

Written by Bobby M. Reyes

Monday, 27 June 2011 12:11 - Last Updated Thursday, 25 July 2013 16:17

“Trapo” Was First Used in the 1971 Gubernatorial Elections When Sorsogon Politicians Were Gentlemen (and Ladies) and They Resumed their Personal Friendship After the Voting

By Lolo Bobby M. Reyes of Sorsogon City, Philippines, and West Covina, California

{xtypo_quote} Ben, I invented the term trapo in one of my columns sometime in September 1989, from the phrase ‘traditional politician.’ – Antonio C. Abaya {/xtypo_quote}

On July 2, 2009, my childhood friend, Augusto “Auggie” Surtida, forwarded to me the July 1, 2009 column, of Antonio C. Abaya, as it appeared in the July 2, 2009 issue of the *Standard Today*. It was entitled: “Trapos versus Non-Trapos.” Mr. Abaya actually began his column by saying, “Last Tuesday, June 30, my friend Ben Sanchez sent out to his e-list the question: How do you define Trapos?”

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"My reply, expanded for the purpose of this column: 'Ben, I invented the term trapo in one of my columns sometime in September 1989, from the phrase 'traditional politician'."

Ben Sanchez is the former governor of the Board of Investments. Governor Sanchez writes a column for our website, as may be accessed in this URL: <http://www.mabuhayradio.com/tremendous-trifles/>

Mr. Abaya never acknowledged receipt of my twin e-mails (as reproduced hereunder) that were sent to him about the origin of the “trapo” word. He did not also publish, or even reproduce excerpts from, the said e-mails. I interpreted his silence to mean that I was right and he was wrong in claiming authorship of the said term.

A Reply to Mr. Abaya Through Mr. Surtida

In the evening of July 2, 2009, (11:51:29 P.M. Pacific Daylight Time) I sent this e-mail to Auggie Surtida. It was captioned:

Re: Trapos versus Non-Trapos (2) Sorsoganons Used Trapos Ahead of Mr. Abaya

Sorsoganons (Not Tony Abaya) Actually Invented the Word "Trapo" to Mean "Traditional Politicians" - Ma

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QUOTE.

Dear Augie and Fellow Sorsoganons:

CC: Tony Abaya

Former BOI Gov. Ben Sanchez

For the information of Mr. Abaya and Governor Sanchez, the term "trapo" was used by Sorsoganons as early as the 1971 local elections. That was 18 years ahead of Mr. Abaya's claim.

As a background material, the Sorsoganon term for the Tagalog's "basahan" is "trapo." Trapo is the Sorsoganon equivalent of the colloquial English term, "rag."

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There was a three-cornered fight in the 1971 election for governor of Sorsogon. The Nacionalista Party fielded the son of then Cong. Salvador Encinas of Gubat town, Melchor Encinas, former Gov. Juan G. Frivaldo (of Sta. Magdalena town) and my first cousin, Atty. Teodulo R. Diño, the son of former Gov. Teodosio Diño of Prieto Diaz town. Messrs. Frivaldo and Diño both belonged to the Liberal Party, which declared actually a "free zone" to accommodate both of them. It was the first (and only) time for Atty. Diño to run for public office, although he worked at the Solicitor General's office for several years prior to his resignation on his filing of the certificate of candidacy.

Atty. Dulo Diño labeled both Mr. Encinas and former Governor Frivaldo as "trapo" candidates, as they represented "traditional politics" and there was a need for a new face, not a "trapo" (basahan) to lead the province. I remember my other first cousin, Patricio Reyes (a son of former Sorsogon Governor Juan S. Reyes) saying that some students at the University of the Philippines were also using at that time "trapo" as their term for a traditional politician. Pat had just graduated at the UP School of Medicine and he went back to Sorsogon to campaign for Dulo Diño. (Pat is now a neurosurgeon in Philadelphia, PA.) Pat and I used also the term "trapo" in our speeches at political rallies in Bulan town.

My father, Dominador, tried to talk to his *cumpadre*, Johnny Frivaldo, to coalesce against the NP. He was the opponent of Mr. Frivaldo in the 1955 and 1959 gubernatorial elections. Mr. Frivaldo suggested that Atty. Diño run instead as his running mate, or if he would not want to accept it, then have me as the other half of the ticket. My father failed to persuade his brother-in-law, former Governor Diño, and his nephew to accept Mr. Frivaldo's offer. At the end, Mr. Frivaldo won the election and our "trapo" battle cry did not resonate well enough with the voters insofar as Governor Frivaldo was concerned but it did affect Melchor Encinas, whose father was then the chairman of the Appropriations Committee of the House of Representatives.

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BTW you can read about Dominador S. Reyes in this article, [My Father Was the Birdman and Butcher of Bulusan during the War and a Don Quixote Later in Life](#)

I remember during that 1971 elections a high-school friend, Freddie Gacosta, use our "anti-trapo" battle cry with gusto, as he was becoming a radical student leader. Freddie eventually joined the New People's Army after President Marcos declared martial law in September 1972. He was later killed in Sorsogon in a pitch battle between the NPA and the Philippine Army in 1973.

So, can we just charge to experience Mr. Abaya's claim that he coined the term "trapo" in 1989? We in Sorsogon and probably some (Sorsoganon) student leaders in the UP were already using the term in 1971.

For the record,

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PS: I will post this commentary and the appropriate portions of Mr. Abaya's column in Governor Sanchez' column in the www.mabuhayradio.com . UNQUOTE.

A Long Post Script to Auggie Surtida and Company.

S ometimes, I am inspired as a writer and I continued pounding that night the keyboard of my old laptop (a Toshiba Satellite Pro, which is now obsolete).

In the wee hours of the morning of July 3, 2009, (2:33:57 AM, Pacific Daylight Time, to be exact), I sent another e-mail to Mr. Surtida, with CC to Mr. Abaya and a few Sorsoganons in my childhood friend's e-mail list. (At that time, I was not yet a member of the FaceBook.)

I dubbed the subject matter of my e-mail to Auggie Surtida,
Subject: Re: When Sorsoganon Politicians Were Gentlemen (and Ladies)

QUOTE.

Dear Augie and Fellow Sorsoganons and Friends:

BCC: Augie Surtida's List of Sorsoganons

Anent this commentary about the Trapos (which is self-explanatory), I want to let you know that I am starting to finalize a book about the politicians in our province – especially when they were gentlemen and very few of them were doing what the crooked politicians are now practicing.

I am one of the few members of our Baby-boom generation who literally witnessed the interaction among Sorsoganon politicians (aside from my father, Dominador, and my uncles and uncles-in-law who were politicians) and I was present in some of their private meetings. These are the politicians that I can write about: (not necessarily in the order of importance or chronology): Gov. (and former Senator) Teodoro de Vera, Gov. Salvador (Gurang) Escudero, Sr., Cong. Vicente L. Peralta, Cong. Salvador Encinas, Cong. Tomas Clemente, my Ninong Cadio and Ninang Choleng Arnedo and their son, Igsoon Acting Gov. Nonoy Arnedo, Gov. Juan Frivaldo, Gov. Augusto Ortiz, Cong. Modesto Galias, Cong. Bonifacio Gillego, Vice Gov. Nene de Castro (who was the OB-gynecologist who delivered me as a baby) and her siblings who became mayors of Bulan, Caridad Salas, Fernando Gerona, Jr., Mayor Johnson So (whose son, John, is now my brother-in-law), Atty. Pedro Carranza, Mayor Celso Tabuena, Engr. Jose Lachica, Mayor Toby Gonzales, Mayor Santos Dangalan, Cong. Rafael Aquino, Vice Gov. Leopoldo Figueroa, Atty. Henry Fajardo, Atty. Jojie Sabater, Mayor Rogado Halum, Mayor Erwin Guysayko, OIC Gov. Ely Diaz and tens of former mayors and other municipal officials. Of course, I have had interaction also with some of the incumbent provincial and municipal officers.

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I plan to include in the forthcoming book the Sorsoganon politicians and political activists from the Left Wing such as Sotero Llamas (my second-degree cousin), Celso Minguez of Bulusan (my distant nephew) and others.

Sorsogon does not have really a good historical account of the days when (for instance) then incumbent Gov. Salvador "Gurang" C. Escudero, Sr., would attack in his speech in a political rally in Downtown Bulusan my uncle, Dr. Jose S. Reyes and my father, Dominador, and after delivering his speech would take coffee with Dr. Reyes -- before he would leave for Casiguran -- at the Reyes residence, the so-called "Daku na Balay." Our elders never took personally any campaign issues and remained friends (and often as *cumpadres*) during and after the elections.

As a nine-year-old boy, I witnessed the historical meeting of WWII and post-war adversaries, Gov. Gurang Escudero and my father, as they embraced sometime in October 1955 at our residence. Then incumbent Governor Escudero (then retiring as a politician) decided to back up my father against Juan Frivaldo and fellow Liberal Party stalwart former Cong. Tomas Clemente in the 3-way fight for the governorship. Then Congressman Peralta backed up Tata Juan Frivaldo, as arranged by then President Ramon Magsaysay.

If you want to contribute anecdotes, biographical data and/or photos about any of the said officials and politicians, please let me know. My childhood friend and former neighbor, Tina Peralta, already sent me some photos about her late Dad.

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Hopefully, you and I can finish the book by early 2011. It can be the most-authoritative objective book about Sorsogon politics. BTW I plan to write only about our politicians in the most-positive ways that I could recall. We owe it to the future generations to write about their stints in politics and they should be good human-interest stories.

Mabuhay,

Lolo Bobby M. Reyes, a witness of Sorsogon History UNQUOTE.

Epilogue. I never got to finish the book manuscript, as I did not receive any feedback from my fellow Sorsoganons. Perhaps the recipients of the two e-mails did not bother to forward them to their own mailing lists of Sorsoganons. Hopefully, since a link will be posted in the Facebook, some scions of political families in Sorsogon Province may now participate in (as co-authors of, or contributors to) the said book project. # # #

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