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Sensationalism and Smokescreens

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January 2021

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Once again, the nation has been gripped by another death: that of Christine Dacera, where, for lack of details from the as-of-yet confidential autopsy results and for the peace of mind of our readers, we will not go into the details of what happened. All that we know so far is that this is a tragedy and that her family is still grieving.

What we want to talk about here is the ensuing media craze and the inability of the PNP to shut the hell up about the ongoing case.

“Never attribute to malice what can be easily done by incompetence” goes Hanlon’s razor, and for most of the time, it holds true — except when we’re talking about people in positions of power.

You see, power— within the context of society — is defined as one’s ability to cause change within it and power is never static. You are either being acted upon by the influence of another entity or person, or you are asserting your own power within your own sphere of influence. The people we work for, the people that command this nation’s armies and police forces and the people who collect our taxes know this fact all too well. Being incompetent (defined as the ability to achieve a set of goals) becomes liability for those who wish to maintain their power in society.

So, let’s say you’re a government in a postcolonial nation that recently got put in hot water because of your patsies getting caught with their hands on public funds, and it’s the national health insurance fund!¹ In the middle of a goddamn pandemic, to boot! Your drug war is in shambles and even your own underlings are caught using drugs.² And no one’s convinced about your next boogeyman, the commies. People tolerate the communists at best, and if you blunder even more, the people might even take up an old M16 and join them, too. Like, can you blame them? You’re killing them left and right, after all.³

New Year’s coming and you need a fresh start, so you can plunder a bit more out of the public treasury in peace. The people were getting a bit antsy before the holidays, and you can easily see them getting revved up as soon as the holiday hangover wears off. You just need the right news item. Then, as if delivered by demons that heard their call, a flight attendant is found dead inside a hotel room

¹ Paolo Romero, “Philhealth mafia pocketed P15 billion” (Aug 5, 2020), <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2020/08/05/2033035/philhealth-mafia-pocketed-p15-billion>

² Emmanuel Tupas, “More cops test positive for drug use” (Dec 17, 2020), <https://www.philstar.com/nation/2020/12/17/2064321/more-cops-test-positive-drug-use>

³ AP News, “Philippine police kill 14 men rights groups say were farmers” (Mar 31, 2019), <https://apnews.com/c9a4e0708b2e44e5adddf40dd1de6c0c>

bathtub, on the morning after a New Year’s party that never should’ve been, under the most heinous of circumstances.⁴

All that’s left to do is to do is to make sure your badged-and-uniformed monkeys go out there and make a spectacle of themselves. Declare the case solved prematurely, say the deceased was abused by multiple men before she died, despite the evidence being incomplete, and what little evidence we know points to the contrary. Cue the ensuing moral panic, victim blaming, homophobia (one of the accused identifies as a gay man) and you have yourself a pretty effective smoke-screen. Maybe even have a photo-op with the grieving mother?⁵

Whatever the truth behind Christine Dacera’s death may be, she didn’t have to die. I’m not saying that she died in order to provide a smokescreen for government corruption. This was simply a tragedy that the powers that be took and ran straight into the spotlight with, giving them just enough time to sweep the mess they’ve made under the carpet.

The Spectacle of the ruling class respects no one. They could’ve used anyone, anything. When your power depends on maintaining the illusion of public support, you’re gonna take any scandal and moral outrage you can get to divert the people’s eyes somewhere else, away from the things you don’t want them to see, to take their minds away from things you want them to forget. Dacera’s death is a tragedy, and the ruling class are shitting on her memory by making a spectacle out of it.

⁴ Consuelo Marquez, “New Year’s Day tragedy: What really happened to Christine Dacera?” (Jan 7, 2021), <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1380542/new-years-day-tragedywhat-really-happened-to-christine-dacera>

⁵ ABS-CBN News, “LOOK: Dacera’s mom meets with PNP Chief Debold Sinas” (Jan 6, 2021), <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/01/06/21/look-daceras-mom-meets-with-pnp-chief-debold-sinas>