Bonifacio's bolo: 'Sangbartolome'



LOOKING BACK

AMBETH R. OCAMPO

Last Sunday, I went on a road trip covering Valenzuela, Pampanga, and Bulacan, tracing the footsteps of men who figured in the birth of the nation. Over 14 hours spent in a moving van, with short stops to document: the grave of Pio Valenzuela, the home of Mariano Ponce, and the birthplaces of Marcelo H. del Pilar and Gregorio del Pilar. We visited old churches where I read history off tombstones on the walls or on the floor.

Documenting almost a dozen historical markers scattered around Barasoain church inspired more questions than answers. Why do our textbooks refer to the Malolos Republic? Should it be the Barasoain or Bulacan Republic instead? Was Malolos chosen because the church was the "*presidencia*," the site of Emilio Aguinaldo's home and headquarters? The town was groaning with history, and as we navigated the narrow and crowded Malolos streets going toward Marcelo del Pilar's birthplace, Ian Alfonso of the National Historical Commission pointed out the sites of the different government departments. None of these sites had structures dating from the revolutionary period or earlier. Antonio Luna's former office is now a gasoline station.

It was a tiring day that ended with a stop in front of a well-lighted barangay hall off Edsa. Frankly, all I looked forward to at that point was a hot shower and bedtime. I was too polite to say I was not in the mood for yet another historical marker, but I am glad I walked to Barangay Apolonio Samson, District 3, Quezon City to see white squat memorial erected in 1917, hidden behind a parked ambulance, on it was a marble tablet that read: "Sa pook na ito ipinasiya ng K.K.K.N.M.A.N.B. ang panghihimagsik noong ika 23 ng Agosto ng 1896." This site perked me up: It is one of the contested sites for the so-called "First Cry" of the Philippine Revolution, officially declared in 1963 to have happened on another date, Aug. 26, 1896. And another place, Pugad Lawin. All this went against half a century of tradition that remembered and cherished the "Cry of Balintawak."

Historians have gone through the sources many times over and, basically, these are the "facts" from various sources: For prewar historian Leandro H. Fernandez, the place is Balintawak, the date Aug. 20, 1896. For Pio Valenzuela, it is Pugad Lawin, Aug. 23, 1896. For Spanish lieutenant Olegario Diaz, it is Balintawak, Aug. 24, 1896. For Santiago Alvarez, revolutionary general who went under the name "Apoy," it is Bahay Toro, Aug. 25, 1896. For Gregoria de Jesus, "Lakambini" or muse of the Katipunan and wife of Andres Bonifacio, it is Pasong Tamo, Aug. 25, 1896. A historical marker plots the place as Kangkong and the date Aug. 26, 1896. Historian Milagros C. Guerrero said the event happened on Tandang Sora's farm in what is now Gulod, Barangay Banlat, Quezon City. One historian, in a 1996 forum, proposed a wildcard date: Sept. 5, 1896!

One could say that too many cooks spoil the broth, and it was only the historian Teodoro M. Kalaw who embraced all of the above dates by stating that the revolution sparked in Balintawak, "during the last days of August 1896." Is this the reason why National Heroes Day is not specific, but changes each year depending on the date of the last Sunday in August? Is National Heroes Day pegged to the Cry of Balintawak or the disastrous Battle of Pinaglabanan that, contrary to popular belief, led to a loss for the Katipuneros? I have said this many times before, that if you plot all the contested sites mentioned on a 19th-century map, you will find them all in the area once known as Balintawak. Things became complicated later by the fluid modern boundaries of Caloocan and Quezon City.

A postscript to this historiographical debate was contributed by Ramon Lucas, whose family runs the historic Rufina Patis factory in Malabon. During the recent town fiesta, Aug. 24, he bought me a "*sangbartolome*," the type of bolo used by Andres Bonifacio. It is said that on his way to Balintawak on Aug. 23, 1896, Bonifacio was challenged at checkpoints for carrying a bladed weapon. He was waved through after saying he was attending the Malabon fiesta of San Bartolome. Thus, Malabon's contribution to Philippine history is not just *pancit, patis,* and *pichi-pichi* but Bonifacio's iconic bolo.

Comments are welcome at aocampo@ateneo.edu

Health messaging in the disinformation age

WORLD VIEW

WILLIAM A. HASELTINE

As the director of the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Rochelle Walensky recently acknowledged that poor public health communication and messaging throughout the COVID-19 pandemic has damaged the public's trust in health agencies and institutions. This, in turn, contributed to well-known problems, such as vaccine hesitancy, noncompliance with mask recommendations and other protective measures, and general misinformation about the virus and how it is transmitted.

According to a 2021 poll from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, the positive ratings of the public health system declined from 43 percent to 34 percent between 2009 and 2021.

Clearly, public health agencies need to win back the public's trust—not just to combat crises like COVID-19 and monkeypox, but also to address a wider range of ongoing health issues.

Public health officials must often base their recommendations on incomplete data; as the data evolve, so will the recommendations. However, in a misguided effort to appear authoritative, public health officials are rarely transparent about the nuances and fluid nature of what they are communicating.

A perfect example is the early advice on how SARS-CoV-2 is transmitted. The CDC was adamant that the coronavirus was spreading on surfaces and not through the air, rather than acknowledging that airborne transmission was still a strong possibility. This approach bred confusion and distrust, because the CDC eventually had to change its advice. After acknowledging that SARS-CoV-2 was spreading through droplets, it finally also conceded that it was spreading through aerosol particles.

As this example shows, credibility often gets confused with infallibility, resulting in public health officials being slow to admit mistakes—further undermining their credibility. Transparency is key, especially at a time when peddlers of online misinformation will seize every opportunity to discredit public health officials. Successful public health communication establishes credibility by being effective, not by being unchanging.

Another cornerstone of sound communication is clarity. Public health officials must explain how data and recommendations relate to people's everyday lives. Whether the information is correct or incorrect is a moot question if the public doesn't understand what is being communicated.

Here, US officials failed the messaging test again when they did not make clear that the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines was measured by hospitalizations, not infections. The public believed that vaccines would block transmission and infection. Instead, health experts could have emphasized how much the vaccines reduce the burden on hospitals. So when the Delta and Omicron variants emerged and caused breakthrough infections to surge, distrust and "booster shot fatigue" duly followed. As of Aug. 3, only 32 percent of Americans had received their first booster shot.

Many public health officials have been committing the same grave error by stigmatizing monkeypox as a disease that only threatens gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men. Yet while it is true that this population has been disproportionately affected by the current outbreak, monkeypox can be transmitted in any situation where there is close skin-to-skin contact with lesions.

By depicting monkeypox as a sexually transmitted infection, health officials could give people the false impression that they are not at risk, preventing them from seeking a diagnosis or isolating if they do contract the virus. The situation is similar to the (incorrect) early messaging about HIV/AIDS spreading only among homosexuals.

More broadly, public health messages are best understood and most likely to be believed when they come from trusted individuals within the communities that need to be reached. The messenger is often as important as the message, especially in communities where structural racism and historical traumas have left people disinclined to trust medical authorities.

Rather than issuing authoritative statements and assuming they will be heeded, health officials should think of their messaging as being part of an inclusive conversation. They should seek out community voices and trusted advocates, such as faith leaders, to collaborate on messaging and reaching populations that may be vulnerable to health disparities.

The current climate of "alternative facts" and rampant disinformation presents many challenges to effective public health communication. But by learning from past mistakes and developing messages that are clear, inclusive, and conveyed by the right sources, we can start the difficult but necessary process of rebuilding trust in public health agencies before the next big crisis strikes. **Project Syndicate**

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YOUNGBLOOD

The cubicle

MIKAELA GABRIELLE DE CASTRO

Back in high school, I took hating the first day of school to another level, by locking myself in a washroom cubicle in the morning before classes started. May it be the fear of new teachers, mean classmates, or being alone—I just traditionally cried on this day every year. So when the first day of senior high came, I braced myself for more breakdowns because I couldn't bear to be separated from my small circle of tight-knit friends.

Most of them ventured into STEM or ABM, while I was the only one who stayed in HUMSS. It was a routine to follow where my friends went, and what choice they wanted, even though I didn't really want the same thing. So this was a refreshing decision.

When I opened the door of my section on the first day of 11th grade, I felt like a lost bunny who accidentally ended up in a lion's den. Huddled in circles or sitting nimbly in their seats were the popular honor students, debate kids, and overachievers, with their intimidating energy filling out the room.

And there I was, who chose this strand simply because I liked to write and speak occasionally. In the first week of school, I let the merriment of the classroom's noise consume me from afar, juxtaposing my loneliness. I pretended to be busy or sleepy by rewriting my pretty notes.

Days passed and I found myself accompanying the noise of my classmates: sharing laughs with my seatmates, gushing over the wisdom of my teachers, crying to movies as a class, befriending these all-star students who were just as fun without their stereotypes.

Eventually, I became part of a new *barkada*. We spoke a language only we could understand, treated daily sociopolitical issues and cultural criticism as part of our normal conversations, and enthusiastically supported each other's hobbies and gigs.

Before I knew it, dismissal time became fun. It was no longer just a breather. The bus port looked colorful when my new friends and I held onto our food cups for dear life and laughed over the sleazy canteen smell on our white blouses. It was beginning to become a comfortable ride back home and I smiled like a fool.

I started using the jam-packed shortcuts to the classroom again. I stopped going to the preschool washroom too.

If you ask my old friends what I used to be like, they'd paint you an image of a shy and laidback student who only raved over boys, hangouts, and froze like a deer in headlights when asked to recite. Now, they like to joke about how political and serious I became ever since I fully set foot in HUMSS.

On the one hand, my current friends and peers perceive me as an obsessed academic who loves to recite in every class, is the first one to complete her part, asks for a word count extension, and leads in almost every group.

I became a perfectionist who desperately sought validation in my school and org roles; editorialized and romanticized productivity with every chance I had, while ensuring I looked effortless in achieving them.

I realized that, at times, I was simply a performative social justice warrior. It was not enough to be book-smart, morally correct, or have strong opinions. Putting social sciences into practice should not revolve around oneself but for the common good, the ordinary lives and faces we see on ground.

I'd be lying if I said I'm still the same person I was before entering HUMSS after viewing human behavior and structures from different and broader angles. I formed an existential love-hate relationship with contradictions, writing multiple essays on hustle culture and capitalism, while still being an active yet chained participant under them.

My experience as a HUMSS student in an all-girls Catholic school is nothing short of a life-changing chapter in my life. It pulled me from my echo chambers, opening my eyes to see beneath the surface in countless ways. But even if this change is an uncomfortable and frightening process, it symbolizes how far I've come.

The thought-provoking immersions, the presentations, the nerve-wracking essays on the chairness of a chair, and debates with Christian religion teachers, among many others, molded my deeper sense of empathy.

The rest of the world increasingly presents us with more reasons to pack it up and not even try anymore. But there will always be more reasons to stand and speak up for those who can't. So much premium is put on mathematics and the sciences. But there should also be as much dedication and care for the humanities and the social sciences. After all, they're the foundation of everything we live for.

We ended our final year in high school by giving speeches in homeroom class. When it was my turn, I cried once again and expressed that I was indebted to the amazing women and teachers of HUMSS who danced into my life. Words can't do justice to how much I owe them.

But most of all, I thanked them for helping my inner child in that narrow washroom cubicle blossom into a passionate and headstrong person just like them.

For now, I'll pat myself on the back for ticking the HUMSS option on that fateful day of March and carrying on my classmates' and teachers' empowering lessons in navigating this ugly and beautiful world.

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LETTERS

FIGHTING CORRUPTION: LET US BECOME HERACLES TO OVERCOME MULTIHEADED MONSTER

I THANK Mr. Marvel Tan for his article contribution published in the Philippine Daily Inquirer, titled "Cut corruption at the root like a hydra" (Letters, 8/24/2022). The hydra symbolizes the many faults, obstacles, and difficulties that people must conquer.

In our country, corruption is possibly the biggest bane in our life as a nation and the most pernicious obstacle to our achieving of full human development.

Kapatiran Party henceforth supports reforms in our system of procurement or in Republic Act No. 9184, otherwise known as the Government Procurement Reform Act.

The party in addition is advancing amendments to RA 1405 or the bank secrecy law.

Said law provides that no one can access records of banking transactions except in two instances: via a court order or by waiver of the depositor. In this law, thus, lies the difficulty we have in going after grafters in government, rent-seekers in business, and elements of criminal syndicates suspected or accused of corruption. Herein, too, lies the perpetration of greed paid for by the poor.

A third and amendatory exception, therefore, is necessary in cases where the inquiry is made by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), provided that there is a reasonable ground to believe that unlawful activity has been or is being committed, and that it is necessary to look into the deposit to establish the same.

The results of the inquiry shall be for BSP's exclusive use and shall not be made available except to the Securities and Exchange Commission, Philippine Deposit Insurance Corp., Anti-Money Laundering Council, Department of Finance, Department of Justice, and/or the courts, provided that the sharing of the results or examination of the inquiry is necessary to prevent or prosecute any offense or crime.

It has been said that 40 percent of people's money is lost to corruption yearly. That is 40 centavos going into someone else's pocket or, conversely, only 60 centavos going to public services. Income foregone by government on the revenue side is tougher to estimate.

Those losses must be regained. They are an indispensable resource to fund better education, which only means more teachers, public schools, learning materials, scholarship grants, etc.; better health care that only means more doctors, medical staff, hospitals, clinics, medicines, health insurance; better housing; and better infrastructure, all crucial to raising business confidence on which jobs creation and tax revenues rely, and to raising the country's standing and competitiveness, regionally and globally.

When asked during a hearing of the Senate committee on banks in 2016 if the BSP would support a repeal of the bank secrecy law, then BSP chief Amando Tetangco Jr. replied: "Our main concern, Mr. Chairman, with respect to the bank secrecy law, is in terms of being able to ensure that existing regulations are being complied with. That's number one. And number two, to provide some form of deterrent for possible fraud, unlawful activity, or irregularity…"

Speaking at a Financial Executives Institute of the Philippines special membership meeting in August 2022, the current BSP governor, Felipe Medalla, said the central bank was requesting and needed support for more authority so it could examine suspect bank accounts, particularly those possibly linked to illegal activities.

According to the International Monetary Fund, there is a compelling rationale for amending the Philippines' unusually strict bank secrecy regulations so that law enforcement and financial regulators have complete and direct access to depositor information. It also said that the Philippines would be able to remove itself from the Financial Action Task Force's "grey list" by revising governing bank secrecy rules.

The Lernaean Hydra, a multiheaded serpentine monster that Heracles must overcome in the Greek mythology, symbolizes the victory over desire and the primary movements of appropriation. Let us be Heracles.

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