines during the Marcos regime. It discloses the late Ferdinand Marcos's abuse of power during his presidency in the Philippines. Those who try to expose him for it disappeared and presumed to be murdered by the police or members of armed services controlled by the government. On the other hand, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings reveals the sorrowful plight of the Black people back then. They were looked down upon by other races and thought of them as lesser beings. The Black folk were repressed from acting on their own will and going to places that they want to be in before the Civil Rights Movement whereas the White people are enjoying their right to be free as a human being. Furthermore, in an article entitled

Slavery in America (2009), the people of color were victims of slavery throughout the 17th and 18th centuries by the white Americans.

Although the two poems showcase important issues and morals, Desaparecidos is more timely relevant especially in the Philippines today because of the current administration of President Rodrigo Duterte. His administration is somewhat similar to that of ex-President Marcos due to the presence of red-tagging, extrajudicial killings, media shutdown and implementation of martial law. During the time of Marcos's presidency, the leadership style is definitely authoritarianism whilst Duterte's political system is gearing towards it.

Red tagging, as defined by the Supreme Court Associate Justice Marvic Leonen, is "the act of labelling, branding, naming and accusing individuals and/ or organizations of being left-leaning, subversives, communists or terrorists (and is used as) a strategy… by State agents, particularly law enforcement agencies and the military, against those perceived to be 'threats' or 'enemies of the State'. (as cited in Tadem, 2020)". Known young activists who are leading the anti-dictatorship movement during the dark part of Philippine history like Liliosa Hilao, Archimedes Trajano, Edgar Jopson, Juan Escandor, Emmanuel Lacaba, Ishmael Quimpo Jr., Maria Lorena Barros, and many more were killed just to silence them (Francisco, 2017). Threatening and harassing are examples of the government's sinister ways to scare and prevent other people from doing the same. Ibon Foundation did a fact-checking on the data of Duterte Legacy campaign whilst Communications Undersecretary Lorraine Badoy did his own however Badoy accused Ibon Foundation as a member of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) which is their way to attack independent groups whose aim is reveal the truth about the situation of the country and inform the public of the issues that matter the most (Gavilan, 2020). According to the report of Rappler, almost 2,370 people, who can be identified as human rights defenders and activists, have been charged by the government as disclosed by the rights group Karapatan (Gavilan, 2020).

Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP) monitored the number of victims of human rights violation in the Philippines from 1972 to 1986 during Ferdinand Marcos's presidency (as cited in ABS-CBN Investigative & Research Group, 2018). There has been 1,217 cases of salvaging, 5,040 arrests or detentions, 892 massacres, 424 cases of divestment of property, 352 disappearances, 165 victims of physical assault, 159 cases of frustrated massacre, 130 cases of destruction of property, 402 victims of harassment, 13 victims of forced surrender, 93 cases of violent dispersal, 90 evacuations, 73 cases of frustrated salvaging, 17 cases of hamletting, three deaths in evacuation, three demolitions, and one victim of other forms of human right violation (as cited in ABS-CBN Investigative & Research Group, 2018). While in Rodrigo Duterte's bloody campaign against illegal drug abuse, it was cited in the report of Roth (2019) that the lives of 4,948 suspected drug users and dealers were cut short from 2016 to 2018 as reported by the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA). This does not include the death of others caused by unidentified gunmen (Roth, 2019). Vigilantes are suspected to be working together with the police (Roth, 2019). Duterte admitted that he is connected to these extrajudicial killings when he told the public that it was his only sin that he is guilty of (Ranada, 2018). However, he is known of his contradicting statements like when he promised to promote cops who execute criminals and then announces the punishment for abusive policemen (Ranada, 2018). His murderous "war on drugs" has been criticized not only nationally but also internationally (Roth, 2019).

In the article Breaking the News: Silencing the Media Under Martial Law (n.d.), media blackout

and media takeover occurred during Marcos regime wherein some mainstream media outlets like ABS-CBN network and Channel 5 and radio stations were accused of being involved in activities against the government or with the Communist movement. Based on an article by Martial Law Museum, Primitivo Mijares, who served as Chairman of the Media Advisory Council confessed in a 24-page memo to the US House International Organizations subcommittee how he helped in filtering the information that the people had access to in order to hide the ugly truth of the Philippines before ("Breaking the", n.d.). On the other hand, current President Rodrigo Duterte has resentments against ABS-CBN network ever since they allegedly did not air his political advertisements after he paid them ?2.8 million pesos and announced to the public that he will not approve the renewal of their network due to the clips shown by the network of President cursing, rape remarks, etc. (Abad, 2020). However, government departments have not yet reported any violations of ABS-CBN that would lead to disapproval of their franchise renewal. Moreover, ABS-CBN CEO Carlo Katigbak clarified that they have shown most of his advertisements except for his local ads (Abad, 2020). If Duterte do not sign the renewal, then, it would seem that he is definitely not a fair and a more likely controlling leader just like Marcos.

Martial Law is defined as "temporary rule by military authorities of a designated area in time of emergency when the civil authorities are deemed unable to function" by Encyclopaedia Britannica. Marcos declared Martial Law in 1972 as an approach to combat Communist movement and because of the supposed ambush of Juan Ponce Enrile (Francisco, 2016). Contradictorily, the ambush is said to be staged to justify the implementation of Martial Law as cited by the Official Gazette (2019). It was his way to have the entire power of the government and to abolish the possibility of rebellion. Meanwhile, in 2017, Rodrigo Duterte deemed Martial Law to be necessary in eliminating the ISIS propaganda in the southern part of the Philippines (Diola, 2017). Although his reason for declaring Martial Law is for the safety of the Filipinos, he has mentioned it numerous times even before this terrorism in order to eliminate the use of illegal drugs as well as the existence of widespread crimes in the country (Diola, 2017).

The importance of respect towards people of any color, size and shape should not be disregarded. Nonetheless, almost all of the people nowadays have grown to develop acceptance and respect for people whose appearance is different from them. This is not only applicable to the Philippines but to other countries across the globe as well. Successfully, people of color are treated with equal rights as other races.

Desaparecidos by H. Francisco V. Peñones Jr. and I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou used literary devices to enhance and captivate the reader's attention to what they are saying. It brings depth and become more alluring to people. Howbeit, Angelou's work applied more figurative language than Peñones's work. On the contrary, in terms of relevance, Desaparecidos is more appropriate for Filipinos to read so that they would be reminded of our history and be prepared whatever happens in the Philippines. Both poems are recommendable to everyone most especially to those without enough knowledge about the pressing issues these two poems discuss. It is to make naive people feel connected and become more understanding to those who were discriminated by grasping what they had felt and experienced. Black people have already owned their freedom which is why Desaparecidos is considered to be the better poem than I Know Why the Caged Bird Sing. The present-day condition of the Philippines needs to be known and understand by the every single Filipinos due to its alarming similarities to that of Marcos regime. The aforementioned distinguishable resemblances of the two administrations like their noticeable thirst for power is enough to reason out why Filipinos have to act immediately. The dark part of Philippine history ought to not be repeated.

Thousands of lives can be saved if only we, Filipinos, fight back against the human right abuses done by the government. Speak up for those who are afraid to do so.

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