AM Band of Brothers

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This essay analyzes the komentaristas (commentators) and their daily programs on AM radio. These people have played a most active role in the nation's political discourse. They can be politicians (active or former) who use radio to either increase their electoral stock or continue their public service. The nature of radio programming is also analyzed, as well as the various audiences of radio programs through the years. This essay concludes that the emergence of more programs in more radio stations is a welcome development. The same holds true for increased audience participation due to emergence of new technologies like texting. However, in the interaction between komentarista and listener either through phone or text messages, the discussion has generally displayed the audience's visceral and unmediated rather than critical and reflective response to basic issues.

On any weekday morning, from 6:00 until 10:00, the nation's airwaves are transformed into a corridor where the frenetic competition among the radio stations' numerous commentators explodes with ear-splitting power. Tune in to the AM band, start from left to right, and listen to Ely Saludar (station manager of RMN), Mike Enriquez (DZBB's chief broadcaster), Ted Failon and Korina Sanchez (DZMM's anchors), Joe Taruc (veteran broadcaster of DZRH), Rey Langit (ace commentator of DWIZ), Ely Lopez (blocktimer of DWWW), Angelique Lazo (anchor of DZAR), Ka Totoy Talastas (the veteran analyst of DZEC), and other personalities from DZXQ (Ed de la Torre), DZME (Herman Tiu Laurel). They, and other commentators on the AM band, spin words endlessly, holding forth and keeping millions of listeners enthralled.

The audience is a motley lot — farmers and laborers, housewives and students, employees and executives, jeepney and bus drivers, commuters, market vendors and other ordinary people from all walks of life. Commentaries mostly on politics have become a way of life, a phenomenon the ubiquity of which can no longer be denied in contemporary Philippine society.[1]

Political commentaries and other types of discourse have found their way into this medium. As Tuazon avers:

> Perhaps no other media channel has touched the lives of ordinary Filipinos as much as the radio. From the traditional *panawagans* during personal tragedies or natural disasters, the tearjerkers of Tiya Dely Magpayo, knowledge power of Ernie Baron, eccentric advises [sic] from Johnny Midnight and of course, the most requested songs in pop music radio stations.[2]

However, for the purpose of this paper, the focus will be on the *komentarista* and their daily programs because collectively taken, these individuals have played a most active role in the nation's political discourse. Listen to them and to their broadcast of the day as they, in unison, attack the spiraling cost of basic commodities, lament the tragi-comic infighting among all types of politicians, report on the terrifying rumors about impending coups, describe (through their field reporters) a hostage situation or some gruesome murder in a barangay in Tondo or Valenzuela. Listen to them boldly intrude and pontificate on the weaknesses of this government, the breakdown in law and order, the insatiable greed of politicians with their countryside development fund (a.k.a. as pork barrel), the latest scandal in the Supreme Court and in the Comelec and other government institutions, the problems of overseas workers, the general sense of despair and malaise that has overcome the nation's most marginalized sectors.

Try to find some humor in the blatant sexism of a few of them (Deo Macalma and Ruth Abao Espinosa of DZRH keep a running commentary full of sexual innuendoes), and find yourself privy to what they are eating while on board, and listen with amusement as they greet their relatives and friends who are celebrating some anniversaries.

The People Behind the Microphones

The commentators are a varied lot. Joe Taruc and Rey Langit were, for decades, field reporters who covered some of the toughest assignments — the military establishment, Manila's various precincts, Congress, Malacañang. Jerry Baja and Anthony Taberna are two of DZMM's field correspondents, and so is Ely Saludar of RMN Manila who is the station's Malacañang correspondent. Arnold Clavio was a reporter who eventually gained enough clout to have his own radio and television shows.

Korina Sanchez, Thelma Dumpit, and Mel Tiangco started out as television broadcasters at various periods on channel 4, the government television station.

Some began their careers as politicians and found a new lease on their public service life as political commentators before they decided to run again for elections in 2004. To this category belonged Ernesto Maceda (***Manong Ernie sa Umaga*** on DWIZ), Juan Ponce Enrile (***Sa Bayan ni Juan*** on DZEC), Salvador Escudero, among others.

A few came from unrelated fields such as computers; and the judiciary and the corporate world; some examples are Ramon Enrique Seneres, Atty Manuel Pamaran of DZEC, Elpidio Cuna (a.k.a Mang Porong) of DZRH, and the late Rene Cayetano. Other broadcasters such as Mike Enriquez, Angelo Palmones, Deo Macalma. Totoy Talastas, Andy Vital, Ted Failon, Jay Sonza, Ross Olgado, among others, have always been identified primarily as broadcast journalists who honed their skills as radio personalities.

There are also politicians/government officials who have their own radio programs. Among them are Jose Lina, Bayani Fernando, Tessie Aquino Oreta, Mar Roxas, Jesli Lapuz, and Raul Roco, Dante Liban, and Cavite Governor Ireneo Maliksi, to name a few. The question arises: when does politics end and real public service begin?

The issue becomes more complicated as we see the manner in which their popularity as broadcasters has done wonders for them in their quest for larger domains.

The most famous example is, of course, Noli de Castro, once a veritably unknown entity (a voice-over in gossip shows in the 1970s), whose booming voice and expensive suits successfully camouflaged his role as a mere talking head in the nation's most powerful radio-television network.[3] He ranked first when he ran as a senator in 1998, and ran for the vice-presidency with a candidate who has latched on to him as the country's foremost "kabayan", even as she hopes that his popularity would do wonders for her campaign.

Ted Failon, another ABS-CBN talent, defeated the scion of the powerful Romualdez clan in Leyte in 2001. Rene Cayetano handily won as a senator due in part to his popular radio and television program aptly called, ***Compañero y Compañera*** with Gel Santos-Relos. Jay Sonza, another popular broadcaster, ran for senator with Raul Roco as the presidential standard-bearer, and so did Melecio "Batas" Mauricio of DZBB.

The success of these broadcasters turned politicians, where strength in one visible area has been parlayed into a more powerful realm, is certainly no mean feat and reinforces the impression that radio as a medium has undergone some radical changes.

Rafael Yabut was undoubtedly the most popular commentator during the 1950s and l960s with his hard-hitting ***Tayo'y Mag-aliw*** on DZRH, the nation's oldest station ("DZRH" 1999: S-1, S-8). Other commentators included the veteran journalist Teodoro Valencia who had programs in English and Tagalog, Damian Soto (whose commentaries over DZBB spewed poison), Roger "Bomba" Arrienda (his tirades against politicians were termed "bomb explosions") and Rod Navarro (an actor who laced his commentaries with sarcasm and humor) who were extremely popular in their heyday. But name-recall was not tested in politics except in the cases of a few like Eddie Ilarde who was elected senator, Johnny Wilson and Rod Navarro who ran for local office and won.[4]

Some Theoretical Considerations

The main objective of this article is to examine certain characteristics that radio broadcasting has assumed in its evolution within the last decade or so, making it a formidable player in the field of competing media, the continuous existence and influence of which has been partly shaped by its appeal to specific audiences. The changing features will include both the processes of production and consumption that constitute these morning radio programs, the possible motivations that continue to animate the complex processes of meaning-generation, and as importantly, the codes and conventions in various and historical contexts that have been deployed to provide the audience with "windows to the world."

As has been the case with other form of mass media, radio is seen as the means through which the "real" can be perceived through the transparency of the medium which readily presents it. The truth is that they do not simply give or present the real world to the audience.

> The media construct and re-present the world for us, and so our understanding of the real world is almost equivalent to our understanding of how it has been and is re-presented to us, whether by the languages of our schooling, of our everyday experience, or of the media. In studying the media, they, we are learning about the ways in which the real world has been

> mediated, about how our understanding and knowledge have been constructed.[5]

A related assumption is that as a cultural form, radio and the commentaries found within this field, is not a fixed, rigid form, for the meaning of a cultural symbol is "given in part by the social field into which it is incorporated, the practices with which it articulates and is made to resonate (Hall in Storey 1978: 447). This idea flows from a specific meaning of the category "popular" which Stuart Hall explains thus:

> It treats the domain of cultural forms and activities as a constantly changing field. Then it looks at the relations which constantly structures this field into dominant and subordinate formations. It looks at the process by which these relations of dominance and subordination are articulated. It treats them as a process; the process by means of which some things are actively preferred so that others may be dethroned. It has as its centre the changing and uneven relations of force which define the field of culture — that is, the question of cultural struggle and its many forms. Its main focus of attention is the relation between culture and questions of hegemony. (Hall in Storey 1978: 449)

Class and Language: "Bakya, Tagalog, Mahirap"

This insistence on the need to view radio commentaries as located within a vast field of popular culture is especially important in light of the pervasive but generally unproblematized view of the popular forms (the radio, films, television, *komiks*) as necessarily "bakya" because patronized by the C, D, E classes.[6] This view related to various modes of reception has given rise to a slew of mostly negative attitudes regarding the audience of popular texts, including radio listeners, termed "masa" (Alvarado, et.al. 1987: 117).

Ever since the l950s, the "bakya" crowd as consumers have been criticized as generally "uneducated if not totally illiterate, simple-minded, irrational, and incapable of abstract thought." The "bakya" crowd has been blamed for the so-called low quality of literature, movies, and television (Lacaba 1983: 175). For example, pandering to this type of audience has led to the "tabloidization" even of news programs on television, argues Nestor Torre, an otherwise sober, intelligent

commentator (Torre 2004: E-2). He points out the pugnacious and shrill style of delivery of the newscasters, their blatant subjectivity, the "dissonance and distortion." This he traces to the producer's decision to make them palatable to the "masa". He says:

> Objectivity be whacked but so what? The additional volume and "drama" is supposed to make the news more accessible ands interesting to relatively uneducated viewers, so the buck stops here" (Torre 2004: E-2).

Torre traces some of the excesses of television reporting back to radio since field reporters, not having the benefit of visuals, are compelled to make up for this lack by making their aural reportage louder, more dramatic and colorful than the actual event (Torre 2004: E-2).

In addition to class, the language with which the signs are conveyed has shaped this prevalent view of "mass culture" as inscribed and made meaningful within the linguistic code of Tagalog, the non-privileged language of the majority, at least in Metro Manila. Tagalog itself is a complex site where the people's struggle for recognition in a colonized society has been inscribed, from the first decades of American rule until the middle of the twentieth century.[7] It has always been the "other" of English, the language of power and influence. English is the language of government, of the law and of other institutions, while Tagalog remained the language of the home and of the marketplace.[8] It is no wonder then that Tagalog became identified with the less powerful sectors of society who read the weekly magazines in the pre-war period, and with the *komiks* after World War II.

Radio in the Postwar Years: Widening the Field

A medium that traces its roots to the American colonial period, radio made its presence felt in the cultural life of the people in English the first decades of its development from the l929s until the beginning of the Pacific War. Its programs featured American hosts, American popular songs played in the original or sung by Filipino talents, and advertised products produced by American firms. The news programs were in English delivered by both American and Filipino talents who spoke with the proverbial American accent.[9]

Tagalog effectively thrust itself forward when the first local soap operas were aired in the 1950s. Although a popular form lapped up by millions of Americans as early as the 1920s, this type of program captured the imagination of millions through the works of Lina Flor, Liwayway Arceo, Genoveva Edroza Matute, Loida Virina, to name a few, and thus effectively challenged the English programs, mostly musical jamborees and news programs.[10]

In retrospect, the renewed interest in Tagalog during the postwar years destroyed the hegemony of popular forms in English. More magazines in Tagalog came out, Tagalog movies continued to attract legions of fans. The komiks magazines met with instant success. Television stations came out with local programs. Various radio serials (***Kapitan Kidlat, Gabi ng Lagim, Mga Kuwento ni Lola Basyang, Edong Mapangarap, Ate Barbara, Prinsipe Amante***) mesmerized huge audiences.[11]

As importantly, Rafael Yabut attracted attention as a fiscalizer and a crusader through his radio program over DZRH. By the 1950s and 1960s, the cultural field had become an area where entertainment was only one of the media's reasons for being. Commentaries over the radio were not only informative but polemical and combative, a thrust that would be reinforced until the 1970s where the radio was a site for the struggle of many conflicting interests — government, big business, activists, the underground movement, among others. DZAQ's hugely program, ***Radio Patrol*** and DZHP's ***Vigilante***, both public service shows enjoyed tremendous popularity (Enriquez 2003: 26-28).

This is important to note because a number of broadcast journalists still enjoying huge popularity — Rey Langit, Andy Vital, Aya Yupangco, Joe Taruc, Deo Macalma , Totoy Talastas, and for a time, Orly Mercado — were affiliated with the major stations in the l970s, and learned their lessons from their involvement with some of the most turbulent events of the period — the rise of activism and the earth-shaking events of the l970s, the declaration of Martial Law in l972 (Enriquez 2003: 31-32). They were back to report and to critique the violent l980s with its People Power and the various military coups staged by disgruntled elements ("Witness to History" 1999: S-3; Enriquez 2003: 35-36). By the 1980s and 1990s they had been joined by a large number of broadcast journalists in their twenties for whom the turbulent l970s did not have the same immediacy it had for the older broadcast journalists. The younger generation included Gani Oro, Rey Pacheco, Ely Aligora, Mike Abes, Neil Ocampo, and others.

Building on Formulas and Reaching Out To More Listeners: Radio in 2000

As a medium, radio possesses a kind of "personal, familiar proximity" which movies did not have, for where one can listen to the radio while at home, movies demand the audience's entry into a public sphere. As Levinson argues:

> And unlike telephone, radio's messages are literally narratives, stories created by others beyond our personal acquaintance, whether news or entertainment or political address. Radio's information was thus more publicly originated and structured than what was conveyed by telephone, and of course it reached millions of people at once. (Levinson 1997: 86)

In the West during the 1930s and 1940s, radio produced an extraordinary impact because its power to influence public opinion was recognized and thus exploited. It was not probably a coincidence that four of the most powerful leaders of the world turned to the medium to make important policy speeches, to arouse the people's sense of patriotism, to conduct "fireside chats" broadcast to millions of home, to affirm the superiority of the Aryan race, among others. Radio was the medium so brilliantly explored by Hitler, Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill, the political giants of the period which also saw the strategic dominance of radio (Levinson 1997: 87).

Filipinos also discovered how powerful radio can be during the Second World War with live transmissions from both American and Filipino announcers providing a counterpoint to the propaganda machine of the Japanese Imperial forces.[12] Perhaps it was not pure coincidence that political commentaries in the Philippines first emerged in the 1950s, after hundreds of thousands saw how radio could be used for purposes other than pure entertainment, and that the deeds of the mighty and powerful could be scrutinized and officials held accountable for their actions. This thrust would continue in the months before Martial Law was declared on September 21, 1972; the Lopez family with its formidable power as owners of a major chunk of the broadcast industry (Channel 2 and DZAQ) had to pay the price.

In the days following the EDSA Revolution in February, 1986 when television had not gotten its bearing, radio was the available medium that provided a blow-by-blow account of the what was happening on

EDSA, in Malacañang, in the military camps. EDSA led to the emergence of unlikely heroes and heroines (Enriquez 2003: 36-37). The duty to provide not only news but also commentaries became a tradition as millions followed the negotiations in the latest coup attempt, the emergency measures being put in place when devastating calamities struck the nation — earthquakes, floods, typhoons, fires, and other events. Television then could not approximate the sense of immediacy that radio could create as field reporters braved floods, earthquakes, typhoons to interview the survivors.

Some Current Practices: Attracting More Listeners

With the increased technological sophistication found in competing media such as television (the face of radio), the print industry, the computer and its various networks, radio found itself facing a formidable body of competitors. To survive it had to adjust to the new situation but in the process of doing this, it appeared to have deliberately depended on its formula that spelled success in the past, but with some modifications.

First, radio has succeeded in an orally oriented society, where intimacy is built between the faceless speaker and the audience. One of radio's most successful series in the 1950s was ***Ang Mga Kuwento ni Lola Basyang*** over DZPI which encapsulated not only society's mode of storytelling (the epic), but stressed the importance of the narrator (the source of *aliw at aral*). In a pre-literate society, the printed word takes a back seat to the spoken word. It is infinitely easier to listen without seeing, for in this structure, the listener relies on the creative imagination to make sense of what is being told. It is more difficult to see without hearing, for sound is more ubiquitous than sight. As Levinson suggests:

> Whereas hearing without seeing is a pervasive, natural "pre-technological" mode of human communication, seeing without hearing is not. The world grows dark every night but never really silent; we can effortlessly shut off sight by closing our eyes, but we have no earlids; we regularly look at one thing and hear something else, modes of eavesdropping on the world, social as well as natural seem intrinsic to the information gathering that typifies our humanity. (Levinson 1997: 98)

Intimacy is created in this situation where the voice addresses a specific audience — the listener — who is viewed as the addressee in a speech

situation. The encounter is direct and apparently spontaneous and unmediated, causing the listener to react directly to what is being enunciated. The appeal is to emotions rather than to the mind, because there is no illusion of distance between the speaker and the listener (Mojares in Reyes 1990: 124-36).

Secondly, this intimacy inherent in the medium is further reinforced (and is a growing tendency among announcers nowadays) by the practice of referring to themselves with Tagalog terms that specify the kind of relationship that should exist between the commentator and the listener. One of the oldest and still very much in use is "pare" with which Joe Taruc and Rey Langit addressed themselves as a tandem in DZRH until Rey Langit transferred to DWIZ. Derived from "compadre" meaning a male sponsor at a wedding or baptism, "pare" makes of the announcer the listener's peer—an equal, a friend of long standing, a comrade and companion. He is not an aloof, know-it-all dispenser of truth, but is one with the millions of listeners.

But part of the carefully structured affiliation is displayed by the fact that only the announcers may call each other "pare" as when Joe Taruc calls Deo Macalma "Pare ko" and vice-versa. This is exclusively for them, for the listener may not call them "pare:" which was the reason the situation became ridiculous when Josefina Lichauco, then Undersecretary of Transportation, started to call Joe Taruc "Pareng Joe" during an interview on the air. As a high government official, Lichauco did not show her awareness of the strict code that should have been observed by resorting to a relationship that, albeit temporarily, made her lose face as the negotiation was going on.

People of authority being interviewed such as Ignacio Bunye or Ricardo Saludo, or Eduardo Ermita, Joseph Estrada, Gloria Macapagal, to name a few, may call these commentators by their first name. They are in a position of power and have all the right to call the *komentarista* by their first name. There are conventions based on a strict hierarchy formalized through the years and the wrong use of title creates a galling impression. Loren Legarda insists on calling Joe Taruc "Mang Joe" to show respect for the much older commentator. This deference creates a favorable impression.

Other terms currently in use are "Ka" which connotes respect and used especially for an older person or for an individual with a higher status in society; "Kaka" which is used to refer to an older brother; "Mang" which again connotes respect or used to refer to someone who

is not a relative. Totoy Talastas is "Ka Totoy Talastas" while Ross Olgado and the deceased Frankie Evangelista go by the appellation "Kaka" and "Ka", respectively. More and more listeners are using "Ka" to address the commentators because it is a neutral term of respect and deference. Enrique Seneres is Ka Iking, Ely Saludar is Ka Ely, Onin Miranda is Ka Onin, to name a few.

Before running for the Senate, former Senator Ernesto Maceda had a morning program, "Manong Maceda sa Umaga." "Manong" is used in the Ilocano- and Ilonggo-speaking provinces to refer to an older brother.

Less common but commentator-specific are "Kabayan," which is exclusively identified with Noli de Castro and "'Igan," which Arnold Clavio has appropriated as his own monicker. "Kabayan" is less personal but has probably more impact as a coined term because it is more inclusive — "bayan" being its root word. "Bayan" does not merely refer to a town, as in kababayan as towns mate; to a province as a province mate. By implication "bayan" refers to the country as "Inang Bayan" or "Ang bayan kong Pilipinas." And when Noli de Castro assumed the role of the nation's "Kabayan," then he becomes elevated to a level higher than the position occupied by specific men and women. A the voice heard throughout the Philippines, he truly became the nation's supreme "kabayan", a title he used so effectively in promoting himself when he ran for and won as a senator. Today, there is only one "kabayan", a claim that seems to have been accepted by whole nation (Ong 2004: 6).

On the other hand, Arnold Clavio's "'Igan" seems not to have struck a chord in the people's imagination although he has taken pains to be addressed as "'Igan." He has positioned himself as a "friend" even as he has figured in some high-profile events such as in tracking down the family of Versace's killer Andrew Cunanan, and the callous murder of Panfilo Villaruel by government troops while the latter was being interviewed live by Clavio.

But the term is dated, does not have the same level of acceptance as "pare" and "ka". This resistance is probably partly due to the fact that "kaibigan" is a far weightier concept in the Filipino's hierarchy of categories to refer to interpersonal relationships; it connotes a deeper level of personal interaction than "ka".

Other commentators have chosen not to be addressed as a "pare" or an "Igan." Mike Enriquez is Mike Enriquez, and so are Korina Sanchez and Ted Failon, Angelique Lazo, Arlene de la Cruz, Ely Lopez, Angelo

Palmones, among others. But they surround themselves with a variety of terms all suggesting some kind of positive relationship as in "kasangga," "kakampi," "kasama," and "kabalikat" for Korina Sanchez (endlessly enumerated as her morning program begins and which indicate a blurring of gender-related qualities), and "saksi" and "imbestigador" for Mike Enriquez. Mang Porong is "ang inyong lingkod." Also frequently used is "tagapagtanggol." In the latest network war, GMA talents are being sold as "kapuso" while ABS-CBN talents are the listeners' "kapamilya."

All these deliberate appropriations of existing terms in the cultural-linguistic code are, of course, meant to project specific images for both the talents and the network. There is one fundamental not-too-subtle message: All of them care for the audience, and all of them take on qualities from the legendary Malakas and Bernardo Carpio, to contemporary icons of popular culture such as Superman and Batman, to real sleuths working for the FBI or the NBI, or Scotland Yard. In such constructs, these men and women are put on a pedestal where they are perceived as more than human, like epic and tragic heroes of yore.

The contradictions in these constructions are evident. On the one hand, these commentators are one of us — friends and comrades. On the other hand, the terms they chose to describe themselves are laden with complex meanings — they are in a position to defend the weak and the oppressed, to provide voice to those who have been silenced, to serve as the mediator between the powerful and the powerless, to negotiate terms favorable to their countless listeners. These voices fill the void in the early morning ritual where they engage the attention of various kinds of people in different ways. And by assuming different and sometimes contradictory identities — the feisty crusading journalist, the patient negotiator, the objective eyewitness, the passionate advocate, the comrade at arms — it is clear that the constructs they create are full of contradictions, "composed of antagonistic and unstable elements" (Hall in Storey 1978: 449). Such identities are formed within the contexts of various fields — culture, language, politics, among others.

In retrospect, this breed of broadcast journalists has gone beyond what the likes of Kuya Eddie (Eddie Ilarde in ***Kahapon Lamang***), Kuya Cesar (***Dear Kuya Cesar***), Tita Betty (***Children's Hour***), Tiya Dely (***Ang Inyong Lingkod, Tiya Dely***) and Ate Helen (Helen Vela in ***Lovingly Yours***) were wont to do in their individual programs. Where Eddie Ilarde and Tiya Dely lived and thrived on letters/narratives from

their listeners, these political commentators do not merely read out and narrate stories of love, hate and death; they create the situations for the emergence of various narratives of varied political tones, colors and hues. They do not merely react; they set the stage that eventually becomes the site of multi-faceted struggles. The movement is complex — from the small world of an individual or two in the earlier programs, to the universe populated by different sectors aggressively fighting it out for power.

And yet, sticking to the practice of referring to themselves as an older brother or a helpful older sister or aunt locates them indubitably within the tradition where the personalities behind the voice are perceived as an ally, a defender, an advocate, a persona who gives voice to the voiceless in the larger community.

The titles of the programs clarify the frame with which to view both the actor/actress and the event, the speech situation. The range is wide — from the neutral ***Balita, Numero Uno*** to the stronger ***Damdaming-Bayan*** of DZRH, ***Failon at Sanchez sa Umaga*** of DZMM to the more precise ***Mata ng Agila*** of DZEC, ***Liwanagin Natin*** of DZEC, to the vaguely charming ***Double A sa Double B*** of DZBB, to the more combative ***Suma Total, Eh, Ano Ngayon?*** of DWWW, ***Dos Por Dos*** of DZMM, ***Hataw*** of DZRH, or ***Kuskos-Batikos***" of RMN. These programs promise not only information and clarification, but also other things — jabs and blows to be inflicted on the enemies whose identities will be unraveled as the program continues.

The Process of Reception: The Radio's Contemporary Audience

It has been assumed that the audience of the programs on the AM band belongs to the marginalized sectors. The faulty connection has been established that because the language of the *komentarista* is Tagalog, then it follows that only the poor who speak the language listen to these shows. When they were the silent audience — denied a voice and thus disallowed the right to refute or interrogate the faceless voices on board — the listeners constituted the silenced majority. Certainly, during the time of Rafael Yabut or Damian Soto, the tirades and perorations of the announcers were the only sounds on the stage; in the 1950s and 1960s, commentators were by their lonesome selves talking in front of a microphone. There was absolutely no feedback, except from the station

managers or owners. Yabut, Soto, and Arrienda spoke, confident that there was a mass listening to them with rapt attention; they were there surrounded by a god-like silence.

Things began to change in the late l960s when the notion of field reporters was introduced, tasked to report periodically to the anchorperson on the events taking place. One remembers the hysterical reports of radio patrol on the latest demonstration in front of Malacañang, the violent dispersal of rallyists along Mendiola, the Molotov cocktails exploding, the sporadic fights between the military and bus and jeepney drivers protesting the 5-centavo gas increase. Joe Taruc, Waldy Carbonnel, Rey Langit, Jess Garcia, Orly Mercado, to name a few, were the battle-scarred field reporters of the early 1970s.

A further change took place in the l980s and l990s when using a tandem became the vogue — there was Mel and Jay on DZMM, Joe Taruc and Rey Langit on DZRH, the short lived tandem of Mareng Winnie and Cito Beltran on DZMM, Ka Kiko and Angelo Palmones, Juan Ponce Enrile and Juan Flavier, to name a few. A dialogue took place between the two anchors; and sometimes a real debate ensued with each one taking a different stance on the issue of the day, e.g. population control, death penalty, gun ban, voter's ID, among others.

At present, the presence of two anchors and the field reporters has proved inadequate for some programs. DZRH's morning program features three commentators— Joe Taruc, Deo Macalma and Ruth Abao Espinosa, while DZEC's ***Mata ng Agila*** has four anchors — Ike Seneres, Ross Olgado, Onin Miranda and Elaine Fuentes. ***Double A sa Double B*** is a misnomer because there are actually three hosts — Arnold Clavio, Ali Sotto and Raul Virtudazo. For a time, ***Manong Ernie sa Umaga*** featured the principal host, Ernesto Maceda, and Christine Taylo, Gregorio Honasan, and Rissa Oreta as co-hosts. Mike Enriquez allots portions of his program to sports (reported by Chino Trinidad) and to entertainment (Gorgy Rula). Instead of hearing only one voice, the listener hears three or four voices dialoguing with each other, and sometimes bantering with each other, in a cacophony of sound.

The stage has thus become more elaborate, and roles diversified — the straight, serious, sometimes pugnacious commentator like Joe Taruc who asks the most difficult questions; the sidekick who can be relied on to provide humor like Deo Macalma, and the woman caught between the two macho hosts in Ruth Abao Espinosa. In ***Mata ng Agila***, Ike Seneres (the one with the most experience from the corporate

world) is called the "Valedictorian", while Onin Miranda, the youngest, is called "Salutatorian," while Elaine Fuentes is the diligent researcher, described as carrying heavy books she has to consult for the issues tackled in the program. The program's use of titles was occasioned by an event in late 2003 when several high-ranking police officers were caught having fun at Classmate, an entertainment lounge in Quezon City.

With the increase in the number of hosts, the space for more voices became wider. With the wider latitude extended to announcers came the decision to allow the listener to take a more active role. Thus the stations opened themselves up to the entry of the audience in the very structure of the program. It was easy to institutionalize the use of the telephone to encourage the programs' listeners to call in for whatever reasons. The program hosts will usually specify the topic for discussion — the onerous PPA in the electric bill, the takeover of Maynilad, the fate of Joseph Estrada, automated voting, the new round of fare increase, and whatever issues are being talked about.

One of the first to follow this format was Mang Porong (Elpi Cuna of Meralco) on DZRH. Currently almost all the programs feature this section where callers either respond to some statements being made by the hosts, or speak their minds on the chosen issue of the day, or even harp on an issue which has not been resolved such as the ongoing terrorist attacks or the moratorium on the death penalty.

Of the innovations introduced in these programs, this practice begun a few years ago has demonstrated that the much maligned audience can think and can express their views in ways which demonstrate not only their knowledge of what is happening around them, but their deep interest in their opinions being heard. For sure, there are the inarticulate ones — the first-timer or habitual callers who hardly know what to say, or who call because of some deeply felt emotions about, say, for example, Estrada's incarceration, an issue which continues to divide the nation.

But there have been callers from Tondo, Quiapo, Caloocan, Laguna, as far as Mindanao and other places who have actively participated in the ongoing discussion with intelligence and sobriety. To refute the charge that it is only the poor and uneducated who patronize these programs, one has to point to a number of callers who have identified themselves as lawyers, medical doctors, faculty members of different universities, middle class housewives, college students, military officers who have come forward to express their views on the recent mutiny, corruption in the Supreme Court, election violence, to name a few.

When before, many commentators appeared to resist this practice — for example, it is only in the last few months that Joe Taruc and Mike Enriquez have allowed phone calls — this is no longer the case today. Realizing the importance of allowing the listeners to speak in whatever form, text messages have also been welcomed. These are interspersed with phone messages, commentaries, and reports by their field reporters. The image of the commentator alone in his booth, shielded from other people by the glass door and window, has forever been shattered — the studio has become a much bigger enterprise, using more human resources, and open to the entry of the audience to make known their thoughts.

As an immediate result of this practice, which gives the listener the chance to speak and be heard, is the curious phenomenon where the same individuals would call up a number of programs with monotonous regularity. They would respond to an issue listed down by Mang Porong during his 7:30 show, followed by a call to the program of Ely Saludar which begins at 8:00 a.m. Or they would first start with a call to the program of Joe Taruc at 6:30 in the morning, followed by a call to the program of Totoy Talastas at 8:45 in the morning, down the line, until the afternoon programs.

They have become fixtures on the air — mostly middle aged men (and some young adults), apparently coming from the middle and lower classes (one seldom hears a listener identifying himself coming from Forbes Park) , and articulate in Tagalog. They have accumulated hours of precious airtime — their moments of fame and glory — basically reiterating their stand on an issue several times a day. Among these indefatigable participants in the ritual are Restie Policarpio from Caloocan City, Joel Medina from Pasig, Boy Falcon from Tondo, Erning Yu from Sta. Cruz, Boy Tabangcura, Elpidio Bansali from Sta. Ana, Brian Pineda, Amang Garcia, Nelson Trinanes, Rommel Alarcon, Ernie Mariano, Elias Maranon, and television host/comedian German Moreno. The female audience is represented by Gloria Aguinod whose voice one hears especially on Sundays.

Moreover, it is important to point out how radio has provided access to groups targeted as enemies of government. Various left-leaning individuals of different persuasions such as Teddy Casiño, Fidel Reyes, Crispin Beltran, Satur Ocampo, Etta Rosales, to name a few, have made their presence felt with their powerful critique of government policies and positions. It is also not surprising to hear the voice of Jose Ma.

Sison as Joe Taruc or Mike Enriquez interviews him via phone patch from Oslo, Norway on the status of the on-and-off negotiations between the government panel and Sison's group. Gregorio Rosal, the leader of the New People's Army, often speaks out on the militarization of the countryside, on the pro-American stance of various presidents, and other topics. Powerful Moro Islamic Liberation Front officials such as Hashim Salamat, Eid Kabalu, and the Abu Sayyaf leaders have become familiar voices as they defend their groups from allegedly "scurrilous" accusations made by government spokespersons.

No longer mere names to which are attached negative emotions, these individuals found outside the mainstream have found an outlet to enable them to discuss their ideas, clarify their stands, and voice out their opinions that millions of radio listeners can hear.

The voices long suppressed have come out in the open to participate in an ongoing discussion in a society where free speech is guaranteed.

Of Politicians and Other Power-Brokers: Breaking the Silence

When in the past, politicians were meant to be listened to only during their interminable sorties in various cities and municipalities come election time, or watched when they appeared on television programs — Luis Beltran's ***Straight from the Shoulder***, Max Soliven's ***Impact*** or Teodoro Valencia's ***Over a Cup of Coffee*** and in the various programs hosted by Ricardo Puno — the same powerful men and women have a chance to get in touch with a greater number of people ready through the power of radio, broadcast nationwide through their affiliate stations.

The trend appeared to have begun after the EDSA revolution in 1986 which witnessed the emergence of "people power". The once aloof and distant government officials have been assigned specific roles in the ongoing rituals and narratives of radio broadcasts. The morning programs feature an impressive list of interviewees, from the sitting president, to a senator or congressman, to a department secretary, to generals and colonels, to town and city mayors, and other individuals who wield power.

The personalities being cross-examined vary, depending on the issue of the day or the week. At the height of the impeachment proceedings in late 2000, then Congressman Joker Arroyo was a willing

interviewee and so were Angelito Banayo, President Estrada's adviser on political matters, Atty. Raymond Fortun or Simeon Marcelo. The issue of the nation's fight against terrorism and various security threats demanded answers from Robert Aventajado and later National Security adviser Roilo Golez. The presence of scalawags among the military is an occasion for interviewing the Philippine National Police Chief (Panfilo Lacson, Ricaredo Sarmiento, Hermogenes Ebdane), or the other generals such as Edgardo Aglipay, Avelino Razon, among others. The scandals that rocked the Supreme Court and the Comelec forced Ismael Khan and chairman Benjamin Abalos to explain the problem confronting these institutions. The voices of Fidel Ramos, Joseph Estrada, and Gloria Arroyo have also been heard over radio. The imprisoned Estrada has been more present than the other presidents because of his need to be heard, because kept away from view, an opportunity to reiterate his innocence over and over again.

All dialogues are in Tagalog; English is a marginalized language in these programs. The dialogue between Joe Taruc, and Comelec Chairman Abalos, between Harriet Demetriou and Ike Seneres, between Korina Sanchez and Raul Roco, among others, is carried out in Tagalog as the interlocutor seeks answers to pressing questions, or clarification on some issues. Officials or important personalities whose facility in Tagalog is non-existent are seldom interviewed; the exception is Guillermo Luz, the spokesperson of the Makati Business Club whose impeccable English the *komentarista* has to tolerate.

Other personalities such as businessmen who are interviewed — the brothers Raul and Jose Concepcion, Donald Dee, Central Bank Governor Rafael Buenaventura, presidents of corporations, to name a few — must speak in Tagalog. Even the spokespersons for the giant oil companies dare not resort to English, lest their explanations fall on ears all of a sudden turning deaf. Government spokespersons — Ignacio Bunye, Ricardo Saludo, Michael Defensor, Dodie Limcaoco caught in the frenzy of elections — and their counterparts from the opposition systematically call radio stations in the ongoing battle for the people's votes, and communicate in Tagalog.

Details associated with the PPA or oil price adjustments, world prices, globalization, government salaries, policy on computerization, laws on impeachment, and other issues are explained in Tagalog. The native language, so often associated with the expression of sentiments, is the site for varied types of discourse at both the emotional and intellectual

levels. That the discourse is done in Tagalog reinforces the argument that on the AM band, the native language reigns supreme, and that contrary to the common view shared by the intelligentsia, it is rich enough to tackle serious issues.

The likes of Ka Totoy Talastas and Ike Seneres, Joe Taruc and Rey Langit, Mike Enriquez and Korina Sanchez from within their radio booths engage the nation's achievers in a dialogue that appears, to their millions of listeners, as basically clarificatory or informative. In some cases, though, the *komentarista* takes on other poses — cajoling, combative, probing, seldom fearful, deferential but not reverential. On the surface, these radio programs appear to be the great levelers where both the powerful and the powerless are allowed equal time with the *komentarista* as the intermediary — the man/woman in the middle of the conflict.

Three Days in the Life of the Radio — January 15-17, 2005

Listening to the various radio programs referred to in the previous discussion on any given day is bound to yield examples that illustrate the functions taken on by the *komentarista*, and the increasing participation of the listeners

On their Saturday morning program over DZMM, (January 15), Tintin Bersola and Julius Babao read some of the text messages sent in by their listeners on a variety of issues. A topic was the future of the opposition which was in seeming disarray. Some responses which, in general did not elicit any intervention from the hosts, were as follows:

> From Mercy Francisco: "Dapat lang si Susan Roces na ang mamuno na kapalit ni FPJ dahil walang kuwenta si Gloria. Patay na ang mga Pilipino!"
>
> From Charlie of Antipolo City: "Dapat lang si Susan Roces, dahil dinaya ang kanyang asawa."
>
> From an anonymous listener: "The opposition should do some soul searching. And they should get their act together. They do not need Susan Roces."
>
> From Louis: "Kung ako kay Susan Roces, huwag na lang siyang makisama sa protesta para hindi na masira ang paangalan ni FPJ. Manahimk na lang."

> From Carmen Soriano of Laguna: " Sana huwag nang pumasok sa sakit ng ulo si Manay Susan at ipinapasubo lang siya. Baka ma-stress pa siya. Mahal ko po siya."
>
> From June Israel of Sto. Domingo, Quezon City: " FPJ supporter ako. Para sa akin ipasa-Dios na lang ni Susan. Alam ninyo naman ang gobyerno ngayon. Sayang lang ang panahon."
>
> Humor was injected by a certain Mitch from Laguna: "May bagong sakit ngayon. Ang tawag dito ay praningococcemia."
>
> From Lito of Araneta Ave.: "Hindi ko alam na may ilusyon si Erap na maging Ninoy. Hindi siya bagay sa tarmac; mas bagay siya sa kulungan."

This section devoted to text messages gives the listeners the chance to air their opinion on practically any topic under the sun despite the request from the host to limit themselves to the specific issue. This often results in a colorful barrage of unconnected observations widely deviating from the topic at hand.

On the other hand, the deployment of a consistently acerbic wit laced with some humor is illustrated by Ely Lopez on DWWW in a mixture of English and Tagalog. Discussing the tight security arrangements for the arrival of Joseph Estrada from Hongkong, Lopez twitted this move and questioned the meaning of executive action versus corruption as one of Gloria Arroyo's programs. He pointed out that in CIA parlance, "executive action" meant assassination. He even set his words to music thus

> Ano iyan?
> Mahiwaga ang nangyayari sa country
> Ang usap papalitan si Glory.
> No? Yun ang tanong.

Another political commentator who has used his program to explain and clarify certain issues is Ka Totoy Talastas of DZEC. In discussing the alleged plot to kill Mr. Estrada on his arrival on January 14, he said:

> Maaaring may sasalbahe o gagawa ng masama laban kay Presidente Estrada; ang tendency niyan ay isisi kay Gloria. Kailangan nating pag-aralan. Hndi natin tiyak na may papatay.

> Pero hindi natin maaalis ang posibilidad. Sinasabing ang gagawa ay third force; kaya kung may mangyari, ang third force ang pagbibintangan. Kailangang mag-ingat dahil maaring may ibang pwersa.
>
> Kaya ang nagmamalasakit kay Estrada, medyo magsakripisyo na kayo. Kung hindi ninyo makita o makamayan man lamang, tanggapin na natin alang-alang sa kanyang seguridad.

On the other hand, Ka Porong during his regular Sunday program over DZRH expressed his inability to understand how Gloria Arroyo could make an assertion during her speech before that MOPC that the economy was improving. Her proof was that more people were buying beer and cell phone cards. In her mind, they had excess money. Ka Porong, trying hard to hide his exasperation at the president's glaring non-sequitur, reminded his listeners that cell phones were a necessity. Later in the show, In discussing the move to raise taxes, Ka Porong called attention to the role of Congress:

> Hanggang sa ngayon ay isinusulong ang tax reform measure — dadagdagan pa ang mga taxes na sasagutin pa ng ating bayan. Alam naman natin na ang mga congressmen ay mga tuta ng administrasyon.
>
> Pero gaya ng pag-increase ng VAT by 2 % sa taxes sa VAT, ang pagbabayad diyan ang mga maliliit. Yung malalaki ang kita ay exempted sa VAT. Gaya ng abugado at doctor.
>
> Ang tanong: Will it affect the majority of our people? Matagal ko nang sinasabi, hindi ang pagdagdag ng buwis ang kailangan kundi kolektihan nila ang dapat na makuha ng gobyerno.

In the same program, Gregorio Rosal called up and spoke against the plan to use wet rags on the pedestrians to impose discipline. He said:

> Ang disiplina dapat magsimula doon sa nasa kapangyarhan. Hindi madidisplina ang ating kababayan sapagkat walang disiplina ang gobyerno. Katulad sa mga sidewalk vendors na gustong paalisin na wala namang kapalit na progama. Imposible ang plano ni Chairman Fernando.

A little later in the show, a certain Pros Lucban, a caller from Samar, described the alleged plight of the people of Samar:

> May plunder case against the governor. Pero lalong namamayagpag ang aming governor sa paglilimas ng kaban ng bayan. Ang sa akin, kung totoong sinsero ang ating presidente sa kanyang 10-point agenda, bigyan niya ng pansin ang ipinaglalaban ng mahihirap. Nakakaranas kami ng mga death threats; ang mga goons ay nakaabang sa amin. Halos hindi na kami makauwi sa bahay namin.

This caller is one of the numerous listeners who avail themselves of the opportunity to make public their grievances and anger because of what is happening in their own communities or workplace — rampant corruption, inefficient subdivision developers, bureaucratic red tape, among others. In this view, the *komentarista* is perceived as an ally, a defender, Mr. Public Service.

The important personages interviewed included Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez regarding the visit paid by Philip Medel to the office of Secretary Gonzalez. In response to the questions of Deo Macalma of DZRH and Ruth Abao-Espinosa, Gonzalez clarified that Medel came to request that he be allowed to stay at NBI. Gonzalez said: "Walang dahilan para mag-stay pa sa NBI. Required by law na dalhin siya sa Pasig provincial jail." The exchange became a monologue as Gonzalez explained the extradition process that would be initiated in the case of Rod Strunk, now directly implicated by two witnesses in the murder of actress Nida Blanca.

On January 17, Joe Taruc interviewed Gloria on his morning show, ***Damdaming Bayan***. She used this opportunity to talk about her programs and to call attention to the improvements in the lives of the people. She attributed the strength of the peso to more foreign investments, and did not refer to the weakening of the dollar against other foreign currencies as the possible reason and discussed to need to have more trade with China, among other issues. She talked of increased taxes as benefiting the people. When asked about the implications of an additional 2% to the existing VAT on the poor, she allayed their fears:

> GMA : Sa pagkain naman mapupunta ang 70 porsiyento ng gastusin ng karaniwang mag-anak. Hindi sinisingil ng VAT ang pagsasaka at pangingisda na siyang pinanggagalingan ng ating pagkain.
>
> JT : Meron silang VAT exemption.

GMA : Yes, Joe.

JT : So, ibig sabihin, hindi dapat mangamba ang pangkaraniwang mamamayan sapagkat karamihan ng ating mga basic necessities ay sakop ng VAT exemptions.

GMA : Tama. Ang mga bagong revenue ay mapupunta sa taong bayan sa pamamagitan ng trabaho, edukasyon, tubig, at ang kanilang kalusugan.

On the whole, this was the president's show which showcased her programs and her policies. As befitted his role, Joe Taruc positioned himself as a facilitator, asking questions that clarified, rather than as an interlocutor. This was not a site for a real interaction where difficult questions could be posed. This was an occasion, though, which allowed the president to be heard by the public, thus revealing how deeply aware powerful people were of the importance of such programs to establish connections with the ordinary people.

On the surface, these programs empower the powerless by allowing them to speak and express their grievances and complaints against government inaction, high prices, against endemic corruption, against agreed and selfishness among the highest officials of the land, against the perceived conspiracy/collusion between the government and big business, against the country's destroying itself.

Through these programs, the silence is broken and government officials and powerful people are forced to speak to explain and defend their actions. The mighty are forced to articulate their positions when before their silence remained unquestioned. Through this medium which thrives on sound, voices are heard in spirited debates or passionate discussions, probably much of which remains unprocessed but strong enough to be heard. In 1932, the German playwright Bertolt Brecht lamented the one-sided function of the radio which was mere distribution. He expressed what he thought should be its role thus

> So here is a positive suggestion: change this apparatus over from distribution to communication. The radio should be the finest possible communication apparatus in public life, a vast network of pipes. That is to say, it would be if it knew how to receive as well as transmit, how to let listener speak as well as hear, how to bring him into a relationship instead of

> isolating him. On this principle the radio should step out of the supply business and organize its listeners as suppliers. Any attempt by radio to give a truly public character to public occasions is a step in the right direction. (Brecht 1932).

Radio for the Millions: Prospects for a More Critical Exchange

This discussion has so far provided a bird's eye view of the changes that radio has undergone since the 1980s in terms of the complex processes of production and consumption. Indeed, a cursory view will enable the reader to gain a dizzying glimpse of the tremendous amount of activity that goes on everyday on the airwaves as competition among the *komentarista* reaches fever-pitch proportions.

On the surface, this widening of space not only in reference to the emergence of more programs in more radio stations but as importantly, in terms of audience participation, is a welcome development. As significant is the willingness of powerful individuals — officials, politicians, businessmen, civic leaders, military top brass — to engage in a dialogue directly with the *komentarista* and indirectly, with the listeners, as the other but less "present" audience. When an important personage talks over the radio, he/she is aware that he is addressing the program's listeners. This is a step in making democracy truly participatory, when the listener is no longer a passive receiver of messages, but occasionally, active in asking crucial questions, in demanding reforms, and even in denouncing perfidious and venal activities, when given the opportunity by the main actor — the *komentarista.*

This is not to say, however, that a truly critical mass of intelligent, outspoken listeners has finally been created. Although it may be true that audiences do not absorb texts like sponges, and that some listeners are indeed creative and critical in their response, it is also a fact that in the interaction between *komentarista* and listener either through phone or text messages, the discussion has generally displayed the audience's visceral and unmediated rather than critical and reflective response to basic issues.

To the issue of the death penalty, the response is frighteningly "an eye for an eye" mentality; death to all rapists, murderers, etc. To the issue of Joseph Estrada's ouster, the responses have varied from the most virulent attacks against the former president or a plethora of *argumentum ad misericordiam*. To the problem of the United States' continued presence in the Philippines in different shapes and forms, the answer has been largely positive for what has been drummed in the

heads of generations of Filipinos is a highly idealized picture of the American hero as a savior from the "Red Menace" and the "Moslem terrorist." To the issue of the unending Islamic revolt, the common sense view is largely formed by horrible images of the "Juramentado", of the Moslem as a bloodthirsty murderer brandishing his kris or his AK-47.

Thus, though a needed space has been provided by allowing the listeners to speak, the voices coming out have not been as critical as we would have wished them to be — articulating their opinions after thinking hard about them, weighing the available options, and coming to a decision. But perhaps the clue to this type of unreflective response can be culled from the specific ways in which the *komentarista* conducts the program. In more ways than one, it is the *komentarist*a who frames or even manipulates these responses. It is these men and women who play the role, perhaps unwittingly, "of drawing attention to, and shaping the understanding of, the political situations it chooses to cover." Further, it is they who, ideally, will

> (1) define which issues will enter the sphere of public awareness and discussion; (2) define the terms in which these issues will be discussed; (3) define who will speak on the topics that have been selected; (4) manage and control the ensuing debates and discussion. (Connell in Hall; Hobson, et.al. 1980: 141)

In actual practice, however, local commentators have displayed their failure to design a program where competing voices are given ample time for a thoroughly satisfactory discussion of issues.

It is common sense thinking — unreflective, unprocessed, determined by feelings — that animates many of these programs which appear not to follow any structure and goes off into various tracks depending on the whim of the *komentarista* or the availability or non-availability of interviewers. The listener sometimes gets the impression that for the *komentarista*, time must thus be deployed by continuously talking about or against, nay haranguing, a personality or an institution — the oil companies, the scalawag in the military establishment, the rival network, the proliferation of tabloids — in the strongest possible terms complete with such terms as "walang hiya," "tarantado," "sira ang ulo."

The pugnacity of some of these announcers appears to have no bounds as they spew out choice terms to put the target in a bad light. Perhaps, this is perceived as a necessary aspect of their pose as crusaders

and defenders. Perhaps, this is a legacy of the style of Rafael Yabut and Damian Soto — direct, confrontational, combative, irreverent, bordering on the hysterical. The intensity is quite palpable and probably conditions the way the listener is made to respond to the topic at hand. Given a minute or so to speak out, what deep thought could a listener really put forth?

As an oral medium, radio offers opportunities for rapid-fire exchange, a number of sound bytes which does not allow any elaboration nor nuancing. The questions the announcer proposes as a field for discussion are answerable with a "yes" or "no." For example, controversies involving presidential candidates in the May 2004 elections were offered simplistically as questions: "Do you approve of FPJ's "pambabastos" against a lady reporter?" Or "Do you agree that Gloria Macapagal Arroyo is spending government money for her campaign?" The thoughtful listener would have wanted a real exchange of opinions but is instead made to deal with a blitzkrieg of one-liners from the lucky ones who succeed in getting precious airtime.

And yet, for sheer immediacy and dramatic impact, the radio has been an excellent medium. The listeners have been allowed access to the dying moments, even the death rattle, of a slain colonel not so long ago. They have been privy to the endless woes and tribulations of squatter families in Baseco compound whose miserable shanties have been razed to the ground, to the cries of terror of the hostage victim in Pasay, to the interview of the officer assigned to a case of suicide, to the reason why a father decided, in drunken anger, to try to kill his infant son. The dramas in the "uneventful" lives of the little people interspersed with the *komentaryo* and the interview provide the needed touches that make these programs so grounded, so real and make the *komentaryo* a series of propositions composed of words that point only to the reality of the utterance.

Despite all these constraints that prevent a lengthy and solid discussion of issues, radio in the Philippines has gone a long way in providing its audience with the means to speak out, and in the dramas, to have the lives and deaths of the ordinary Filipinos featured once in a while (to enable the other social groups to see how the others live!), albeit in a limited manner. It has been an important chain in the massive system of distributing numerous texts to millions of Filipinos, no doubt helped by reliance on other technologies such as the telephone and cellular phones.

However, it must be pointed out that its commercial nature as a profit-driven enterprise, owned and controlled by powerful families and institutions, has unarguably shaped its structure and its vision-mission.[13] One wonders what editorial policies are followed by the *komentarista*s working for the Elizaldes, the Lopezes, the Cojuangcos, the Canoys, the Cabangon Chuas, among others, whose business activities and interests extend far beyond the broadcast industry. For example, where such stations as DZBB, DZEC, and RMN (now controlled by tycoon Antonio Cojuangco) appear unrelenting in their attacks against Meralco and Maynilad (both controlled by the Lopez family), DZMM's pool of komentaristas hardly feature the burning issue that led to rallies and lightning raids on these pubic utilities offices not so long ago.

Moreover, in the last few years, the advertising quota of the more popular programs has been so heavy that more than twenty percent of the time (for example, Mike Enriquez and Joe Taruc come to mind as *komentarista* cum endorser) is devoted to radio jingles and advertisements passed off as pieces of news.[14] The producer/*komentarista* has now unabashedly identified himself with the product, and in the process, he calls more attention to the unarguably commercial orientation of the program.

The fact that radio has continued to attract millions of listeners suggests that it has created a niche for itself in the collective consciousness, for it has not only been a source of information, but a way to understand the complexities of issues through the commentaries of its speakers/producers. Perhaps this is where its significance as a medium lies — that it has allowed the ordinary people — the social groups that are relatively powerless and interpolated as consumers — to find the means to articulate what has lain suppressed for a long time. These groups are defined as people with "marginalized and repressed histories", and who have "intransigently resisted incorporation" (Fiske in Storey 1978: 505).

The so-called "masa" — society's marginalized sector— have appropriated the programs and the band of brothers and sisters as the site not probably for negotiation (the poor do not possess much power nor are they in a position to make demands), but for a series of interrogations in this unceasing attempt to make sense of life's recalcitrant realities. This is an auspicious start — the exploration of a difficult terrain where voices speaking their own language can be heard, not the least of which come from those who do not have much in life.

In a bleak world where the listeners are perceived as mere consumers, a number of radio's most faithful listeners have created a space (no doubt aided by the producer/*komentaristas* conscious of the need for a bigger audience) as the site for their own "subversive" moments where what lies beneath the falsehoods and hypocrisies, doublespeak and prevarications are forcibly laid bare, even for a few seconds of air time. It is they who generate meanings that help them define the parameters within which the political commentaries and the presumed sources of authority can continue to produce their discourse on the AM band.

Notes

[1] Radio is acknowledged as the primary source of news in the Philippines. It reaches 85 to 90 percent of the population with over 25 million sets nationwide. Of the 12 million estimated number of households nationwide, the number of radio households is 10.2 million. Industry estimates suggest that the average radio listening time is two to three hours a day. Read, for example, Tuazon (online).

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] For a brief account of Noli de Castro's life and career, see Ong (2004: 1, 6).

[4] For an investigation of this phenomenon of the remarkable success of popular personalities in politics, read the essays of Quijano de Manila (the pseudonym of Nick Joaquin), especially the article, "Erap in a New Role" (1977: 1-44).

[5] For a lucid analysis of the origins and subsequent meanings of "bakya," read Lacaba (1977: 214). The issue is also discussed in Reyes (2003: 84-88).

[6] "Masa" is another unproblematized term that has been habitually used to refer to the poor and the unlettered, their inclinations and taste, and became a convenient label to refer to the "Great Unwashed" even as it gained additional meanings during the 1998 election and the so-called EDSA II and EDSA III revolutions. Read, for example, Cristobal (2000: 17-19).

[7] See, for example, Lope K. Santos's (1938: 24) passionate and spirited defense of the role of Tagalog in articulating the goals of the Revolution.

[8] The intimate relationship between language and power was argued in Constantino (1966).

[8] For accounts of the history of radio in the Philippines, see Trinidad (1967); Lent (1968: 49-50); Chanco (1946: 6-20), and Trinidad (1964: 26-27).

[10] For an account of the phenomenal success of Tagalog soap operas in the l950s, see Reyes (2000: 84-88).

[11] The 1950s should be analyzed as a crucial period in the gradual move away from the hegemony of cultural texts in English and the subsequent cultivation of popular texts in Tagalog such as was never seen before. It would be interesting to show possible connections between the Japanese Period (l941-45) when English was banned and Tagalog encouraged, and the postwar years when Tagalog writers, buoyed up by the new self-confidence, re-examined their position as cultural workers in the movies, in literature, on radio and in the komiks.

[12] "Witnessing History," p. S-3. For an account of the uses of radio during the Japanese period, read Mario Ampil, "PIAM: Rising Sun on the Air Wave," in Clodualdo del Mundo, Jr. (ed.), ***Philippine Mass Media: A Book of Readings*** (Metro Manila: Communication Foundation for Asia, 1986), pp. 53-59.

[13] The owners of various radio stations constitute a virtual Who's Who in Philippine business. Among them are the Elizaldes (DZRH), the Lopezes (DZMM), the Canoys (RMN), Antonio Cabangon Chua (DWIZ), the Catholic Church (DZRV), the government (Radyo ng Bayan), Iglesia ni Cristo (DZEC), and Far East Broadcasting Company (DZAS). Before the declaration of Martial Law in 1972, the Roces and Soriano families also owned radio and television stations. Read Ofreneo (1984: 123-38).

[14] Among the products advertised not in the form of a radio jingle but as personal endorsements are pain-relievers, herbal medicine, college assurance plan, roof paint, animal feed, and other stuff. The products are inserted into specific narratives that change from day to day. Witness to history, shaping history. (1999, July 15). ***Philippine Star***, p. S-3.

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