

# OPINION & FEATURES



## On politics and hope

IT'S hard to connect the two together—politics and hope—as most people will agree that they have lost hope in the political system of the Philippines. Trust in the current administration has been declining, and the current economic crisis in the United States has not helped the way Filipinos see their future.

Also, the 2010 Presidential election holds an unsure outlook for those who wish for change in the Philippines. Former RP Senate President Manny Villar is one of those who view this future with uncertainty. "I am confronted with this... We don't even know if there is going to be an election in 2010," he said. As for hoping for economic recovery, that too, remains bleak. But although private businesses in the Philip-

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pinas have been pessimistic about the economy, the latest survey of Grant Thornton International reported that the country remains among the world's "pockets of hope." This may not seem good news for now, as we can only see bad news coming one after the other. Still, as long we hold on to a glimmer of hope, maybe we'll be able to see the light at the end of this dark tunnel and change the way politics has worked in our country. (AJPress)

## The greatest Filipino ever

"RIZAL would lose his head for writing the *Noli Me Tangere*."—Padre Federico Faura, S.J., a friend of Rizal's



in Zamboanga. To keep him away from the revolt, Governor General Ramon Blanco offered Rizal a job in Cuba, where a similar rebellion was taking place. (He was to treat patients suffering from yellow fever.) Rizal accepted the offer.

While on a stopover in Barcelona, Spain en route to Cuba, Rizal's ship was ordered back to Manila. Arrested upon arrival, Rizal was tried by a military court and found guilty of all the three charges of rebellion, sedition and illegal association. He was to be shot on Dec. 30, 1896 on orders of the new Governor General Camilo Polavieja. Blanco, who was sympathetic to Rizal, had been forced out of office, and the friars used their influence to have Polavieja take his place, thereby sealing Rizal's fate.

The Spaniards (particularly the friars), thought that by executing Rizal, the rebellion would weaken (just like in the case of Fathers Gomez, Burgos and Zamora when they were executed after the Cavite Mutiny of 1872). This was a costly misjudgment, for Rizal's death ensured that the rebellion would stay on for a long time.

After two years of fighting, and with the unintentional help of the Americans (Admiral George Dewey brought back Aguinaldo from Hong Kong and destroyed the Spanish Fleet in Manila Bay on May 1, 1898), the Filipino revolutionaries defeated the Spanish army (capturing 15,000 of its finest soldiers and officers).

On June 12, 1898, Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo declared the independence of the Philippine islands from foreign occupiers, the first Asian country to do so in Asia. It was quite sad that Rizal did not live long enough to see what he really wanted—an independent country for us Filipinos. Though, I think that if he had his way, he wanted it attained through a nonviolent fashion.

Philippine independence was short-lived, though; the Americans took over the country after a few months.

Fifty years later, a man named Mahatma Gandhi, adopted and perfected Rizal's nonviolent "recipe" for independence. Gandhi's approach called "civil disobedience" drove away the British from India in 1947. Soon, other Asian nations would follow.

Earlier, in 1946, the Philippines regained independence from the Americans. Indonesia won their independence from the Dutch in 1949. Vietnam fought its way against the French and won it in 1954. Malaya and Singapore had theirs from the British in 1957.

Asia's struggle against colonialism was a long and tedious one. It was started by our own Dr. Jose Rizal, when he wrote the *Noli Me Tangere* in 1887. That is why he was once called by our Asian neighbors "The Great Malay." But no, he never was. Jose Rizal is "The Greatest Filipino Ever."

A final Note: One of the founders of the Observatorio Meteorologico del Ateneo Municipal de Manila, Padre Federico Faura, was the first man to predict the coming of typhoons and issue signal warnings in 1879. Consequently, he also predicted the fate of Rizal when the latter wrote the *Noli Me Tangere* in 1887. Though he was a Spaniard, Padre Faura was a very good friend of Rizal's since his schooldays at the Ateneo de Municipal. (*Inquirer.net*)

## Eartha Kitt's Philippine connection

ONCE upon a time, in the ancient monastery of Montserrat, on a mountain outside Barcelona, my reflections on things religious were jolted when one of the few monks who spoke English sought me out and invited me for coffee in his cell at *merienda* time. I accepted. While he was serving me a small cup of strong brewed coffee, he exclaimed, "I said Mass for Ella Fitzgerald this morning. She died yesterday."

This was in 1996, in a monastery famous for a venerated old image of the Virgin Mary and the monks and choir boys who sing in the church dedicated to her. This is a monastery where monks would huddle to seriously discuss the merits of a 12th century *Alleluia* whose tune one of them found in one of the many manuscripts in their great library. Everyone seemed so learned and erudite that I felt out of place, so it was a pleasant surprise to be sipping coffee in a monk's cells listening to Ella Fitzgerald from long playing records. I cannot imagine now what

the abbot or the choirmaster would have said about our afternoon of remembrance.

I remembered Ella Fitzgerald over the holidays because another gifted singer passed away. Eartha Kitt succumbed to colon cancer last Christmas. She was 81.

My students don't know Eartha Kitt, but the Internet ensures that if they know where to look, they will find out that she played a sexy purring Catwoman in the 1960s television series *Batman*. More importantly, Kitt had a Philippine connection because one of her signature songs was *Waray-waray* which she performed in her many concerts. There are at least two recordings of *Waray-waray*, the most recent being a live performance at Café Carlyle in New York recorded in 2007. This East Side café has hosted many other performers, including Woody Allen who doesn't do stand up comedy but regularly jams with the resident jazz band.

If you do a Google search, you will find a number of YouTube videos that have static screens while Miss Kitt sings *Waray-waray*. One of them even has a still picture of the iconic San Juanico Bridge that connects the islands of Leyte and Samar. Her performance in Café Carlyle was described by The New York Times as "indestructibly seductive." You have to hear Kitt to appreciate her rendition, but unfortunately the people who posted the YouTube music didn't take the trouble to cut and paste pictures of Miss Kitt so that Filipinos would not only enjoy the song but recognize Kitt's signature tilting singing posture. While I was surfing the Net with *Waray-waray* playing in the background, someone looking over my back gasped, *Sa kanya pala kinopya ni Pilita ang pagliyad-liyad niya*. ("So it's from her that Pilita Corrales copied her bending singing posture.") Imitation is indeed a compliment and Diana Ross and Madonna also got a thing or two from Eartha Kitt.

I don't speak the language of Samar and Leyte, and I wonder how faithful Kitt was to the original song. In fact, I cannot vouch for the accuracy of her transcription of both the Tagalog and Waray lyrics of the song. Still true artistry is taking something old and transforming it into something uniquely your own. The transcription of the song goes:



"*Waray-waray hindi tatakas / Waray-waray handang matodas / Waray-waray bahala bukas / Waray Waray manigas!*"

She stops singing but the music continues and she addresses the audience: "I suppose you wonder what language this is. It's the language of the Philippine Islands called Two-galag (sic)? And it says, the women of *Waray-waray* have muscles of steel, and we can fight any battle, but our kisses are as sweet as wine." And then she continues.

"*Waray-waray / tawag sa akun / Sa bakbakan dirimaguron / sa sinuman ay humahamon / kahit ikaw ay maton!*"

"*Likas sa ating paraluman / kaming palagid, mapagbigay / guniti baring waray waray.*"

Kitt fades off again and while music continues to play, she talks to the audience again: "Don't you think that's terribly expressive? (Laughter from the audience.) What do you think it means? (Laughter again.) It means, give me everything you got, honey, and I could make you feel like a king." And she continues the song.

"*Likas sa ating paraluman / kaming palagid, mapagbigay / gunitibaring Waray-waray / walang sindat kaninuman / Warang babaeng Waray-waray / a siga siga, kahit saan / kabakina, ay lumalaban / kabakina manang habay / Waray-waray sadyang di siya tatakas? Waray-waray handa nang matodas / Waray-waray bahala bukas / Waray-waray manigas! Likas sa ating paraluman / kaming palagid mapagbigay / gunitibaring Waray-waray / walang sindat kaninuman / walang babaeng Waray-waray / a siga siga, kahit saan / kabakina, ay lumalaban / kabakina manang habay / Waray-waray sadyang di siya tatakas / Waray-waray handa nang matodas / Waray-waray bahala bukas / Waray-waray... Waray-waray... Waray-waray...*"

Kitt fades off again and leading to the finale she sighs, "You fought that battle, I didn't." Then she belts out the last word, "*Manigas!*" and cackles and laughs to applause.

Listening to Kitt and reading the transcription, I can't make out what she is saying but she makes everything sound so sexy and funny at the same time, adding yet another footnote to Philippine cultural and popular history. (*Inquirer.net*)



### LOOKING BACK

Ambeth Ocampo

### COMMENTARY

George M. Hizon

Looking back to the year 1887, one cannot help wonder why national hero Jose Rizal was considered Spain's greatest enemy in the Philippines. From the history books that we have read, Rizal was depicted as a mild-mannered gentleman, he was neither brash nor ill-tempered. Although he was an expert marksman and fencer, he neither held a gun nor brandished a sword against an enemy. Rizal was also described as remarkably educated, a genius as many had called him. He was a polyglot, one who could speak 10 or more languages. He knew 22, including the ancient languages of Sanskrit and Latin. He was also a polymath, one who is exemplary in so many skills and subjects. He was an excellent surgeon and a brilliant writer and poet. In 1887, he wrote the *Noli Me Tangere*. The clever use of wit and humor would have made the "Spanish" novel a bestseller during that period. It, however, depicted the abuses and corruption of the Spanish officials, as well as that of the friars, leading to its permanent censure. In 1891, the *Noli Me Tangere* was followed by an equally classic sequel, the *El Filibusterismo*. In the book, Rizal predicted that there would be a rebellion of "great magnitude." Rizal would pay dearly for his work—he was jailed in the Fort Santiago prison in 1892, from July 6 to July 15. He would ultimately spend the next four years of his life in exile in the faraway town of Dapitan, in the province of Zamboanga.

In August 1896, Rizal's prediction in the *El Filibusterismo* came true. Andres Bonifacio and his Katipuneros launched a full-scale rebellion, first attacking the Spanish polvorin at San Juan del Monte, in Manila. The accusing finger was quickly pointed by the Spaniards at Rizal as the main instigator of this rebellion. Rizal denied involvement, as he was already incarcerated in the last four years

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