

## God knows Hudas

As in other languages steeped in Christian culture, Judas in Filipino means the betrayer. It's the same in some other Philippine languages, too, like Binisaya. Judas is *traydor*, *taksil*, *hudas*.

That iconic sign inside the jeepney is both expression and commentary: "God knows Hudas not pay" is a warning, to those passengers who may be thinking of not paying the fare, and at the same time a winking denunciation of those who do not pay the right fare as cheats, traitors of a social contract, Judases.

And the pun is just the right touch of obvious. Often, the word as printed or embroidered is capitalized, so that its point is not lost: "God knows HUDAS not pay."

The way the story of Judas Iscariot is part of the everyday reality in the Philippines, we can almost make a case that the least of the apostles must have been Filipino. Not only is his name part of the language; his basic and most base act, the betrayal of Jesus, seems to be a daily burden.

At least this is what runs through my mind, when I see (or read about) audiences that still laugh at President Duterte's ugly, offensive jokes; about women he lusts for, journalists and human rights advocates and lawyers he detests, the Christian faith he mocks. It may be too much to expect members of the audience, especially officials of the government he leads, to walk out of the room—there is the possibility of being manhandled, or worse, by his security aides. But surely it is within the realm of the doable not to laugh, when the President makes yet another rape joke, or throws yet another crude insult, or launches yet another attack on the Church.

The surveys showed that a majority of



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JOHN NERY

Filipinos thought President Duterte was being vulgar when he called priests names and described the Christian God as "stupid." But we wouldn't have known it if we had judged only from the audience response at the time he spoke. If, as seems only likely, the audiences he spoke to reflected the national sentiment, but those same audiences still laughed at the "jokes" and applauded at the lines—then many in those audiences, sitting there before the President, must have betrayed their own sense of right and wrong.

When we act as the President's enablers, we too are Judases. We are traitors to ourselves.

**Who are the Judases of Philippine politics?**

**These days, when the talk turns to treason, the focus often falls on the Duterte administration's abject failure to stand up to Beijing. It is not so much the cowardice that is galling; rather, it is the craven calculation of the powers-that-be that offends public opinion.**

The President and his administration are quick to hurl insults at their perceived enemies: human rights monitors, members of the press, Western allies, the political opposition. But let China flex its muscles inside Philippine territory—and nothing, or next to nothing. What was it the former vice presidential candidate and foreign secretary said? We complain too much about China—exactly what an enabler, or a codependent, would say of an abusive relationship.

To be sure, betrayal of the public interest is not the monopoly of a government that seeks to change Philippine society on a fundamental level. But surely it is worth reflecting on, that when talk today turns to betrayals, to acts of treason, many Filipinos think of the Duterte administration's seeming complicity with Beijing.

Those who live by the survey, die by the survey. The same polls that show high public support for the President also show high (and since 2012, constant) support for a tougher Philippine stance against China. As far as the West Philippine Sea goes, a majority of Filipinos think the administration is not serving the public interest. The continuing "invasion" of Chinese workers into the Philippines—something even Senators Joel Villanueva and Nancy Binay have alerted the public to—will only deepen public dissatisfaction over China.

**God knows HUDAS not follow the Constitution.**

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### YOUNG BLOOD

## The myth of work-life balance

MARIEL BALITAO

Almost a decade into the workforce, I have come to the realization that I have wasted all those moments reciting the "work-life balance" mantra for all the times I felt guilty at having chosen anything else besides work.

Sure, most of us spend majority of our waking hours at work due to the nine-hour workday, including the extra hour for lunch break, plus give or take three hours in traffic for the commute to and from work.

It is impossible to not give priority to something that gives you sustenance, harnesses your skills and gives you the occasional ego boost for every job well done.

But remember, there shouldn't be a balance between life and work, because they are not coequals to begin with.

A job is a task or piece of work we are paid to do. Surveys reveal that people get jobs primarily for the money. A chosen few are lucky to be working just to pass time. Others would say they do it to earn back the years and effort spent in school.

Basically, people work to improve lives—their own and their family's, and perhaps that of the larger community.

But what happens to the life you wish to improve when you have no time to spend nourishing it, and the intangible things you need for a happy existence are ones you can't afford with your salary?

I used to take pride in being called a workaholic, punching in longer overtime hours than the number of man days required of me, or bringing work home to impress the boss who wouldn't even bat an eyelash if I resigned the next day.



**I USED TO TAKE PRIDE IN BEING CALLED A WORKAHOLIC, PUNCHING IN LONGER OVERTIME HOURS THAN THE NUMBER OF MAN DAYS REQUIRED OF ME, OR BRINGING WORK HOME TO IMPRESS THE BOSS WHO WOULDN'T EVEN BAT AN EYELASH IF I RESIGNED THE NEXT DAY**

In the process, I lost quite a lot of things—moments I could have spent with a dying family member, milestones achieved by younger siblings, friends who suddenly became strangers, potential lovers who left because I was "too busy," and maybe the most cliché of them all—myself.

I was too busy working that I forgot to take care of my internal self. I used my job and the demands that came with it as an excuse for an unhealthy lifestyle, along with increasingly bossy behavior and lousy relationships.

The reckoning happened after I got diagnosed with a

medical condition recently. I thought about what remains of my life, and how I intend to spend it prudently.

Of course, I shall remain faithful to my work ethic, as long as I can physically do so. I value the quality of work that I do, and that is never going to change.

I'll probably just set a mental alarm every time I time out that, although work ends daily, it gets to reset the next day. Something the time in my life won't have.

Work is just one of the many aspects of life. One of the many things we can spend our precious time on, like family, friendships, education, religion, romantic relationships, hobbies and other passions.

Since that eureka moment, I have been trying to make up for lost time by nurturing remaining relationships. I'm realizing that there are yet far too many things to learn to improve myself, and also a thousand and one ways to make other lives better, without slaving myself away.

Today, I vow to be more present where and when it matters. Because, after all, life is but borrowed time. We never know when it will be taken away from us, so better choose how to balance it. Yes, with work, but with everything else as well.

Mariel Balitao, 28, is a corporate slave turned government employee, with a degree in communication.

## Attention and the evil within

During a recent Sunday Mass, a group of young girls, perhaps not even in their teens, were taking a selfie even before the priest could give the final blessing.

There they were, but they were elsewhere.

In the same church, many years ago, I remember seeing a mother and her grown-up daughter holding hands, as the faithful are wont to do, when "The Lord's Prayer" is being sung or said. But then their faces were somewhere else—looking down at their phones held by their other hand.

Together they were, but so far apart from each other.

There they were, but they might as well have been elsewhere.

In the past years, whenever I conducted written exams in my philosophy classes, which always consisted of just one question, and which they were to answer in the form of an essay, more and more of my students turned in their papers after a mere 10 or 15 minutes, even if they had the entire period of either an hour or an hour-and-a-half to carefully craft essays that they could be proud of.

But it seemed they couldn't care less, and would turn in their papers just the same, even if all that they had managed to write was no more than two or three paragraphs that hardly engaged the matter at hand, sincerely and seriously. When I asked them why they did not use the whole period, they simply said there was really nothing more they could think of or write about. Then they walked out of the room, and you wondered what they were really in a rush to do.

I cannot but suspect that these incidents

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REMMON E. BARBAZA

are symptomatic of our time, marked as it is by our inability to linger, to tarry, to dwell on the matter at hand, to devote our attention to something that bids us to think, that invites us to engage in it with our whole being.

It is not really technology itself that is the problem, I suspect. It seems technology is merely a cover for our lack of courage to confront the restlessness within, or the boredom that is at bottom an invitation to transcend ourselves each time.

Simone Weil said that the sole purpose of studies is the development of the faculty of attention. It is the same attention that we exercise in prayer—or perhaps for those who do not believe in God, in our moments of reflection on things we hold sacred, things that are beyond our selves.

Weil also said that whatever it is in us that feels repelled by intellectual work is much more connected with evil than our avoidance of manual work. Thus, every time we exercise our faculty of attention, we destroy the evil in ourselves.

Could it be that behind all the hatred of our fellow human beings, behind all the violence we inflict on others, behind all the wars we wage that ravage the earth, behind all the destruction of our environment and our world—could it be that behind all these is our inability to exercise, if not our refusal to exercise, our faculty of attention?

Think of every great human being that ever lived on this earth, and you can be sure they exercised their faculty of attention to the highest degree. When Jesus was surrounded by a throng of people, He still managed to sense someone touching the hem of His cloak, a woman who was suffering from hemorrhage. "Who touched me?" He asked, and His disciples thought it was a foolish thing to ask. Unable to ignore the faith of the woman, Jesus turned around and healed her.

In contrast, think of any human being who had inflicted so much suffering on others, and you can be sure he thoroughly lacked the capacity for attention, and completely ignored the humanity of those right in front of him.

Does not respect (from the Latin *specere*, "to look") for others, as well as for our environment, mean, quite literally, to look back, to look again—that is to say, to devote our attention to others and the world around us? In turn, does not attention (from the Latin *tendere*, "to stretch") mean, quite literally, to stretch our hands, to reach out to others, to what lies before us?

We need not be anything other than who we already are.

We need not go anywhere, but simply dwell in the very place where we already are.

Alas, becoming who we already are and dwelling where we already are—these are the hardest things to "do," and the very ones we have yet to learn.

Remmon E. Barbaza is associate professor of philosophy at Ateneo de Manila University.

### MORE VOICES

The problem with the Philippines are Filipinos: the Filipinos who laugh at rape jokes, who applaud the killings, who threaten, insult and demonize the critical, who can't abide facts and are unteachable, and who elect the same monsters every three years  
Luis V. Teodoro, @luisteodoro

So why the sudden pivot of some people? Before scuffing at and belittling the arbitral tribunal's decision. Now, suddenly emphasizing its importance and significance. Before, pro-China. Now, singing a different tune. Maybe because of May 13?  
Gregorio Larrazabal@, @GoyYLarrazabal

Don't only stand for your rights, you have to exercise your rights—by voting in an election, by speaking out against the administration, and by marching on the streets to seek redress of grievance. If you don't exercise your rights, you will lose it.  
Legalist, @junjjayme165

## DO NOT GENERALIZE ABOUT MAINLAND CHINESE IN PH

I was recently mistaken for a Chinese national at our bazaar. The young man spoke to me in Mandarin, thinking I was from the mainland. He was very surprised when I spoke to him in fluent English, explaining that I am a Filipino. But that did not discourage him from pursuing a conversation with me and my partner. We were able to do this, thanks to the translator app in his smartphone.

At first, I was very suspicious of the man since I am very critical of how China has been treating the Philippines, not to mention the loud and rude behavior of some of his countrymen while based here in our country. At one point, I even asked him bluntly if he was a soldier. He denied this.

From our dialogue, he confided that he has been working in the Philippines for three years in an IT company. He also admitted that he is a Christian, making the sign of the Cross while divulging this information.

From there, our discussion covered the policies of China, which, according to him, were oppressive. With his consent, I took pictures of his responses and thoughts regarding his country's governance. I was not at all surprised about the intolerance of China toward other religions. In fact, some Catholic churches in China have been torn down while followers have been harrassed, persecuted, jailed and even tortured. That, he said, was one reason why he decided to

work here, because of the freedom to practice one's faith. He also found Filipinos very kind.

Was I taken for a ride? Was I gullible? Perhaps. I will never know, until circumstances prove otherwise. But I felt so ashamed for having been too critical of most Chinese from the mainland. It never occurred to me that, maybe, some of them saw an opportunity to flee their country because of its oppressive regime. It turns out we might have some things in common after all, aside from a shared ancient heritage. Lesson learned: Do not generalize.

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### LETTERS

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## IMPLEMENT 2015 ROADMAP ON EL NIÑO

INQUIRER'S editorial, "El Niño and the May polls" (4/8/19), was timely as the dry spell is again upon us. The 2015 Roadmap for Addressing the Impacts of El Niño (RAIN) is a commendable approach to mitigating the effects on the supply and prices of food. But the implementation of that roadmap was not consistent, as it depended on the local government units (LGUs) run by politicians whose priorities were elsewhere.

The implementation should be given to the Department of Public Works and Highways, which should build water impounding facilities in all provincial areas as part of the "Build, build, build" program. This function should never be given to LGUs and politicians, but rather to engineers. Our country should never have to experience any water crisis, if only our leaders would stop talking and start thinking more. Ask engineers from UP and other schools to initiate, plan and eventually implement RAIN.

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# Disinformation is not limited to digital

Today, “fake news” is often described or understood as digital. Even in Asia, the emphasis on digitally manipulated information, circulated through digital platforms like Facebook, for political gain or to profit from a digital gold rush, is a reflection of the times—and for good reason. Seven of the 20 countries with the fastest growth in absolute number of internet users, in We Are Social’s January 2019 report, are from Asia. India leads the world with an additional 97.8 million users; three members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations added over 30 million in one year (Indonesia, plus 17.3 million; the Philippines, plus 9 million; Cambodia, plus 4.5 million). China is second fastest in the world, with an additional 50.6 million users.

But it is crucial to pry one’s eyes away from the digital space long enough, to see that disinformation and its upstart spawn, “fake news,” do not need to inhabit the internet or submerge in social media to wreak consequential damage.

“If by ‘fake news’ we are talking about the distortion or the selective framing of facts, then I do not believe we are in new territory,” writes the Malaysian scholar Farish A. Noor. “There is a long history of this and it goes back to the beginning of the printing press and popular journalism in the nineteenth century.”

His instructive examples of deliberately slanted reporting, which “presented the non-Western Other in terms that were jaundiced or biased,” include the distortions and disinformation that justified the British role in the three Anglo-Burmese Wars between 1824 and 1885.

“Empires may have been built on information, but their power was often legitimized and reproduced through misinformation, distortion and outright lies as well. Again, the history of Southeast Asia is instructive here: when Britain turned its sights on Burma, the Kingdom of Burma was seen and cast in a decidedly negative



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JOHN NERY

light by colonial scholars and reporters.”

“News reports emerged and were circulated across the empire, about the alleged wrongdoings of the Burmese towards their own people and their neighbours. The popular theme at the time was the idea that Burma was a ‘belligerent power,’ bent on becoming a dangerous ‘Asiatic empire.’ Burma was referred to as ‘the Burman Empire’ in maps and news reports, though the fact was that the real empire was Britain, and it was Britain that posed an existential threat to Burma, as it spread its power across much of northern India.”

(Noor’s remarks at the Asian Journalism Forum in Singapore in 2007, on which his commentary on fake news was based, are even more pointed; among other qualities, they necessarily draw the disturbing parallels to the US-led invasion of Iraq.)

Another example of the use of disinformation by colonizing forces, which Noor also references: In the last years of the 19th century and the first years of the 20th, US newspapers deliberately mischaracterized Filipino revolutionaries and the revolutionary situation in the Philippines, helping create a climate of opinion in the United States that was favorable to colonial conquest and empire-building.

They were merely following the lead of an ambitious US government; President William McKinley’s infamous rationalization for the American takeover of the Philippines was based in part on two false “facts” with pernicious consequences: that Filipinos are “unfit for self-government,” and that “there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them.”

In reality, the Philippine revolutionary government was doing creditable work governing its territory, as the voluminous documents captured by the US Army proved; and the largely Catholic population was already Christianized. Spanish proselytizers arrived in the Philippines almost a hundred years before the Mayflower landed in Plymouth Rock.

[Excerpts from “Democratic Decay and Disinformation in the Digital Age,” an “issue briefer” I wrote for the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, available for free.]

**Here’s a recent example of nondigital disinformation, given at the ongoing 2nd Conference on Democracy and Disinformation, at the new University of the Philippines campus in Bonifacio Global City. Students from Xavier University in Cagayan de Oro who had gone on immersion in Bukidnon province a few weeks ago and were staging an exhibit of the photographs they had taken found themselves “Red-tagged” for no reason. Sheets of paper—old-fashioned paper—were distributed at the mall where the exhibit was being staged, anonymously accusing the students of being New People’s Army members, and of the exhibit as communist propaganda. Nothing could have been farther from the truth, but the lie came in nondigital form.**

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## YOUNG BLOOD

# From city lights to island life

ROMAR MIRANDA

The ground beneath me felt like it shifted six ways from Sunday. A shot of cold sensation went straight up my spine, and I was on the brink of passing out. Gladly, I didn’t. I made my way to the office and headed straight to the clinic, fearing I might be having a stroke. I was 25. This couldn’t be a stroke.

Our company doctor ruled out stroke and heart attack because my vitals were stable. I felt relieved, until I overheard him talking to the EMT, sending me off to the hospital with a recommendation: possible nervous breakdown and/or anxiety. Clearly, he doesn’t know what he’s talking about, I said to myself. I am fine, it’s probably just the heat or something. At this point, you may possibly have an idea what the findings were, so I am just going to let your thoughts run wild on the diagnosis.

For one year and seven months after the incident, I religiously took my Zolodin and went to my therapy sessions. I kept going forward, but I felt like it did not amount to anything at all. That’s when I decided to leave everything behind and go home to Palawan—plant crops, teach yoga, sell produce at weekly weekend markets, or something. So I did.

People often complain about their awful work on social media—the grueling hours, the relentless workload, the unyielding and painful commute—everything. We often look forward to long weekends where we can make a quick trip to the beach. Oftentimes, it becomes our routine—work, travel, then go back to work to complain about work and contemplate about living the island life where you can live near the beach, teach kids and do volunteer work, go on early morning runs on the shoreline, and plant your own produce.

Island living is what so many corporate slaves crave for, and I am here to tell you exactly what to expect the moment you leave the weirdly comforting city lights. The most exciting part about this crazy idea is packing. You pack your entire life from the city and you stand in your empty apartment while staring at the pile of boxes of stuff—work clothes, documents (lots of documents!), utensils and supplies, furniture, mementos. Then ask yourself, “Is this what my worth is?” You would probably feel ecstatic thinking you’re taking off the capitalist leash. You would feel free. Finally.

The second best thing is when the plane lands and you smell a hint of peace—just for a brief moment. Everything after that is panic. For several nights, there will be nothing but restless nights and endless thoughts of self-doubt. This is going to eat you up and make you question your entire plan and life choices.

Three weeks after my return to Palawan, I woke up late in the morning craving for a Starbucks iced latte and a blueberry muffin. My body immediately went into panic mode, and I texted all my closest friends to send me my cravings via LBC. If they made it in time before the cut-off, I would still have my coffee and muffin the next day. We can all agree this was a stupid idea.

I managed to check all the marks on my plan. I did raise my own produce. I did volunteer. I did do yoga. I did run on the shoreline in the early morning.

I did not get the feeling I was hoping for, though. It felt forced. Suddenly, I found myself identifying all over again with that broken corporate slave that I used to be. It didn’t make rational sense because our lives couldn’t have been more different, until I realized that we were still the same at the core—stuck to a routine. Now on completely opposite environments, but the same, nonetheless.

That’s when you would think that your calculations might have missed some marks—the variable of feelings in the whole equation. Before we go on a wrong turn and everything goes dark, I want to assure you that everything will be okay. The shadow of doubt will continuously follow you like a cloud above your head, and that’s okay. A little doubt is good. It makes you reevaluate your life choices and remind you that feelings can never be forced. That actions and thoughts can be adjusted, but your feelings might take a while to catch up.

It took me almost half a year before I was desensitized to that feeling. As corporate slaves, we’re used to tension, stress and inconvenience. And that’s the most important thing I want to warn you about. The transition phase from the concrete jungle to island living is oftentimes not pretty. There will be a roller-coaster of emotions, mostly self-doubt, but continue to breathe and chase the sun. I promise, in the end, it will be glorious.

Romar Miranda, 26, is a former corporate communications coach who recently moved back home to Palawan.

# Alternatives to water privatization

In 1997, the Philippine government privatized the operations of its publicly-owned water service provider for Metro Manila. The aim was to reduce government’s role in the provision of public services. Two decades later, however, the goals of Philippine water privatization continue to fall short of its promises, to the detriment of consumers (See “Water privatization has not delivered,” Opinion, 3/14/19).

The Philippine experience is mirrored in the experiences of other countries. This has led to initiatives for alternatives to water privatization by citizens’ movements and local governments, to bring back ownership and control of water services to the public sector and guided by the principle that access to water is a human right, rather than a market transaction driven by the corporate profit motive.

The Philippine situation reflects the state of water privatization around the world. In fact, however, public delivery of water services remains a viable and sustainable form of public service. Balanya et al. (2005) document successful cases of people-centered participatory public models of water services in Latin America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and the United States. Dargantes, Batistel and Manahan (2012) surveyed public sector water service delivery in Southeast Asia, South Asia, East Asia and Central Asia covering 646 listed water utilities servicing 10 million people. Kishimoto, Petitjean and Steinfort (2017) reported initiatives to reverse the privatization process in 45 countries.

The following alternatives to water

## COMMENTARY

EDUARDO C. TADEM

AND TERESA S. ENCARNACION TADEM

privatization thus arise:

**Public/nonprofit partnerships (PuNPP).** In PuNPPs, “one or more public sector agency works with one or more civil society or community-based organization to deliver water services.” The joint management between local communities and the water utility is “based on equity, resource management, reduction of water consumption, improvement of reliability, and reduction in operating and maintenance costs.”

**Public-Public partnerships (PuP).** This involves collaboration among public sector agencies in collectively developing performance benchmarks, implementing tertiary-level treatment of wastewater and reducing demand for piped water, use of excess water, and access to other water sources such as natural springs.

**Single nonprofit agencies (SiNPs).** Some NGOs, acting as SiNPs, “have the capacity to develop noncommercialized water systems” by establishing water harvesting structures and check dams using an integrated water resources management approach, water system improvement, and securing dependable water supply from third-party bulk providers.

**Deprivatization and/or remunicipalization.** A popular alternative is deprivatization and/or remunicipalization—that is,

returning public services back to government. This involves public ownership, public management and democratic control that is transparent and accountable. There have been 835 successful remunicipalization cases in 45 countries, of which 267 were in the water sector in 37 countries, benefiting more than 100 million people.

The above experiences show existing and viable public ownership of water services and success in preventing privatization. The key is cooperation between citizens’ movements, public officials, water service workers and communities, and guided by the values of participation, empowerment, equity, accountability, quality or safety, efficiency, transparency, solidarity and replicability.

Eduardo C. Tadem, PhD, is convenor, Program on Alternative Development, University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS) and retired professor of Asian Studies, University of the Philippines Diliman. Teresa S. Encarnacion Tadem, PhD, is professor of political science, UP Diliman and executive director, UP CIDS. This commentary is excerpted from a research study of UP CIDS, the Department of the Interior and Local Government-National Capital Region (DILG-NCR) and the Office of the Quezon City Mayor on “The Administrative Region of the Republic of the Philippines: A Study on the Implications of Federalism in the National Capital Region and Considerations for Forming the Federal Administrative Region.” The project is funded by DILG-NCR.



## MORE VOICES

Isn’t it strange that people supporting the admin keep on sharing fake news and information from known fake news peddlers and they don’t even question authenticity and validity. Also, they ask for higher standards from opposition yet they accept the trash that’s the incumbent?  
**Patrick, @patriciolicious**

A government that sees “enemies” everywhere is not a secure government. Think of the person you know—there’s always that one person—who always sees themselves as the victim of some enemy. Now give that person a military & all your taxes.  
**#tamana #sobrana @amyslayer**

You may choose to [dis]agree with the political stand of Regine or Lea, but do so because you [dis]agree with their idea. Not because they are singers. For crying out loud, many people in showbiz are more intelligent than some other professionals.  
**Gideon V. Peña, @gideonpena**

## CYBERCRIME LIBEL LAW NOT THAT CLEAR

THE new Congress should observe the constitutional requirement that a bill “shall embrace only one subject which shall be expressed in [its] title,” such as by increasing the penalty for libel, reversing the humane libertarian trend in recent Supreme Court decisions of no jail time for defamers, only fines and damages.

Republic Act No. 10175, “An Act Defining Cybercrime, Providing for the Prevention, Investigation, Suppression and the Imposition of Penalties, Therefor...” to me, did not alert the community that what was merely fined before, as a practical matter, could

now mean a nonprobationable penalty of at least six years and one day.

The title should have included language imposing a more severe punishment for libel. In the case of Maria Ressa, the rider is the new weapon used to stifle effective criticism or dissent. Had Rappler been in praise of the regime, the law would not have been applied with an evil eye and an unequal hand against one not brown-nosing the regime.

The new law repudiated the humane libertarian tendency of the Supreme Court not to impose jail time, which is as it should be.

Speech is not criminalized in many advanced jurisdictions. And cyberspace, millions of us do not stay or stray in, unlike radio-TV and the printed media. So, why treat cybercrime defamation more harshly when much of the community at large may not know of the defamation? Or smaller than those who get their news from radio-TV and the printed media? No equal protection.

We are in decay, which Digong should arrest by being more liberal with critics who all share his love of country.

**R. A. V. SAGUISAG, Palanan, Makati City**

## NOT TOO LATE?

IT seems the efficacy of our hard-earned victory at The Hague suffered tremendously.

It could have impacted more forcefully and gained worldwide acceptance and collective support had President Duterte given top priority to the decision as soon as he took office, instead of conjuring the likelihood of war if we allowed the verdict to take its course, and then shelving it in the hope of getting better trade relations with China.

Mr. Duterte’s diplomatic gambit at first seemed to have somewhat appeased the already souring relations between the two countries; we were lulled into thinking that by putting the decision aside, everything in the West Philippine Sea would become fine.

Thus, in just one blink, we saw the sad spectacle of hundreds of Chinese vessels swarming our Pag-asa backyard.

Faced with the public’s seething resentment over the Chinese incursion, the government is taking a different tack: invoking The Hague decision. It now seems hell-bent on flexing its muscles, moral or otherwise; it now openly declares that Chinese actions are clear violations of our country’s sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction.

The flexing may not be too late; it shows Filipinos can muster enough courage to stand up to anything when under threat.

**BENJIE GUERRERO, attybenjie@gmail.com**

### LETTERS

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## Locsin and other small men

When 22 Filipino fishermen almost died at sea after a Chinese vessel rammed their boat inside the West Philippine Sea on June 9, the initial reaction of the strutting, slur-happy, jetski-riding officials of the pugnacious Duterte administration was either to (a) doubt the fishermen or (b) do nothing.

This was a big scandal—the first time that China has sunk a Filipino fishing boat since the maritime disputes in the Spratlys began, the most violent act since China refused to honor a three-party agreement in 2012 to withdraw vessels from Panatag, or Scarborough Shoal, certainly the largest Chinese provocation since the arbitral tribunal ruled in favor of the Philippines in 2016. And what did the officials who like to talk tough and dirty, to talk a big game, do? They acted small.

The country needed forthright voices to denounce the deliberate sinking of the boat and the calculated abandonment of the fishermen; the nation needed defenders, not necessarily to stand tall against the Chinese bully, but simply to make a stand. Instead, we got Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr., who despite all his customary bluster is actually a small man, physically, and acts small, figuratively.

Among his first contributions to the lame government response was to suggest, out of the ocean blue, that the sinking of FB Gem-Vir 1 was not a collision, but an allusion. He tweeted: “It’s presumably an ‘allusion’ or bumping of two vessels one of which was stationary. Ramming is another thing altogether requiring proof of intentionality.” This was supposed to be a display of easy erudition, I guess, but its net effect was to suggest a way out for the Chinese. He has since, he said, “fired off” a diplomatic protest, but he responded to the Chinese Embassy’s entirely noncredible press statement with an apparent open-mindedness



### NEWSSTAND

JOHN NERY

he does not bestow on long-standing Philippine allies or ordinary Filipinos.

“Interesting. That’s China’s take and it is a free world; it can say anything it wants. We say what we want because it is a free world for us too; but in our case we speak from the law of the sea. But still everyone’s free.” Quick to take offense from other Filipinos who call him out on Twitter (hey, it’s a free world), but when the Chinese embassy releases an insulting version of events that alleges the presence of other Filipino fishing boats, with the Chinese captain feeling “besieged,” all this Twitter bully who freely insults people can manage is “Interesting.”

It is certainly of interest to Filipino citizens to know who exactly Locsin represents. A foreign secretary who says “Fuck the international community” does not truly represent the country who was present at the creation of that community.

Presidential spokesperson Salvador Panelo is another man who acted small when the country needed defenders. He was, in the first place, never a credible spokesperson for the President; the presidential palace mistakes his capacity to string words together like a lawyer as an effective substi-

tute for policy explanation. As I have said elsewhere, between the President and his spokesperson, we can see the difference between a bullshit artist and a bullshitter. Panelo says things which, like the Chinese embassy statement, no reasonable person would believe: “The President does not lie.” “The President is a cautious man.” “The President makes calibrated statements.”

His statements on the ramming have been dictated by two needs: to offer an out for President Duterte, from whom we have not heard a word, and to not offend Beijing. Indeed, his declaration that the presidential Palace is waiting for the Chinese investigation to be completed raises the question: Who is this spokesperson speaking for?

But the President himself has remained silent—nine days after the ramming took place (on Philippine-Chinese Friendship Day, thank you very much), and six days after it first came to light with a forthright, indignant statement from Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana. Panelo says the President is only “waiting for the facts to set in” (a curious choice of words, as though facts were malleable and needed time to fix)—but this is the same President who has threatened to go to war against Canada over trash, and spoken intemperately about the United States.

The basic facts are clear, and even admitted by Beijing. A Filipino fishing boat was rammed by a Chinese vessel. This happened near Recto, or Reed Bank, in the country’s exclusive economic zone. The fishermen were abandoned at sea (regardless of what the embassy statement said, it admits as much). Vietnamese fishermen rescued them. So what is the President and his tough-talking officials waiting for? Each day that passes reveals just how small they really are.

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### YOUNG BLOOD

## Acting like the boss

KNULP ASEO

Do you remember the tagline, “*Kayo ang boss ko*”? I remember. It was 2010, I was just a sophomore in high school when Benigno Aquino III, more popularly known as “Noynoy,” won the presidential elections.

It was an optimistic time. I was young, but I remember that people were hopeful for change, as they usually are during a presidential election year. It was in this atmosphere of optimism that, with much fanfare, P-Noy declared during his inauguration: “*Kayo ang boss ko!*” We cheered. We hoped.

I remember, everybody repeated that phrase so many times that it became a mantra. A collective prayer that this administration would finally change the country’s political culture and create a more people-oriented government.

But within the next six years that mantra, so full of the hopes and aspirations of millions of Filipinos, became just another campaign slogan, a vessel for broken promises and unanswered prayers.

We always point to that quote from P-Noy as a symbol of our politicians’ penchant for arousing hope and then crushing it beneath the reality of their policies.

But I think there is another layer to that phrase that we seem to be forgetting—our role as the bosses. We seem to forget that bosses also have a responsibility to their organizations. They aren’t supposed to just sit back and relax as their employees do the work for them. Bosses are expected to actively manage their organization, most especially their employees.

Yes, politicians are mostly to blame for the inadequacies and inefficiencies of government, but as their bosses, we are equally to blame for the failures of the government.

In any good organization, accountability always starts at the top. The boss is always accountable for the actions of his workers. So if an organization’s employees are inefficient, lazy and corrupt, the blame is put on the boss as well for not managing them well.

The same goes for the country. Sure, P-Noy said we were his bosses, but did we really live up to that job?

If we truly want to be considered the bosses of this country, we need to act like it. As we millennials say, “you gotta own it.” *Angkinin mo na*. Stop the blame-shifting, and start being accountable.

So how can we become accountable? Well, most obviously, through the vote. Just as corporate bosses fire incompetent and corrupt employees, so should we.

Corrupt politicians always try to push the boundaries of what they can do without getting kicked out of office. It’s true everywhere. The difference is, those boundaries are just slightly different from place to place. In the Philippines, we’re just way more tolerant of criminal acts in public office.

There is only one thing that drives politicians, and that is staying in power. In our country, politicians are so empowered to do criminal acts while in office because they know they can do so with impunity. Even if they get caught, charged and, heck, even imprisoned, they know a political comeback is always in the horizon. They just need to know what’s trending with the masses.

Accountability starts with us, the voters. We are supposed to be the threat that keeps politicians in place, the bogeyman that keeps them awake at night, the micromanaging bosses that watch their every move.

They should know that if ever they betray the public’s trust, there will be repercussions. Maybe not in the form of trials and court cases, but through the loss of votes. We must let them know that they are dealing with strict and demanding bosses, and if ever they screw up, they will be kicked out of office.

Hell hath no fury like a voter scorned.

I suppose this call to action is a little bit late for this year’s elections, and a little bit too early for the next one. So take this as an excuse to reflect on our voting habits. A lot of what I’m saying here we already know. We need to stop taking our responsibility for granted. We need to let our voices be heard in saying that enough is enough. It’s time for change.

As Dr. Jose Rizal so elegantly noted, “There are no tyrants where there are no slaves.”

Knulp Aseo, 21, is a graduate of the University of the Philippines Diliman and currently works in government.

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If you are sending your contributions by e-mail, please address it to youngblood@inquirer.com.ph together with your address and information about your age and the school, course and year you’re enrolled in or if employed, the position you’re holding and the company you work with.

## A dark reality for Filipino children

Still euphoric over the previous day’s outing to the mall, May, a 10-year-old girl, is awakened by the sharp nudges of Mercy, her 24-year-old mother, at 5 o’clock in the morning. She adjusts her eyes to the dark room lit by the computer screen.

“*Maghahanda na po, ma* (I will get ready now, mom),” she responds. As she gets up from their futon bed, she is careful not to awaken her younger sister, so she tiptoes around the laptop, careful not to trip at the power cord. As she splashes her face with cold water, a sense of dread descends when she remembers that today she would perform another sex show for Joe—a 50-year-old white man living in a Western country.

Shocking as it seems, May’s experience is by no means isolated. In 2014, the Department of Justice (DOJ) received 1,000 referrals each month of online sexual exploitation of children (Osec)—or the livestreaming of sexual exploitation of children through the internet. In the first four months of 2015, the cases doubled to more than 2,000 monthly cases all over the Philippines. With the internet becoming more widespread, this upward trend is only expected to continue unless critical government intervention is made.

To understand the problem, we need to look at the mechanisms of Osec, and the profile both of the victims and perpetrators. Osec usually involves a foreign customer based in another country, a Filipino facilitator who has access to children, and the children themselves. In exchange for payment, the facilitator offers the live sexual exploitation of a child to the customer, who is actively prowling the internet for children.

Facilitators are economically motivated, but like Mercy, many start off with what they thought would be a romantic re-

### COMMENTARY

GIDEON CAUTON AND GIDEON LASCO

lationship with the foreign customer. In Mercy’s case, what she thought was true love from Joe turned into a pay-per-view transaction for online sex shows.

Such acts are punishable under a myriad of laws protecting the rights of children. Foremost of these is Republic Act No. 10364, the Expanded Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2012. However, what makes Osec particularly difficult is that, per available data from International Justice Mission, almost 60 percent of these facilitators are the victims’ parents, relatives, close friends or neighbors.

More than half of the victims rescued are 12 years old or younger; the youngest thus far is a 2-month-old baby. Sometimes, children are made to perform sexual acts with their parents or siblings. As with other forms of child sexual abuse, Osec can lead to physical and mental health issues, difficult sexual adjustment later on, and lifelong trauma.

Surely, many would find it difficult to believe that parents can do this form of violence to their children. The shocking nature of this reality, however, should not lead to denial. While, to their credit, various law enforcement agencies are already working on this issue (and also coordinating with foreign governments to deal with the all-important demand side), a more coordinated and collaborative public justice response is needed, with a victim-centric approach at its core.

Specifically, we need more officers assigned at the Philippine National Police

Women and Children Protection Center and at the National Bureau of Investigation Anti-Human Trafficking in Persons Division exclusively investigating Osec cases. These operational units need to be properly resourced. Collaborative initiatives between these units and foreign law enforcement such as the Philippine Internet Crimes Against Children Center, envisioned to be a center of excellence for combating Osec, need to be strengthened.

Similarly, strategic investments should be done with prosecution development in the DOJ and aftercare development in the Department of Social Welfare and Development. Crucially, measures should be explored to minimize the trauma of the victims at every stage of the process, and to understand the socioeconomic contexts that inform these practices and the “local moral worlds” that surround them.

Finally, we need to raise public awareness on this matter, in a way that does not lead to a “moral panic” but to a moral response, which can then lead to stronger action from other sectors—the academe and the media, religious and civic groups, nongovernment organizations and local government units.

Everyday, thousands of Filipino children suffer sexual violence at the hands of the very persons who are supposed to care for them. This is a dark reality the country must acknowledge and act on, now.

Gideon Cauton, a lawyer, is the director of investigations and law enforcement development at International Justice Mission, a nonprofit organization focused on human rights, law and law enforcement. Gideon Lasco, MD, Ph. D. is an Inquirer columnist and medical anthropologist.

### MORE VOICES

It is an absolute shame that the most powerful man in the country has failed to protect and take a stand for our most vulnerable.  
Nathania, @PilosophoTanya

You know what’s the other result of the Duterte government’s unresponsiveness to China aggression? Some Filipinos’ misplaced hatred of the ordinary Chinese. A gov’t calibrated response to China would have tempered this, and directed Filipinos to what the real problem is.  
@prinzmagtulis

I look to HongKong, and to the Filipino fishermen, for hope and inspiration today. The people have a voice. They have the power.  
@chiarazambrano

Naiinggit ako sa mga mamamayan ng Hongkong. Haay. Ang hirap maging Pilipino sa panahon ngayon.  
Bodjie F. Pascua, @owlinthemoon

### STAND UP FOR FILIPINO FISHERMEN

IT is distressing that the Filipino fishermen were left in trauma after the ramming incident in Recto Bank in the West Philippine Sea. I do not understand why, until today, the old man in Malacañang has not said a word.

It’s as if it’s hard for him to make a statement, despite knowing that 22 Filipinos almost died in the incident that happened within Philippine territory.

Why do most supporters of President Duterte blame the fishermen? Why is it so hard for them to stand up for fellow Fil-

ipinos against Chinese bullying? It is not just bullying; ramming the boat is another thing altogether, because it is their livelihood. No one in their right mind will disturb them at sea and leave them hanging.

But then, what do we expect from China? This is not something new and I am not surprised, to be honest. However, my heart bleeds for the ordinary Juan who just wants to live a simple life, but is disrupted by these greedy people.

REGINE AGAPAY,  
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### TO UNIFORMED PERSONNEL: BE FRUGAL WITH PUBLIC FUNDS

THE print media carried news on June 14 that President Duterte has signed Joint Resolution No. 1, which provides for a substantial increase in the pension of some 220,000 retirees. The active members of the MUPs (military and uniformed personnel), sooner or later, will also benefit from this resolution.

Sen. Panfilo Lacson extended a lifetime thank you to the President on our behalf. Yours truly, having been a senior officer of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, wishes to say the same, but our best way to thank the President is for us to

urge those in the active service to be true to their oath of office and utilize their budgets frugally and judiciously.

This reminds me of the time when our big brother, Fidel V. Ramos, led the AFP. We would go out and jog, which was often, and had only two pieces of *pandesal*, a boiled egg and coffee for breakfast.

On his visits to military units around the country, meals were ordinary. If the AFP sponsored a golf game, which he did during meetings with foreign military guests, he did not want golf balls to be

given free. Frugality was his virtue, which the current President desires from among all government personnel.

Today, the President is sad because of the rampant corruption in his administration and the misuse of public funds. It is best, therefore, to express our gratitude to the President by urging all MUPs to be honest in their jobs, frugal in spending public funds and being true to their oath of office.

LT. GEN. ANTONIO E. SOTELO (RET.),  
Muntinlupa City

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### LETTERS

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