

By Jesse Jose

A Cup O' Kapeng Barako

I didn't write the story below. It was written by F. Sionil Jose and sent to me by my prolific cyberspace friend, Ed Navarra. When I read it, I said to myself, "This must be shared with my *B arako* readers.

I wrote this note to Ed:

my next

written and everything he said here is all so true. I think It will also get a prominent space in my next book.

"Ed, thanks. I am going to lift this and install it in *Kapeng Barako* column. It's so profoundly

"F. Sionil Jose is a distant relative and a long-lost uncle, I believe. Maybe not. Perhaps, it's only wishful thinking on my part.

Pero ... Ilocano din

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to. At an

g sarap sumulat.

...

"JJ."

So,

okey ngarud,

Dear Readers, here it is. Enjoy.

Why We Are So Corrupt?□

Written by Jesse Jose

Tuesday, 01 July 2014 14:44 - Last Updated Tuesday, 01 July 2014 15:10

By F. Sionil Jose

At lunch the other day, the cultural activist and stage star Joy Virata asked two very important questions. I have mulled over them for so long, I think I have some of the answers, most of which are based on our history, our nature as Filipinos and our economic system. I am only too aware, of course, of the Marxist injunction that this economic system itself determines our culture.

I'm pushing on to 90 — Ms. Virata must have considered this when she asked, is there any difference between politics of yesteryear and today?

And the other more telling question is, why we have declined morally, why we are so corrupt.

Being this ancient, I must be forgiven for my nostalgia and tenacious clinging to a past that has been enhanced by a little knowledge of history. I remember what the historian William Henry Scott told me — how he came across an inventory in the 1896 revolution listing down broken pens, old chairs, the trivia put down by outgoing bureaucrats illustrating their honesty.

In the Thirties, politicians spent their own money for their election campaign. Many of them were impoverished by their aspiration to be town mayor, congressman or governor. Not now — politicians make money at the very beginning when they campaign. How did they go about then?

I fondly remember the former Secretary of Health, Dr. Juan Salcedo, going to Pangasinan in a non-airconditioned Pantranco bus, Cabinet Secretaries Conrado Estrella and Emmanuel Pelaez travelling without any escort, Senator Juan Flavio Velasco using public transport. Not the officials today — from the simple city mayor who goes around with a fleet of security vehicles. Look at the composition of the Senate in the Fifties — they were intellectuals, writers, Recto, Tanada, Pelaez, Manglapus and so on. Yes, there was one movie star — Rogelio de la Rosa but he was circumspect, competent enough to be ambassador, too.

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Look at Senators today, and weep.

Yes, indeed, how can any Filipino today escape this plague that has drained us of courage to fight it, that has rendered us apathetic and submissive?

Corruption now pervades our very lives. We see it in the conduct of our highest elected officials, our police officers, in the justice system that is in shambles. After all that pork barrel noise in Congress, why is no one in jail? The Ampatuan massacre — why, after four years, there is no court verdict? The daily murders — many of them are unreported. And the public apathy and cynicism:

I have an explanation, which I know is incomplete for there are iron realities that aggravate the Filipino metastasis — the poverty which has forced so many to steal, the hypocrisy inherent in Filipino relationships, our pakikisama, wherein we don't ostracize the corrupt but instead greet them with handshakes and smiles. Our cowardice even — all these basically obstruct the creation of a just society.

But first, the trauma of history.

It is quite correct to ascribe so many evils in our society as accretions of a colonial past. We must bear in mind though that the colonialists are gone, that though vestiges of colonialism remain, as the Spanish writer Salvador de Madariaga stated, a country need not be colonized by a foreign power — it can well be a colony of its own elites and leaders. And this is what we have become.

The past hundred years or so have sorely tested us as a people aspiring to be a nation. In 1896 after the execution of Jose Rizal by the Spaniards, the revolution broke out only to be sold out by a weakened leadership in the Pact of Biak na Bato. That struggle was resuscitated when the Americans came in 1898. We fought them, too, but the ragtag revolutionary Army was beaten and we became an American colony.

In both wars, our patriotism, our unity as a people were tested on the battlefield, our morale succumbed but far more demeaning was the moral decay.

In that period when Filipino leadership was under siege, Apolinario Mabini provided it with a stern moral leadership. This was his singular role, but his voice was not heeded by no less than the president, General Emilio Aguinaldo, who was surrounded by the rich ilustrados. They

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wanted Mabini's influence totally banished, so that they could enrich themselves and negotiate with the new imperialists.

We see then from the very beginning of the Malolos Republic this fatal virus that afflicts us — the acceptance of collaboration with the enemy for personal gain.

It was the same when the second trauma ravaged us — the Japanese invasion in 1942 and the brutal three-year occupation. So many Filipinos collaborated with them, some out of sincere belief that they would relieve Asia from Western colonialism, but most, simply to preserve their privileged status and profit from collaboration.

How was collaboration with the Nazis in Europe in World War II resolved? The Danes started killing the collaborators even before the collapse of Nazi Germany. The French hounded them, jailed them.

In the Philippines, many of them even proclaimed themselves patriots. They were granted amnesty. As a political issue, therefore, collaboration with the Japanese was settled but it continues to fester today as a moral issue.

Were the collaborators ever bothered? Hardly, I think, because they know we are not bound by moral scruples.

Then martial law. So many of us knew it was coming and some even welcomed it. As for the very poor, the masa — it was not their real concern. As one put it, he didn't care if it was the devil himself who ruled as long as food was cheap.

Again, many Filipinos accepted the edict; they even worked gladly for Marcos, legitimized his regime and willfully contributed to the violence, the death, imprisonment and torture of thousands.

In all these three traumatic events in our history, the collaborators with our exploiters were never really punished. They ended up rich, and successfully masqueraded as heroes. The evil that imperialists and Marcos did was soon forgotten. We see now the Marcoses and so many

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of their hirelings back in power, sneering at our credulity.

What then does history tell us?

In these man-made disasters that wrought havoc on otherwise stable and just societies, the rules of conduct, of ethics were thrown out of the window as the powerful dictator, king, bureaucrat, imperial agent exploited the people and the land. Each individual must survive; he becomes an animal in the jungle; he gets used to the violence, the corruption, the lying and the cheating as normal human traits; he adapts to them, even exploits them if he can. Forget truth, God, the wrath of the heavens — there is only he and his family.

In this decadent atmosphere, it is difficult to recover virtue. And if the disaster strikes again after it is surmounted, the individual is immersed deeper into the slime so that eventually, he is totally submerged in it, he no longer knows what it feels to breathe the fresh air, to appreciate green living things, to know God and the infinite splendor of creation. He knows only the fetid darkness.

Today, for all hosannas evoked by the seeming development in the economy, we need to think not of the future, but of the past which impacts on today.

There is one great failing of government, from Cory's to her son's which is not lost on the national consciousness — and this is the resolution of the assassination of Ninoy Aquino. No one seriously believes that those soldiers who were imprisoned for the crime were the real perpetrators. Someone upstairs, powerful and well connected masterminded it all, as well as the cover-up murders of several people who were supposed to be in the know.

What our leaders do not realize is the gravity of the murder of Ninoy Aquino, not so much because of the man's political ambition, but the perception today that murder has become so common — a daily occurrence as blatantly evidenced in the newspapers but that this government — the whole justice system — is so rotten it cannot even resolve such a high profile murder case wherein it should not be difficult to target the perpetrator.

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Such a crime — without being fully resolved — contributes to the apathy of people, their acceptance of crime as the last nail in the coffin of the Filipino dream.

The assassination of Ninoy is not just a domestic crime — it is known all over the world, it is blot on the image of the Filipino nation as it illustrates to the whole world the rottenness of the Filipino justice system. If there is no justice for Ninoy Aquino, how can there be justice for poor, anonymous Juan? If President PNoy knows, he does not say — which is, of course, the most damning of all because he is the son.

What aggravates our moral decay is our very nature, our sociability and hypocrisy. Although we are familiar with the crimes of our leaders, we continue to fete them, invite them in social functions, often bonded as they are with us not just by social ties but by gratitude for what these politicians must have done for us. Then, of course, there is this economic system which is propelled by consumerism and untrammelled greed.

The last question: Is there no hope for Filipinos then?

The answer is with our youth. I always tell them, our heroes who wrote our history with their blood were all very young, in their twenties and thirties. For sure, many of the ilustrados joined the revolution for themselves. But Rizal, Mabini, Bonifacio and so many others did not.

And we are a talented people, as illustrated no less by Rizal. No country in Asia has ever produced a man like him. When we celebrate his birthday next week, just remember, he was a novelist, a sculptor, a medical doctor, a scholar, a teacher and a martyr at 35 when the Spaniards executed him.

That's all, Dear Readers. JJ

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