



Razor's Edge

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On Ambassador Lauro Baja, Jr. - - -

Who Is Clad With The Garment Of Truth?

NEW YORK, July 10, (PinoyGlobal) - This column aims to explore which side of the controversy that has gained international concern lately, is buttressed with the unvarnished truth or a modicum of it. The story that flared up in the news and broadcast media has grown out of proportion because one of those involved is Lauro Baja Jr. - who was Permanent Representative of the Philippines to the United Nations and his erstwhile domestic helper of three months, Marichu Boanan.

Ostensibly without qualms or compunction Marichu has turned accuser and tormentor of the Baja family to a point that her diatribes appear to be wrecking Mr. Baja's well-guarded reputation now that he is foreign affairs secretary of the Philippine Senate. Whether her charges adhere to the actual scenarios she has been retailing to the media with the assistance of her handlers should be a matter of credibility anchored on facts and evidence. On the other hand, Baja's rebuttal must be subjected to the close scrutiny of impartial observers and also by the law.

Bare in mind, however, that Marichu escaped from the Baja family three months after she arrived with them in New York, which can lead to the inevitable impression that she merely used the clout of the ambassador to jump to the United States with no hassle. What is distressing is that she came up with the macabre justification that she was compelled to runaway because they virtually cut her off from the outside world, i.e. if all her allegations embrace what actually transpired behind the iron grills of the ambassador's official residence on 66th street in Manhattan. Truth to tell, there are pictures showing her promenading in the United Nations with the Baja family that offhand highlights her lying of being sequestered.

Let us begin by candidly asking the pertinent and

relevant question. Is it really normal for a newly appointed Philippine envoy to the United Nations to start his prestigious position with one foot already sunk in a quick sand of troubles by doing the verboten his detractor claims "that he committed human trafficking when he brought her to the U.S.? I imagine he did this egregiously palpable crime despite being a lawyer? That may not be farfetched if Baja was mentally impaired? but then why was he confirmed by the Commission on Appointments?

His accuser went on to say she was only paid the shameless pittance of \$100 for her months of service. Whether deliberate or otherwise, she clearly omitted to admit that her family was also receiving quite a hefty amount, by Philippine standards, from the ambassador. It is not possible for her not to know about this. The receipts the ambassador holds from Marichu's mother, demolishes the pathological lie whenever she demonizes her former boss on the subject about her salary. That is understandable if it had so much as a nugget of truth. But it seems that is not the case.

Going to the central issue of her running away without knowing anybody in New York, to most readers this yarn taxes the mind. How was it possible that she easily got in touch with the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund that champions the cause of abused women by mental telepathy? I know we are in an era of abnormal occurrences happening often these days, but this is just too weird even for a simple mind to accept.

It is in the spirit of searching for the truth that last Wednesday I joined my publisher Manny Agbanlog to attend the press conference initiated by the said association in lower Manhattan. What titillated my curiosity was the screaming brouhaha about the abuses allegedly perpetrated by then UN Ambassador Baja and his family on his

domestic helper. The woman with the support of the organization has filed a civil case because the salary she got was supposedly the measly amount mentioned earlier for three months work. She also charged that she was never given a winter jacket and shoes; that she worked 18 hours a day (it is a wonder she never got sick or collapsed) and was incessantly scolded by the ambassador's wife without let up.

Typical Filipino housewife who is intrinsically considerate and compassionate, more so for someone who is the wife of our UN envoy. Norma's high standing with Filipino community during their tenure and her concern for our countrymen in distress, belies the allegation of her lack of concern. The maid's reference to the alleged cruelty of Mrs. Baja is seemingly to demean her as inhuman; one devoid of the virtue of compassion.

This is hard to believe because from the background of Norma alone one can readily trace the profound sentiment she is capable of. Norma is well educated, soft-spoken and one who came from a very religious family. In short her character is solidly founded on moral grounds. Her friends are steadfast to her precisely because of her sweet disposition.

In the welter of these revelations it is adequately clear Mrs. Baja is the target of her former domestic helper's scurrilous maligning to which the recipient is totally helpless and innocent. Her character voids the virago aspect she is painted to be. Mr. Baja on the other hand, is vilified in the international scene because of his having been UN envoy and therefore a conspicuous and vulnerable persona for whatever demands his accuser may have in mind.

On the bright side for Marichu - she could eventually get a Green Card. Note that if someone files a case of human trafficking against his/her employer almost immediately she or he is given a T Visa for 3 years. Furthermore, if the accuser survives and proves the charge, her T visa is converted to permanent status, which would enable her to bring the entire family to the U.S. Fine, if the accused deserves the character assassination. But in this case, the Bajas are the victims and the hidden agenda of the accuser is quite transparent.

The absurdity of it is that for icing she (Marichu) included the charge of slavery and racketeering. Anybody who knows Ambassador Bajas would be scandalized on

how they reinvented his true character. His friends will be one in debunking the charges, adding that those accusations describe a monster from outer space not the former envoy.

Hence, I raised my hand and asked how did she know of the AALDEF she took refuge after leaving the Bajas if in all those 3 months with them she was as she claims a virtual prisoner of the ambassador with no contact outside and prohibited to use the telephone? Did she reach it by mental telepathy? When did she become a member or how long was she in the protective wings of the association?

At that instance someone slipped me pictures of her and the ambassador's grandchild surrounded by a mountain of snow. You can see her and the child grinning widely as if enjoying a great snow holiday in the Alps. If she was not given even a modest winter jacket, how is it possible that in the picture she was fully clothed for such blizzard? Without winter boots her sunken feet could have been frostbitten in minutes. If she did not buy her outfit for winter, who did? Could it not have been Norma or any one in the Baja family? The winter jacket, cap and gloves she wore fit her to a tee, which means it was fit first before it was bought and therefore they could not have been hand-me-downs. Santa Claus could not have come down the chimney to give her winter clothes because January was way beyond his schedule to make children happy on Christmas Eve, December 24.

I tried to speak once more holding the pictures in my hand but as if on cue, the handlers who initiated the press conference cut me off just when I was beginning to talk that what I had in my hand will belie Ms Boanan's claim that she was never protected from the blistering winter, and they ended the interview. It did not matter because I was not the horse with blinders some people were.

I don't know with the brilliant journalists present from the mainstream media and the ethnic papers if they thought I tried to monopolize the questions but my conscience is clear that I just wanted to get at the bottom of the story because since my days as radio-TV commentator back home, I always fought for the oppressed and down-trodden. Being here does not change my sympathy for the persecuted. Just because Baja enjoys the higher rank does not make him the villain, in the same manner that Ms. Boanan who is the seeming underdog does not make her right. Justice is blind to the status of individuals. #