

POLITICAL JOURNALISTS - A THREATENED SPECIES

Journalists and political activists from organisations like Karapatan, an alliance of individuals, groups and organisations working for the promotion and protection of human rights in the Philippines, are a threatened species in the Philippines. Joseph Lagorra is under fire for being both: he works as a journalist for the “Philippine Human Rights Reporting Project” and for the church-based human rights organisation “Promotion Church People’s Response” (PCPR).

Extrajudicial killings take place frequently in the Philippines. Among the victims, many are journalists and newsmen. This article exemplifies the dangers and threats many journalists have to face in the Philippines. The publication of an article that covers an inconvenient topic, most often political topics, can have lethal consequences for the writer.

In 2009, the Maguindanao massacre shocked the world. More than 30 media workers were killed in just one incident (CPJ 2009). Although lethal attacks on journalists are not a singularity in the Philippines, the USAID “Report on the Philippine extrajudicial killings” shows that 15 % of all extrajudicial killings are murders of journalists (Al Parreno 2010: 7). According to this report, journalists are the second most endangered group when it comes to extrajudicial killings. Most of the identified suspects belong to the military and the police, and just like in other instances of extrajudicial killings, many cases remain unsolved. According to the “National Union of Journalists of the Philippines”, more than 100 journalists have been killed since 2001 (NUJP: 2010).

IPON Observers have met personally with several journalists in the Philippines. One of them is Joseph Lagorra. Based in Negros Oriental, he writes for several newspapers in the country and also for the Philippine Human Rights Reporting Project. This project conducts trainings that respond to journalists’ needs to develop and strengthen their knowledge, skills and attitude on reporting and monitoring human rights. As a member of PCPR,

he also organises and teaches classes on human rights. Many of PCPR’s members, including several fathers, have been killed over the last years.

In his articles, Lagorra is not afraid of writing about alarming topics concerning human rights, even though he puts his life on the line. On several occasions he and his organisations have accused the military of committing human rights violations in Negros Oriental. Lagorra and others claim that the military, especially the 79th Infantry Brigade, is responsible for numerous abuses committed against farmers (Lagorra: 2009). Among the accusations there are cases such as murder, enforced disappearance, physical assault, destruction of property, illegal arrest and many others. Father Nene Francisco, PCPR secretary general, states: “The military do not distinguish civilians from combatants. Community folks are automatically branded as NPA supporters” (ibid.).

Colonel Cesar Yano, commander of the 302nd Brigade, denies the accusations. Yano further claims that Karapatan and PCPR are legal fronts of the Communist Party of the Philippines, under which the armed New People’s Army (NPA) operates.

When I met him in Dumaguete City, the pressure asserted on Joseph Lagorra was indisputable, I could almost touch it. With a calm voice he told me that militaristic looking men had conducted a house search in his apartment. His face showed a smile when he told his story, but his hands were unmistakably shaking. After this incident, he moved to

another place and travels a lot. With an emphatic voice he added that he would keep writing because the truth is on his side.

Quoting famous German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer:

“All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident.”

The first and the second stage are predominant at the moment, but as long as journalists like Lagorra keep on writing about human rights violations, there is still hope that Schopenhauer’s third stage will be achieved.



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© IPON | Farmers demanding continuation of the agrarian reform, February 2009, Manila.

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PATRIMONIALISM

The term patrimonialism was used by Weber (1947) to describe a traditional form of ruling which is marked by a high degree of personalization and missing separation of private and public spheres. Administrative staff is recruited personally by the ruler on behalf of personal relations. Therefore it is also the ruler's choice to dismiss them, sometimes without a reason. Like the ruler, his recruited staff enjoys a quite big leeway within their domain (Brinkerhoff et al. 2002:6f). The dawn of patrimonial structures in many parts of the so-called "third world" can be linked to colonialism. The colonial powers either tried to centralize their power through quasi-feudal arrangements (Latin America) or through the coercion of violent oppression (Sub-Saharan Africa) (Schlichte 2009:142). Established structures of clientelism did not vanish with independence and even today still exist in former colonial countries. The combination of patrimonial and modern patterns is described as neo-patrimonialism. Although not a specific form of governance, it is a distinct feature in authoritarian presidential regimes which are focused on the president as a person. The president takes possession of material goods and resources of the country. In search for support through clients and to remain in power, those means are distributed through networks to these clients (Brinkerhoff et al. 2002:9; Hensell 2009:36). Hence money and resources are mostly used for the benefits of a few. Especially the population in peripheral areas does not profit from national institutions or politics. Also, patrimonial structures are seen as a hindering factor for economic development since rules and laws may change at will of the ruler (Brinkerhoff et al. 2002:7f).

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