

OPINION & FEATURES

Vigilante rule

AT a multi-sector meeting in Davao City last month, Mayor Rodrigo Duterte said: "If you are doing an illegal activity in my city, if you are a criminal or part of a syndicate that preys on the innocent people of the city, for as long as I am the mayor, you are a legitimate target of assassination."

That was a dangerous statement to make. It is an open invitation to lawlessness, a justification for anyone to take the law into his hands.

The laws on due process govern everyone and every part of the Philippine territory, even mayors and cities that claim that they have a low crime rate because of vigilante justice. And even when the state goes the due process route, no criminal is put to death because the death penalty law has been repealed.

It is thus a welcome development that the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) has finally taken cognizance of the unexplained killings of 814 people in Davao City since 1998. The suspicion is that the killings were done by the so-called Davao Death Squad, a shadowy vigilante group.

If the 814 people were suspects in various crimes or were known



criminals, they should have been arrested, charged, prosecuted, tried and sentenced. That is the process in a nation that upholds the rule of law, not the rule of the mob or vigilantes. One big danger in vigilante rule is the great possibility that an innocent man may be put to death without being accorded due process.

Government and civilian forces or groups cannot take shortcuts in enforcing the law. They have to abide by due process, even if such process takes time for justice to be meted out to the guilty. To do otherwise would be to take a backward step and to return

to the law of the jungle.

Maids and mothers

Rep. Risa Hontiveros of the Akbayan party-list group on Sunday condemned as "disgusting, derogatory and vile" an article written by a Hong Kong columnist and broadcaster calling the Philippines "a nation of servants." Writing about the Philippines' and China's conflicting claims on the Spratly islands, Chip Tsao urged his countrymen not to bow to the Philippines because there are more than 130,000 Filipino maids providing cheap labor in Hong Kong. Hontiveros took offense at Tsao's article and said *HK Magazine*, which carried the story, should apologize immediately for the racial slur.

Tsao and his compatriots should realize that Filipinas are forced to work abroad because of lack of good-paying jobs in the Philippines. Many of these maids are teachers and professionals with university degrees who work as maids and earn salaries that are several times what they would earn in their own country.

Tsao and his ilk look down on the Filipino maids who do menial and backbreaking work. But do they realize that without their Filipino maids, they would not be able to work at high-paying jobs and enterprises? Probably the Filipino servants should make good their threat to go on strike.

The Filipinas may be servants "only," but they are performing a very important role in the economy and society of Hong Kong. If Chip Tsao (real name: To Kit) is a man and a gentleman, he should apologize immediately to the Philippines and the Filipinas. (*Inquirer.net*)

Among Ed for CEO of Chinatrust

MONTHS before the last presidential elections, when the buzz was that the Lopez interests were seriously considering endorsing Noli de Castro, then a senator, for the presidency, I ventured the opinion that, if this was true, the giant business complex, whose top brass know a good management person when they see one, must have had a very high regard for De Castro's managerial ability, intelligence, financial know-how and people skills.

I then suggested that, if this was the case, why didn't the Lopezes consider De Castro for CEO of Benpres or, at least, president of ABS-CBN?

Surely, I said, a person who was qualified to be president of the Philippines was more than qualified to run a vast corporate complex. On the other hand, I added, if De Castro was not good enough to run the Lopez empire, then why inflict him on the Filipino people?

In fairness to Gabby Lopez and the rest of the enterprise, it was never really established that they were pushing De Castro for the presidency. However, it was no surprise that Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo picked him for vice-president.

We all know why. The welfare of the country was farthest from her mind. She just wanted one more insurance policy for her campaign. Someone whose popularity with the masses could help neutralize the votes of Ronnie Poe and Loren Legarda.

Since then, we have all had to pray that Arroyo's health is sustained until the next elections (or an upheaval that will see her replaced by a competent

individual). Otherwise, good grief, we would end up with De Castro as president.

At any rate, here we are again, sending out feelers for presidential candidates—to add to an already top-heavy list of wannabes, many of them with more press releases than substantive performance in their curriculum vitae.

And jumping into the fray or, at least, testing the waters—is Pampanga priest-turned-governor Ed Panlilio. If you are to believe the press releases, there is a tsunami of support developing overseas and locally. Among those reportedly endorsing his candidacy is a certain Joey Bermudez, president of Chinatrust Philippines.

I have no doubt that Among Ed has the best of intentions. It certainly took a lot of guts to take on the combined muscle and money of the Pinedas, the Lapid and the Arroyos in Pampanga and trash them in the race for governor. There is also no doubt that he can claim the moral ascendancy that many of the current "presidentiables" can only talk about in press releases.

But unless someone can convince me that good intentions will translate into the ability to piece together a jigsaw puzzle of a battered economy, a Mafia-type hold on the rackets at the local and national level, poverty and joblessness, a broken-down bureaucracy, non-existent health and social services, a wayward educational system, an ill-equipped military, self-serving legislation, a questionable judicial system, the quid pro quo of foreign relations, and the gargantuan problem of managing the biggest enterprise in the country—government—I'm not sure I would like to endorse the good crusader for president.

Of course, I have the same reservations about many others who are (horrors!) ranking high in the SWS polls. But let's focus on the likes of Among Ed.

Doesn't he remind us of a near-saintly presidential candidate who vanquished a near-satanic president and took over a government that had long suffered under a dictatorial yoke? I don't think anyone, including myself, ever doubted Cory Aquino's good intentions. But were those enough to bring our country out of the depths?

Anecdotal evidence tells us that her good intentions were undercut by friends and relatives, and the most competent advisers and cabinet members could not make up for her own inability to cope with the multifarious demands of the presidency. Mercifully, she made good her promise to step down after one term.

Fidel V. Ramos, steeped in military discipline, skilled in political quid pro quo and armed with 20a vision for the country won (I must say, again, mercifully) against another would-be president who came on the scene with fire and thunder: Miriam Defensor-Santiago. We now know what fate would have awaited the country had she become president.

We also know what fate befell the country when Erap Estrada became president. And we know what has befallen our hapless people with Arroyo as president.

Now, Joey Bermudez and a host of well-intentioned folks think that Among Ed is qualified for president? Again, with due respect, I beg them to look at it this way: Would he qualify as CEO of the Ayala corporate empire?

Would he be able to raise, like the Phoenix, an abandoned US naval base and transform it, with volunteer power, into an economic miracle, the way Dick Gordon did to Subic? Does he have the scalpel-sharp mind of a Diokno or a Recto? Does he have the leadership qualities of a Ramon Magsaysay? Can he handle foreign relations like Carlos P. Romulo? Does he have the business wizardry of Manny Pangilinan

(not to mention the work ethic)?

Bringing the standards to more esoteric and humane levels: Does he have the vision, the compassion, the humility, the salesmanship, the leadership qualities, the long track record, and the dogged consistency of Tony Meloto, the miracle man of Gawad Kalinga?

The only question to which I'm sure the answer will be "Yes" is: Will Among Ed try his very best to be a good president? I'm sure he will. But trying doesn't mean succeeding.

Failure can also be so devastating for our people. Because, at that point, they will say, "Let's just settle for someone who's corrupt but manages to get our country moving slightly forward rather than not at all." That's what they're now saying about Marcos, after years under Arroyo.

In America, there is now, among Fil-Am do-gooders, a call for a national conference at which likely presidential candidates—who are not cut from the same trappel mold—will be shortlisted. There is a note of desperation in the call. Indeed, the 2010 elections are not too far away.

I think it's a good exercise, provided the promoters approach this with an open mind and a willingness to hold the prospective candidates to the highest standards of integrity, intelligence, managerial ability, people skills, vision and statesmanship. Plus a great love for our country and our people.

Among Ed's name should certainly be added to the pool. But, better yet, I think we should just support him in his Quixotic campaign to give Pampangueños back their pride. That's a difficult enough task, as it is. Forget about the presidency. That should come in due time, if deserved.

Hasn't anybody ever heard of the Peter Principle?

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STREET TALK

Greg B. Macabenta

Mystery slang

PEOPLE tend to associate anthropology with a study of cultures that are distant in place or time, with a tendency toward describing the most exotic aspects.

These days are far more interesting in every-day culture—

how cultures are made and why they change.

Last March 27, I wrote a column about Tagalog slang, and didn't realize that it would lead to a rather complicated adventure in linguistic forensics that shows just how dynamic culture can be, as exemplified by language. Here goes:

The March 27 column was mainly a review of Ferdinand Aguas' *Pinoyn Dyoksyonaryo*, a compilation of 300 Tagalog words produced by what linguists call agglutination or combining existing morphemes

or units with meanings. I picked out words which dealt mainly with the body.

I was surprised to get more than the usual email feedback from readers, including several referring me to a posting from the Internet *Tagalog Words You Should Know*, a list of 20 words which has been circulating for several years now.

What got my detective work going was an email from noted writer Pete Lacaba, who said that going through my pickings from *Dyoksyonaryo*, he realized it was his first time to encounter some 90 percent of the terms, and which got him wondering if the author had just coined the terms, rather than picking them out from actual usage.

Pete's e-mail got me worried, because when I was doing my column I also had similar suspicions. I hadn't heard most of the terms but then I've learned, through the years, that class and age differences in the Philippines can be quite significant when it comes to language. For example, I didn't know that "luto ng Diyos" [God's cooking] referred to sex until about 10

years ago, and I still run into many upper- and middle-class Filipinos, as well as non-Tagalog people, who are surprised, even shocked, when I use the metaphor.

Bubble Gang

After reading Lacaba's e-mail, I thought I'd do a bit more probing, and what better way than to actually get to the author himself. I do not know Ferdinand Aguas but I was able to track him down through the Internet, through an ad he had posted for his book.

Yes indeed, he had coined the words himself. He does many things, including writing scripts and at one time, he handled *Bagong Diks*, a segment on the popular comedy show *Bubble Gang*. *Bagong Diks* featured these new words, described as words for stuff you've always wanted a term for.

Again, I had to do a bit of investigation here, checking with younger friends and students, and they knew right away about the show, and *Bagong Diks*, although this segment is no longer featured. *Bagong Diks*, my friends told me, was very popular and at least two suggested that maybe people even picked up the coined words there, and began to actually use them.

We might actually be seeing

an example of how the mass media introduce new words, even through comedy shows. With the words now compiled as book, people might find some of the terms so innovative that they begin to use it, undaunted, as I was, by the title *Dyoksyonaryo*. Only after talking with Aguas did the title hit me: "Oh no, how could I have missed that title: the terms were meant as jokes!"

You never know about what words will click, but the entries in both *Dyoksyonaryo* and the *Tagalog Words You Should Know*, which has been posted and reposted dozens of times in different sites, reveal some of our cultural foci, meaning particular areas or domains of our world and our lives that we seem particularly interested in, even fixated on.

An example would be smells. We have dozens of words for different kinds of smells that would be described in English simply as "fragrant" or "bad-smelling." Besides the classic "ma-" suffixed adjectives, we create a tremendous number of possible terms by combining "amoy" [smell] with another word (e.g., "amoy baby," which is supposed to be a pleasant smell but which I would challenge after changing more than a

thousand diapers in the last few years).

I'm afraid I can't go into the details of "dukil" and many of the words on the list because I know many Inquirer readers are almost un-Filipino with their squeamishness about the body. *Tagalog Words You Should Know* is terribly corporal and scatological (toilet-based), but the words support my view (which I mentioned in the last column) about Filipinos being quite fixated on bodies. It's not surprising that Aguas also invented many words around that domain.

'Burnik'

I did want to smuggle in one finding from my linguistic excavation of *Tagalog Words You Should Know*. Psychologists sometimes describe Filipinos as "oral," but an analysis of slang—real and invented—suggests we can be quite anal. We seem fixated on phenomena associated with that region, anatomically, physiologically, meteorologically (you know as in winds).

In my March 27 column, I mentioned that I had learned the term "burnik" only recently from students and that they used it to mean "anal hair." Lacaba sent a definition that he says dates back to

2001. Interestingly the definition he sent also appears in the Internet's *Tagalog Words You Should Know*, the term refers to certain things that tenaciously stick to the anal hair.

Again, I checked with my informants, admittedly all younger ones, and they were unanimous that it referred to the hair and not the hangers-on. Explanation? It looks like we're seeing rapid linguistic mutation here, from what you find on the hair, to the hair itself.

More examples for cultural analysis: three words in the Internet postings ("wenkeng," "baktung," "bakti") deal with sensitive body parts that people unintentionally expose. How do you explain these terms? They suggest voyeurism, but I also think, paradoxically, that it tells us of how modesty drives us into linguistic promiscuity, with warnings to be careful.

As for all the words we have about the body, and stuff coming from and sticking to the body, I believe these reflect our obsession with personal hygiene. Somewhere in the linguistic maze way, you'll find a link between the "burnik" and the "tabo" [water dipper], which I wrote about last month. (*Inquirer.net*)



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