

TO FREE US FROM THE CLUTCHES OF THE TAGALOG-FILIPINO NATIONAL LANGUAGE

by Ronald Llanos

Jed, we must first address the ambiguous regard and mindless apathy by which issues pertaining to our ethnicity, language, and culture are looked upon by our people. We ask ourselves, why does such unconcern persist among our people? Why don't they instead possess an unequivocal, firm, strong, and determined regard for our ethnicity, language, and culture? Our people show an unconcern that is pestilent to an already damaged culture like ours. We will have to address them first, for if not, our fight for linguistic freedom will be jeopardized by the very traits our people possess. As we try to fathom the causes of a complex social behavior and understand why it lingers in our culture, we see factors prevailing in the whole system cultivating the continuance of such traits. The first one, our fragmentation and disunity, antecedes the establishment of the Tagalog Filipino national language. It is a social phenomenon that sustains and spawns an ambiguous regard and mindless apathy. Let us remind ourselves that from our fragmentation and a lack of unity sprang forth an ugly outgrowth - the failure of past Cebuano leaders to survive the political skirmish that occurred over the consideration of a national language.

The second determinant factor is the establishment of the "Filipino" national language itself. By a sly, clever wording in the Philippine constitution that "Filipino is the national language," the Tagalista framers avoided an unyielding opposition to Tagalog while anointing it a national sounding name, "Filipino". Its protagonists are armed with a constitutional mandate and by enforcing it, also forcefully inculcate on other ethno linguistic groups a Tagalog-Filipino nationalism.

A dominating national language endows great benefits and advantages on those whose mother tongue it is but places a discriminatory burden on the unfavored ethno linguistic groups. As Tagalog-Filipino gained ground through our educational system it gave rise to another reality. Some of our people are gradually losing pride of ethno linguistic identity in favor of the Tagalog Filipino nationalism. To those who have accepted the forced Tagalog-Filipino ascription, their original identity is something of an ambiguous meaning, it having been confiscated or forcefully distanced from them. You will find that some of them are affecting an air of superiority when speaking in Tagalog Filipino. The forced patronage of a Tagalog-based national language subordinates ethno linguistic pride and diminishes it. What once was a strong ethno linguistic identity among Visayans is becoming a subordinate sociopolitical entity when pitted against the push of a Tagalog Filipino national identity. To the Tagalistas, this is national coherence.

The burden is more than just a matter of psychological resentment. The forced ascendancy of Tagalog Filipino coupled by disallowing the teaching of native languages in our schools put a grip of restrictiveness into the development and propagation of our native languages. When Tagalog-Filipino dominates in our educational system and seizes initiatives for the promotion of local languages, there is not only a restrictiveness; there is a repression of our basic right to propagate our language. The prestige of our language and identity takes an ill-favored plunge and gradually, our fervor for our own language and identity is weakened. All these assaults have flung us to a path where we don't want to be – a path of abortive appreciation of our language and culture. It is a process that goes unnoticed while it forces in

us a nebulous recognition of our true identity and encourages a malign neglect of our language and culture. We are now realizing what this means to us - cultural and emotional ties to our true ethnicity grown denser by the decade as the Tagalista assault tends the fire of detachment from our original ethnicity. Indeed, it is a fertile political environment that shores up our people's ambiguous regard and mindless apathy toward our own language, ethnicity, and culture. To us, this predicament is linguistically undemocratic and culturally unjust.

A situation can turn out from bad to worst. Economic realities exacerbate the language plight we're in. We are embroiled in the discussion and the fight for linguistic freedom but to the common people on the street, it is the gut issues that really concern him or her. I mean to say that when the demands of the belly assert themselves, the finer things in life, like language, culture, and the arts are consigned to the lowest rung in the list of priorities. We can not expect our people to be on our side fighting for a linguistically democratic and culturally just country. You will find Jed that there are only a few who are vocal about a vision for our own language and culture. The sporadic initiatives and wavering, private endeavors of those interested few are not enough. Among our people, there is very little awareness, if not nil, that the development of our language and culture lies fallow while Tagalog-Filipino advances. Political and economic realities melted our people's awareness about the sad plight of our language and taxed them to yield to an onerous demand by the Tagalistas - that our people accept and internalize the Tagalistas' forced ascription on us as Tagalog-Filipinos. To us, this is an oppression.

Our raw confrontations with political and economic realities make it hard for us to untangle that grip of restrictiveness that suffocates the development and propagation of our native languages. But as a people, we must first struggle to renew from within each of us in order to break free from our own apathy and fragmentation. Issues that haze our approach to our own ethnicity and befog our movement need to be dug out from their unfathomable obscurity, untangled, understood, and addressed before we can even start a movement resisting the Tagalista oppression. Our people need to know how these two traits are pestilent to an already damaged culture like ours. We should educate them so that they will develop a keen sense of social responsibility toward our own language and culture. When we've changed our people's unconcern and impassivity, we can count on each one to care to do something within the limit of each one's capacity. But first, how do we acquire a will power that is so strong as to enable us to overcome all opposition, especially that which arises from our own? That would be our first challenge.

Jed, we must remember that character shapes destiny. A part of the fight is that it is character that will arrange our destination. Possessing the desired character and the persistence is power that will equip our inner selves to carry on the fight.

For the longest time, our ethno linguistic rights and interests have been under assault and in the absence of an effective counterforce that assault can only grow more brutal. The coercive political power that Tagalistas use to attract followers to a Tagalog Filipino nationalism can partly be attacked by a soft power, a power that comes from within each of us. The power to find a positive foothold of imagination for our ethnicity, language, and culture starts from within each of us. We first have to manifest outwardly our pride of ourselves as Cebuanos, Warays, Capampangans, Ilocanos, Bicolanos, Karay-a, Ilonggos, Sambals, etc. before we can imagine ourselves as Filipinos. A love for our language that is not anemic but is charged and forceful will supply the motive force for the continued propagation of our language. Coupled by our people's solidarity, this will be our saving grace and the Tagalista's nightmare. We must recast ourselves and before we know it, the metamorphosis will seep into every sector of our society and the change becomes exponential. This is the way we can move into position.

Our second challenge would be to assert our rights. We must confront those who have a monopoly over the label "nationalist" or "patriot" or "Filipino heritage" and those who have the monopoly of writing and teaching our history thru Tagalog lenses. Those are the Tagalistas, the manufacturers of knowledge, with

their importunate demands for the Tagalog-Filipino national language to be viewed or recognized as a "Filipino heritage." They tout it as an integration or a hybridization of our varied languages and cultures when in essence it is 99% Tagalog. These are the same Tagalistas who, at every opportunity, display their manifest intent of wrongfully labeling people with strong ethno linguistic feelings as regionalist while promoting Tagalog Filipino not as ethno centric as it is, but as nationalistic.

Jed, the Tagalista academics will challenge native speakers of any language if they choose to abandon their language or if they choose to propagate it. They'll say, "If you lose your identity, it's all up to you." Tagalistas would want us to believe that factors internal to the speech community decide whether our various languages get marginalized or if they die, as if it were possible to separate internal and external factors and thereby assess the blame. Certainly, in the final analysis, speakers make language choices themselves. But there comes a point when multilingual parents no longer consider it necessary or worthwhile for the future of their children to communicate with them in a low-prestige language variety. Children, in the long run, are no longer motivated to acquire active competence in a language that is lacking in positive connotations such as youth, modernity, technical skills, material success or education. The languages at the lower end of the prestige scale retreat from ever increasing areas of their functional domains, displaced by higher prestige languages, until there is nothing left for them to be appropriately used about. In any particular speech community that is suppressed and threatened by a dominating language, this scenario can happen. We know that this can happen slowly without us noticing it.

While it is true that the speakers themselves have a responsibility to nurture their language and culture, the whole picture of a language being suppressed and marginalized involves factors that are both internal and external to the speech community. The social forces underlying the native speakers' choices that may result in languages dying or becoming marginalized are not only composed of factors that are internal to the speech community itself. The process always reflects external forces beyond its speakers' control: repression, discrimination, or exploitation, in this case, the Tagalista onslaught. Already, a Manila-centric culture dominated by Tagalog cultural influences in media, schools, and institutions cultivates intolerance and sustains an atmosphere of ethnic snobbery and cultural supremacy. Stoked by Tagalog cultural domination, you could hear ethnic slurs against Visayans in Tagalog television programs, Tagalog movies, and even in personal jokes among the Tagalogs. What else could you call these? They are certainly insults to ethno linguistic identity and in plain view, Tagalog ethno centric prejudice in action.

While the speech community itself has a role in deciding what to speak and what language to impart to their young, changes in attitudes and values that discourage the teaching of its vernacular to children and encourage loyalty to the dominant tongue are brought about by the uneven terrain in Philippine linguistic reality. That terrain is of course, favorable to Tagalog than to any other language. There are varying degrees by which any of our varied languages are marginalized and while not all are dying, some are just hemorrhaging too fast.

Jed, what the Tagalistas actually want us to believe is that changes in attitudes and values that lead to a shifting of loyalty to the dominant tongue won't happen without complicity on the part of the losing speech community itself, them being the ones who will decide whether to shift to the dominant tongue or not.

But let us expose the truth: It is also true that external forces are responsible for this predicament and in this case, it is the preferential constitutional mandate on Tagalog-Filipino. Deliberately not allowing our native languages to be taught in schools and deliberately not providing a wide political avenue for it to flourish and develop will enfeeble its development and impact on its prestige. The Tagalista explanation that the speakers themselves are responsible if they lose their language is overly simplistic. That argument lends support to justifying their prerogative to coerce assimilation or blame the losing speech

community for acquiescing and eventually, losing their language.

The crafty Tagalistas knew that a calculated renaming of Tagalog was necessary in order for us to embrace Tagalog-Filipino nationalism. Thus, a name which beguiles the population into thinking that language and citizenship are the same was chosen. "Filipino," is nothing but a national sounding word concept that effectively blunts the ideal of multiculturalism. It buttresses the Tagalista position that having the national "Filipino" language is an absolving excuse to forego of our linguistic rights. But it cannot be hidden that government-sanctioned censure of local languages in schools, institutions, and media while allowing a state sponsored national language monopoly of these avenues has a negative impact on our native languages. The forced ascendancy of Tagalog Filipino subordinates, seizes, and paralyzes the development of our varied languages. People in academe recognize that our native languages are stuck in baneful circumstances and are aware of a language predicament that needs to be fixed. We should advocate for and defend our linguistic rights.

The 1987 Constitution states that, "The national language of the Philippines is Filipino. As it evolves, it shall be further developed and enriched on the basis of existing Philippine and other languages." A "Filipino" national language, propagandized and forcefully taught as a fascinating hybridization of all our languages and cultures, is essentially Tagalog. All cultures are hybrids, as the Tagalistas will claim, but the few Visayan words included in "Filipino" are an emotional consideration to the Visayans. "Filipino" is valid only to those in government and in the Tagalista academe, whereas people recognize that Manila Tagalog and "Filipino" are more or less the same languages with different labels. Ethnic tensions fester, not totally unnoticed, behind the emergence of a Tagalog national language and the reality of an unequal playing field in the Philippines' linguistic situation. People in the provinces recognize that the emergence of a Tagalog-based national language results into a great political, economic, and educational hegemony by the Tagalog ethnic group over the other ethnic groups. Pointing to a higher Tagalog hegemonic power becoming the standard, regional communities come to realize that a national language ideology does not allow non-Tagalogs to retain linguistic diversities. This creates a sense of feeling that non-Tagalogs are second class citizens and other ethno linguistic groups gave severe critics to this phenomenon as a fourth colonization by the Tagalogs (after the Spaniards, Americans and Japanese, in that order). Thus, the national language policy is a crisis not only to the Binisaya speaking ethnic group, but to all ethnic groups in the Philippines. It is a torment that wrings the heart of every proud Bisaya, knowing that our mother culture and language plus one intellectualized language like English are abundantly adequate for us. The question that springs out of our hearts is: Why should we, Visayans accept a forced ascription of a Tagalog Filipino national identity? Why should we accept a Tagalog-Filipino national language when that, too, is foreign to us? To pay our dues as nationalistic Tagalog Filipinos is difficult to extract because it is based on a language and culture that is foreign to us. This paradigm does not fit the landscape of linguistic equality that Visayans silently envision.

The 1987 constitution further elaborates that, "The regional languages are the auxiliary official languages in the regions and shall serve as auxiliary medium of instruction therein." These are statements intended for emotional considerations to non-Tagalog ethnic groups. This constitution is defective because it does not provide for the constitutional protection of an ethnic group's right to propagate and develop its language. Nowhere is protection for our varied languages and cultures expressly enshrined, nowhere is any specific provision that we have the right to propagate our language and culture and teach them in our schools.

This brings us to a greater truth occurring in most colonial societies, once the struggle for self rule is over and independence is achieved: The most widespread genre of injustice in the world today is the hidden internal colonialism, justified as "nationalism" or some other convenient word-concept, that goes on unabated in former European colonies; and which has resulted in staggering poverty, destroyed ecosystems, monstrous primate cities, languages and ethno-linguistic peoples held captive and

extinguished. This is a picture of the current Tagalog-Filipino Philippines.

This is the Dark Age for a country that is now called the Philippines. Each one of us is coerced to put pride of our original identity in the backseat in favor of a forced ascription as Tagalog-Filipinos. It creates a sore feeling of dispossession from one's true identity that is not outwardly manifested. The Tagalog people would never have to experience the same because the "Filipino" national language and identity is steeped on the milieu of their very own language and culture. There is no need to cross over ethnic lines. For non-Tagalogs, we are witnessing that a dichotomy of loyalties, one for a forcefully imposed Tagalog-Filipino nationalism and one for our own ethnicity is not possible without subjugating one to the other. We are subordinated to the ascription as Tagalog Filipinos and as the remaking of our identity into Tagalog Filipino surreptitiously continues, the more that the Tagalista establishment will demand from our people to possess, love and show, first and foremost, a Tagalog-Filipino identity. Insisting on that guidepost is a sore point because it is hard to extract and express a Tagalog-Filipino nationalism from us. We need a constitution that is not preferential to one ethno linguistic group and that is not restrictive to the others. Let us remind the Tagalistas that the torment of being forcibly ascribed a Tagalog-Filipino identity cannot remain latently manifested. We will carry a resistance movement so that this inner conflict inside our hearts will be outwardly manifested and prod us to action. Let us remind the Tagalistas that when a minority mother tongue and identity comes under attack, its users feel uncomfortable and experience an inner conflict. When people aren't at peace with themselves, they can't be at peace with others. The armed conflict in Sri Lanka between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils had as a major cause the imposition of Sinhalese as the sole national language over the objections of the Tamils. In 1956, passage of the Sinhala Only Act in parliament made Sinhala the sole official language, and the Tamils resisted by armed conflict. Over the years, the violence associated with the introduction of the Sinhala Only Act forced an explicit reversion to parity of status to the two languages, Sinhala and Tamil, which came in 1987 and 1988 as part of a political settlement brokered by the Indian government. Violence is an effective way of communicating sensitivity of an issue that unfavored ethnic groups are passionate to another ethnic group with higher hegemonic power in the political, cultural, educational, and economic arena but is not sensitive to the issues felt strongly by the unfavored ethnic groups. In an ethno linguistically diverse Philippines, we will avoid resorting to violence to achieve linguistic and cultural equality as well as political and economic parity, areas presently dominated by the Tagalogs. But if all peaceful efforts fail, we shall not fail to count that as the last option. Thus, if a million Tagalogs need to be killed to get rid of that stupid national language, RISE! RISE! RISE! RISE! RISE!

What we seek is a Philippines in an enlightened age. Knowing that we are an ethno linguistically diverse country, we ask ourselves, what constitutional moorings must this country begin with? Forcing the language of one ethnic group such as Tagalog, under the guise of "Filipino" upon other ethnic groups is divisive and disruptive of the national fabric. We need a constitution that explicitly recognizes and sets provisions for the protection, development, and promotion of our varied languages and cultures. It must provide that every group has the right to use its own language in every domain, to preserve it as a cultural resource and to teach it in our schools. Let our Tagalog brothers know that the constitutional moorings of an ethno linguistically diverse country must begin with parity of status between ethno linguistic peoples. Mutual respect blossoms in a land of different ethno linguistic groups who are coherent in their recognition - *of the truth*. It is our birthright, it is our inalienable right that our languages are free to be used not only in the marketplace but in every domain – in government, schools, and media. The reality of a multi-ethnic nation should not be suppressed in favor of Tagalog masquerading as the "Filipino" national language. Without constitutional protection, the promotion of our various languages will continue to endure a grip of restrictiveness while the legalized ascendancy of Tagalog grants it the impetus to grow and develop as the national "Filipino" language. Our varied languages and cultures must become integral parts in the fabric of our national life. Legal protection for them must be enshrined in the constitution in order to give each language the impetus to be dynamic and robust. Our

native language must be the official language in the areas where it is dominant – it is not an auxiliary official language as the present constitution provides. All Bisaya people must be made aware of Tagalista thinking about the national identity of a multi-ethnic Philippines because behind those concerns always lurks a conspiracy against ethno linguistic freedoms. We will reawaken every Bisaya to these truths. No Tagalog-Filipino national language must be allowed to lord over our birthright and inalienable right to teach our languages in our schools. *Our way is the truth* and it is only the truth that aims at preserving knowledge of who we are, knowledge of the best way we have found to relate each to each, each to all, ourselves to other peoples, and all to our surroundings. We hope not to go the way Sri Lanka has gone – armed conflict. *The way should be parity of status and reciprocity* and by it we mean that if we are to study Tagalog language and culture, the Tagalog ethnic group must be required to study at least one major language and culture in equally the same breadth and depth as we learn the Tagalog language and culture. All Filipinos, including Tagalogs, must be obliged to learn as many languages spoken from end to end of our archipelago. Knowing as much of the Philippines as possible, without prejudice would make us proud of our rich cultural heritage and help us understand each other. We could still be united while staying true to our original identity and flaunting it. An enlightened course would be to follow a pluralist rather than an assimilationist language policy and devise ways for including regional languages in the educational curricula. This pluralist perspective presupposes broad legislative support for the maintenance and development of any ethnic group's language and culture.

Establishing and recognizing the truth is one thing. *The way* legislation is written to express and protect the truth is another; but provided legislation comes up to the same fundamental sense of meaning as the truth it intends to recognize and protect. When it is, there is not an iniquitous language situation. There is wholeness. *Our way, the way, is wholeness.* A paradigm that creates a landscape of ethno linguistic freedoms must be achieved. Therefore, there must be no Tagalog Filipino national language, but in its place, all major languages must be declared as national languages and an effort to study each other's culture and language must be instituted. It is the truth: It is not through domination by one ethno linguistic group over the others but through mutual respect and reciprocity that cross-cultural understanding and unity will blossom. Disunity results when there is no respect for each other's cultures and languages. As the experience of Switzerland shows, assimilation into a larger nation-state does not necessitate monolingualism.

A movement of a culturally and linguistically subjugated Philippines carried out by Tagalista rhetorical ghouls cannot hold through time. A nation with cultural and linguistic diversities such as ours should be built with mutual respect and parity of status between ethno linguistic peoples as the bedrock. For now, the paradigm of a Tagalog-Filipino nation is accepted only in sufferance. Unity does not come from a choice of the expedient, which is the Tagalog-Filipino national language.

When these truths are not in our hearts and minds, we will fail to act on them and the Tagalistas will continue to propagandize and forcefully teach to a credulous population that the "Filipino" national language is a fascinating hybridization of our varied languages and cultures. Jed, you will find it in our history how easy it is, just like slipping on a river stone, when our people fell into the agendas of those who are in power. Having the constitutional power and resources, the Tagalistas will propagandize that it will bridge the differences of the various ethnic groups. We will slip to the Tagalista drumbeat that for the sake of national unity we should be willing to sacrifice our ethno linguistic rights. A semblance of unity, there seems to be, when some of our people have already been subjugated to an assimilationist Tagalog-Filipino nationalism and don't care about a pluralist policy. But underneath that fragile Tagalog-Filipino unity are cultural cleavages that fester. This assimilationist policy is working only for the Tagalog ethnic group whose language and culture a "Filipino" national language and identity are anchored on. A social division exists between the Tagalogs and the unfavored ethno linguistic groups. What is called for is much more equitable and productive paradigm of language use.

Languages should be dynamic. For our Binisaya language to be robust and dynamic, it must flood into the educational and government institutions as well as the media. But when our own government forces it out of these domains and degrades it as an “auxiliary language,” as the present constitution provides, we could see that grip of restrictiveness that suffocates its propagation. Meanwhile, a Tagalog Filipino language that is preferentially treated by the constitution ensures its dominance in the domains of education, government, and media and provides the impetus for its development. By relegating the other languages to the home and market place only, they languish and are regarded lowly. As this is happening, promoters of Tagalog Filipino will merrily point out that a quick trip to any community market will confirm that the population speaks their native languages freely and thus these languages are alive and do not need to be taught in schools. We could not expect our people to appreciate and cultivate a high regard for our native language if it is not taught in our schools.

Because it is their language and culture that Tagalog-Filipino nationalism is based on, the Tagalog people will continue to demonize regionalism while not looking at their own ethno centrism. Our regionalism is not an attempt to go back to a pure pre colonial past. It is an attempt to reclaim our pride and our true identity and repudiate the subjugation to a Tagalog-Filipino identity. It is an attempt to preserve our language as a cultural resource, to develop, propagate, and teach it in our schools. It is our response to a Tagalog Filipino nationalism that is bent on subjugating our varied ethnicities into a larger nation-state with a Tagalog-Filipino identity and unity.

Other than force feeding “Filipino” as an integration of our varied languages and cultures which is a blatant lie, other than cleverly tying language and citizenship into one name, “Filipino”, what are the truths surrounding the establishment of the “Filipino” national language?

When they say it can be fascinating to unravel all the sources and processes involved in the hybridization of “Filipino,” the Tagalistas are actually creating a positive spin on a national language that is 99 % Tagalog. The few Visayan words included into “Filipino” are an emotional consideration to Visayans. That fascinating hybridization is nowhere to happen and will remain a figment of the Tagalista’s overwrought ultra nationalistic imagination – that the Philippines become more and more linguistically and culturally homogeneous under Tagalog Filipino. “Filipino” somehow succeeded to establish political control over all other ethno linguistic groups. Had Tagalog been the name of the national language, it would not have succeeded.

The Tagalistas’ espousal of an ideology of resentment to anything that is American is often used to justify the ascendance of Tagalog Filipino and discourage the use of English as an extension of American domination. Such sentiments are used to reject and treat English as foreign when in fact, to us Visayans, Tagalog Filipino is foreign as well.

For something which was an outcome of political opportunism, the Tagalistas will argue that the establishment of the Tagalog-Filipino national language was decided upon by history. The Tagalistas could not face the stealth issue of the beginnings of the national language. History respects no secrets and the truth will come out eventually. According to official records and documents, the language provision approved by the Constitutional Convention of 1934-1935 was as follows:

The National Assembly shall take steps towards the development and adoption of a common national language based on existing languages (Constitutional Convention Record, Vol. IX, pp 470-471).

There was a sabotage of the Convention’s approved resolution on the national language when it was incorporated as part of the 1935 Constitution. Between the time the provision was approved and the time it was printed in the official copies of the 1935 Constitution, it was tampered with. The words “one

of the” were inserted between the words “on existing” in order to read “on one of the existing.” When the constitution was printed, this provision read, “based on one of the existing languages” (1935 Philippine Constitution, Article XIV, Sec. 3). Then President Quezon created a commission to select the one language to serve as basis. To the commission, he appointed various experts on the principal vernaculars and made Jaime de Veyra of Leyte, a former resident commissioner in Washington, its chairman. After twiddling their thumbs for a while to earn their pay, they chose Tagalog, knowing that Quezon wanted Tagalog to be chosen. The altered provision pointed to Tagalog as the sole basis of the national language without mentioning it. Quezon was a Tagalog and was about the first to urge a common national language. We have to expose this Tagalista stealth, this knavery.

The Tagalistas will tell us that “Filipino” reigns supreme from Aparri to Jolo. The truth is the language in the broadsheets, television, and the language spoken on the streets is Tagalog. We should have an international team of linguists arbitrate if indeed “Filipino” is a separate language or a dialect of the Tagalog language. At the present time, a “Filipino” dialect of Tagalog overloaded with English loan words spelled or altered “Filipino” dialect style is being concocted by Tagalista academics. The effect is “Filipino” is so stilted, so difficult to read and understand, that one is given a reading experience of a laboratory “Filipino.” A laboratory dialect that could not excite or inspire but instead confounds and bewilders readers as reading all those English words spelled “Filipino” style impede comprehension and reading appreciation. Nevertheless, the Tagalistas’ minds are warped with Tagalog-Filipino ultra nationalism and are keeping themselves busy concocting a prescriptive, laboratory kind of Tagalog aka “Filipino.”

Jed, all these Tagalista untruths were meant to justify Tagalog-Filipino nationalism and create a positive spin around that political movement, could we fight it with the truth? The ultimate weakness of the “Filipino” national language is that it started on a deception and continued with a crafty contrivance of a national language renamed “Filipino,” a calculating way that has beguiled our people into thinking that language and citizenship are the same. We should not be afraid to expose Tagalista guile and craftiness such as claiming “Filipino” to be an integration of our varied languages and cultures, or their loathing of English as foreign and promoting Tagalog Filipino which to us is foreign as well. Should we continue writing in order to assert our rights? We should. To the rabid Tagalistas this idea might seem outlandish but if we fight the untruths they’re espousing with every fiber of our being, we can turn the tide. Any additional writing is not isolated and unconnected from all the others, but is rather an extension, a continuum of all efforts that has come before. Don’t worry Jed, all those years’ writings plus one more, this one added to the others, will surely turn the tide. If our efforts and luck in previous years have not been quite sufficient, never fear because we are capable of resurrecting sensitivity to language rights among the old and new generation. This inner anger in our hearts cannot remain latent. We will carry a resistance movement so that this inner anger in our hearts will be outwardly manifested and push us to action. Ethnic upsurge is happening everywhere in the world and the tenacity of regional identity and the attachment to language are evident. We have to expose our people to these Tagalista stealth and knavery and prod our people to advocate for and defend our language rights. It is by challenging Tagalista untruths and exposing disturbing, bitter truths that we can reawaken our people’s pride and elevate once again sensibility to language and cultural issues. The truths we expose can be amplified in its resonance when bound so well in an artful rendering that appeals to the silent anger in our peoples’ hearts. Jed, believe in the convincingness of truth when expressed like a work of art, that it has a vast potential of being irrefutable and powerful enough to take out the inner anger in our hearts. It will become an irresistible call to everyone to be proud of one’s original ethnicity. It is a call to our lawmakers that they ought to act on an iniquitous language situation. Truth has the capacity to change lives, sometimes by the sheer force of ideas communicated with felicity and grace. We will find that as long as that sense of ethno linguistic pride and liberty burns in the hearts of our people, we can reawaken it. When it dies there, *no one* can save it.

The truest tribute to a language is not in the regimented classroom settings imposed by the Tagalista institution; rather, it is in peoples' hearts and it can be seen or felt through their silent aspirations to promote their own language and culture. It can be felt from their silent yearnings to get rid of a colonizing Tagalog Filipino national language. It can be seen by their spontaneous collaboration in literary contests. We cannot remain strangely silent in advocating for our linguistic rights, nor can we continually be overwhelmed by decades of negative evaluation and subordination to a Tagalog Filipino national language and identity. The national language debate is not closed. It merely started. We are going to compete freely for the hearts and minds of our people. Let us be aware that if the Tagalistas succeed on suppressing regionalist aspirations and on instituting a nationalism based on Tagalog-Filipino, it will skew tribute towards the Tagalog-Filipino national language. We need to reawaken our people about advocating for and defending our language rights and unleash a vast reservoir of ethno linguistic pride. The "soul" of the nation called the Philippines does not reside in a Tagalog-Filipino nationalism.

And how could we ask our people to pay tribute to our language, culture, and identity the way it should be due? How could we release an unbridled ferment of local language defense and promotion? How could we prevent this Tagalog Filipino nationalism from confiscating our true identity?

As a way of rejuvenating our lost fervor, a cultural battle for hearts and minds must be waged. We need a Binisaya Language Month and fill it out with cultural activities. Let it be filled with persistent, traditional, and creative ways of language maintenance for our people to acquire a strong attachment and be empowered with a greater ethnic pride. We can utilize the Binisaya language as a centripetal force to unite Visayan speakers and strengthen a sense of ethnic solidarity. Let us inculcate discipline, propagate our people's values using our own language and attract followers by the strength of those discipline, values, and culture. Nothing is more important than reawakening the spirit of ethno linguistic liberty that lies quiescent in our people's hearts. Nothing is more effective in confronting an intense encroachment of Tagalism in our areas than by putting that ethno linguistic fervor back. A renewed interest that is charged with pride for our ethnicity will nurture a fierce love for our language. *Daghan nga mga isla, apan usa ka katilingban, usa ka tinguha.*

By writing about the truth we could strengthen the tenacity of regional identity and the attachment of an individual to his language. We need effective evangelizers to bring our people to realize the importance of advocating for and defending our language and culture. We should confront head-on this unflinching unilateralism about language by fighting for parity of status and reciprocity and defending our inalienable right to teach our language in our schools. Jed, let us remember that there is no place else to put the onus on reaching the ideal of an organizationally mature resistance movement but on ourselves. But how could we overcome our organizational immaturity when our people themselves show an ambiguous regard and mindless apathy toward our own ethnicity, language, and culture? By struggling to renew from within each of us! It is easy to say that but each one of us needs to possess an indomitable will in order to advocate for and defend our language and culture. That indomitable will is evasive. We must repair our damaged psyche. There must be an internal unraveling within our ethno linguistic communities that will make each one be aware of our linguistic and cultural rights and empower each one to advocate for and defend them. As soon as our struggle to renew from within each of us seeps into the mass sector, expedient and coerced symbols of unity like the Tagalog-Filipino national language, harnessed as a patriotic guidepost – even with its mighty apparatus of a constitutional mandate – will diminish in meaning. The strength of each one's personal commitment becomes our triumph and our people will be ready to adamantly pursue linguistic and cultural equality, political parity and economic opportunity. There will be a shifting paradigm on language policy. Collectively, we will pressure lawmakers for a change in the language policy.

We also need to understand who we are by looking into our past. What happened to us as an ethno linguistic group, we did not create nor design ourselves but nevertheless, we were willing collaborators to

it. Our past reveals to us how easy it is, just like slipping on a river stone, when we as a people mindlessly fell into the agendas of those who are in power. Silently aspiring for a landscape of ethno-linguistic freedoms is not enough. We should acquire a forceful vision for our language and culture. Without a sense of what's honorable, right, and true, what buoys up in our culture is our habit of throwing up our lot with those who are in power. It is time to correct ourselves. To reverse this, our people must possess the indomitable will and the persistence to advocate for and defend our language and culture.

Let us create a forceful vision and seize the shaping of our own destiny. After we've struggled to renew from within each of us, all of us will be a vigilant steward of our language and culture. An old Maori proverb will remind us:

Uia mai koe ki ahau
He aha te mea nui o te ao
Maku e kii atu
He tangata, he tangata, he tangata

which means,

You ask of me
What is the most important thing in the world?
My reply must be
It is the people, it is the people, it is the people ...

Once again, Jed ... possessing the indomitable will and the persistence is very important to carry on the fight. It is the people, it is the people, it is the people ...when they possess the desired character and the persistence...who are going to help us succeed in our fight. We owe it to ourselves to struggle to renew from within each of us. Our government *owes* it to us to amend this iniquitous language situation. Ethnicity matters here. Our cultural-linguistic pride matters.