

# Where There's Smoke There's Fire



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THERE is a reason many crimes take place under cover of darkness: Most people tend to be if not good, then decent, and law-abiding. There is a reason election controversies end up focusing on provinces in Muslim Mindanao: These places are shrouded in a kind of political darkness. And it has less to do with the culture of Filipino Muslims as a whole, and everything to do with the culture of their leaders — and the relationship they've built with their Christian counterparts in the national government.

For the Philippines, national senatorial elections began in 1941, but it wasn't until 1949 that Muslim areas became identified with electoral fraud. Lanao in particular, sadly went down in history as a place where the birds and the bees, and even the dead, voted. What has not gone down in history is how in the next election, in 1951, Ramon Magsaysay ensured clean elections were held in the same place.

This example from more than half a century ago, should be partnered with another example from not so long ago. The acknowledged warlord of Lanao during the Marcos years, Ali Dimaporo, was feared by politicians everywhere, and boasted he could "deliver" votes. The late Comelec Commissioner Haydee Yorac famously visited him, allowed him to flirt with her, and the result was a friendly Dimaporo and clean elections in Lanao.

The requirements then, are basic, when it comes to elections in Muslim Mindanao: For the national government to insist on clean elections; for the local Muslim leaders to be reassured they are part of the political process, so long as they guarantee the autonomy of their constituents in expressing their national preferences. In short, national leaders determine whether an election will be about fraud, and selling votes to the highest bidder, or whether it will be about about Filipino Muslims being allowed to express their choices freely, and without molestation, when it comes to national elections.

It works both ways. A combination of partisan complaints (from the Genuine Opposition and its candidates), the efforts of citizens' organizations seeking clean elections (Namfrel and the PPCRV), and media reporting, took the votes of Maguindanao basically out of contention. The administration Team Unity bragged they'd achieved a 12-0 result for their slate, until people began to ask questions.

The first question was why someone like Luis "Chavit" Singson did even better than the administration's Muslim candidate, Jamalul Kiram III. The next series of questions were even more troubling: In some areas, it seems no election was held at all; in others, the voting had nothing to do with the counting. In an electoral contest where the last two places in the senatorial results can be decided by mere thousands of votes, the 300,000 votes of Maguindanao have ended up so hotly contested, even discredited, that they have been taken out of the counting. And now, Lanao del Sur is in the process of having the voting so heavily scrutinized, that the votes will have a hard time surviving the harsh glare of public attention.

The administration is upset about this. Because Muslim Mindanao — remote, and more firmly in the pocket of local

leaders than other parts of the country — is their last hope for preventing a near-total defeat in the senatorial race. Try as the administration might, to claim it still has provincial bailiwicks, these so-called administration areas have, one after the other, delivered an anti-administration vote. The result is that the outcome has stubbornly stayed the same: 8 for the Genuine Opposition, 2 for Team Unity, and 2 Independents.

Even the votes from the last, solidly administration-leaning bailiwick, Cebu, haven't been enough to stem the tide. This really leaves Muslim Mindanao as the last place where administration victory can be snatched from the jaws of defeat. Yet left to themselves, Muslim Filipino voters have proven themselves not very different from their Christian Filipino counterparts; and where their leaders have intervened to try to change the results, they've been caught.

Administration spokesmen are left trying to argue that the political culture is such, in Muslim areas, that leaders arrive at a consensus with their followers, and everyone follows what the leader says. They may have a point, but as Maguindanao showed, that means nothing if no voting took place at all. And it means nothing in places like Lanao, where media and citizens' groups have exposed how the political diktat takes place with every rule that applies to elections being violated. Local leaders, operating in a kind of darkness — beyond media scrutiny, without citizens' volunteers swarming around precincts to keep tabs on the conduct of the voting and counting — might have peddled "consensus" as an argument.

But now, they can't. Enough Muslim Filipinos were seen conscientiously doing their civic duty — and wanting to vote freely — to prove that vote delivery only happens with the help of systematic fraud.

Which leaves the administration furiously trying to accomplish the counting — and have their provincial counts counted nationally, in turn — before citizen's groups or the media can belie their claims. It's not working. And the blame can't be pinned on Muslim Filipinos, it can only be assigned to what has clearly been revealed to be a partnership between national and local officials to delay the voting in Muslim Mindanao, to enable it to serve as an antidote to the results from other areas.

Hoping to distract the media and the public from their shenanigans in Lanao and other places, Team Unity spokesman Tonyet Albano now says they are going to insist that the counting of votes in opposition bailiwicks be repeated. They denied us Maguindanao, he said, so now we will deny them victory everywhere else the opposition claims a win. No less than all of Metro Manila, and 15 other provinces, he says, will have their voting results challenged by the administration.

A smokescreen? Probably. But a dangerous one, and one which requires risking the political equivalent of a forest fire. Makati City, San Juan, Caloocan and Pasig, Albano says, will be places they definitely intend to challenge the votes. They might even challenge the results in Christian areas of Mindanao, like General Santos City where administration bet Manny Pacquiao lost heavily. And if they do? And a cooperative Comelec does what they want, which is to proclaim a "failure of election" in Metro Manila, and other areas, putting out of play as many as seven million votes, what then?

Or would they not go that far, in the hope that the public would have been distracted long enough, to have their operations in Muslim Mindanao produce "results"?



Amjad Rasmi

## US Is Shortchanging Democracy in Ukraine

**Jackson Diehl**  
*The Washington Post*

WASHINGTON — Amid the wreckage of the Bush administration it's easily forgotten that the export of democracy to formerly unfree societies has not always been a failing policy. For a decade after the end of the Cold War, the United States and its European allies worked through NATO and the European Union to convert 10 post-Communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe. At the time it wasn't clear that all or even any of them would embrace free elections and free markets. That they did was due in large part to the abundant tutelage, training, aid and tough love provided by the Western alliance.

Lots of people are pointing to Iraq as an example of what happens when attempts at nation-building go wrong. But what happens when it isn't tried — when the West sees a country struggling to find a new political order after decades of repression and simply decides to back off? In effect, a test of that option is underway far from Iraq, in the biggest country between Western Europe and Russia — Ukraine.

Three years ago, when the Bush "freedom agenda" was still gaining momentum, Ukraine was a focal point. US funds poured into nongovernmental organizations that were agitating for a free presidential election. When a Russian-sponsored candidate tried to steal the election through blatant fraud, the Bush administration strongly backed the popular protest movement, the Orange Revolution, that eventually forced a new vote. The pro-Western winner of that ballot, Viktor Yushchenko, was for a while a favorite in Washington; there was even a push to put Ukraine on a fast track for NATO membership.

The change from then to now is one measure of how far a demoralized administration has retreated from its ambitions, and from the world outside the Middle East. Last week Ukraine was again in political

crisis; the protagonists once again were the pro-Western president, Yushchenko, and his pro-Russian rival, Viktor Yanukovich, who is now the prime minister. Once again crowds gathered in the center of Kiev. There were struggles for control over government buildings, and each side accused the other of plotting a coup. The country seemed to teeter between a compromise agreement on

and what has been lacking, is a strong message to all sides that it is in their interest to abide by democratic principles," Gryshenko, a former ambassador to Washington, told me. "The message we're getting is that the United States really doesn't care."

It's not just the lack of phone calls or visits that conveys that disengagement. As the human rights group Freedom House points out in a new report, the administration's foreign aid budget proposal for next year contains big cuts in democracy funding for Europe and Eurasia. In Ukraine, the administration would slash funding for civil society organizations — that is, the groups that led the democratic revolution of 2004 — to \$6.4 million, reflecting a 40 percent reduction from last year. In Russia, where pro-democracy and human rights NGOs are under enormous pressure from an increasingly autocratic Vladimir Putin, a cut of more than 50 percent is planned.

The retreat is largely a function of the administration's ever-deeper absorption in the Middle East — a lot of the democracy funding is being shifted there — and simple demoralization. There's a reluctance to do anything that might help Russia's perceived ally, Yanukovich, who believes he would win any free and fair election. It doesn't help that European governments have lost their willingness to offer more memberships in Western clubs. Both NATO and the European Union have made it clear that Ukraine won't be admitted anytime soon, regardless of how its politicians

behave.

What will happen in the absence of Western influence? Maybe Ukraine will muddle through; most of its leaders seem more interested in the model of democratic Poland than of Putin's Russia. Maybe Russia, which will never lose interest in its neighbor, will succeed in converting it into a political satellite, as it tried to do in 2004. Or maybe the chaos in Kiev will deepen, violence will erupt and the country will start to splinter, like Yugoslavia in the 1990s — or Iraq. If so, it won't be because the United States tried to impose democracy; but it might be because it didn't.

new parliamentary elections — which was announced Sunday — and an attempt by one side or both to seize power by force.

The Bush administration and its NATO allies, meanwhile, were nearly invisible. Contact between US officials and the feuding Ukrainians was limited mostly to the US ambassador in Kiev and European affairs officials at the State Department. A senior adviser to Yanukovich who came to Washington last week to lobby for more involvement, former foreign minister Konstantyn Gryshenko, found it hard to get a meeting at the National Security Council or the vice president's office.

"What's needed from the United States,



## For Boycott to Be Effective, an International Coalition Is Indispensable



**Ramzy  
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SOUTH AFRICA'S Minister of Intelligence Ronnie Kasrils whispered to me just as I sat down following a most enthusiastic speech at a recent conference in Cape Town: "If you want the world to heed to your call for boycotting Israel, the call has to originate from the Palestinian leadership itself."

Boycotting is obviously right. The call for boycotting the racist apartheid government was an exclusively South Africa endeavor, made resonantly and repeatedly by the African National Council (ANC) and backed by the various liberation movements in the country and in exile. It took years for the dedicated campaign to be effective; the message communicated to the international community was clear, simple persuasive: An end to apartheid. It

was but only a facet of various methods of struggle, notwithstanding armed struggle, that spread to Namibia, Angola and other African countries. Nonetheless, it was a decided and consequential strategy. One of the architects of the banking boycott campaign presented me with an elaborate plan to involve civil societies in holding to account banks that facilitate and make the Israeli occupation less taxing and possible. It was composed of a clear purpose, a straightforward plan of action and non-negotiable demands.

Is a similar campaign possible in the Palestine case? Many people seem to think so. In fact, calls for boycotting Israel have dotted the political landscape of the Arab-Israeli and later Palestinian-Israeli conflict for years. The main hurdle facing efforts at utilizing civil societies to compel Israel to end its brutal policies against the Palestinians is that the efforts are neither centralized nor emanate from a well-regarded Palestinian source of authority and leadership. They remain well-intended, yet scattered, reflecting a strong feeling of solidarity with the Palestinians, but never orchestrated or streamlined to achieve a clear set of objectives.

A young Indian activist who spent many days urging shoppers at Britain's Marks and Spencer to boycott the store for contributing to the Israeli occupation tells me that she was utterly frustrated that many of the store's customers are Arabs from the Gulf. While nothing beats a good deal, indeed, she never understood why a wealthy Arab would find it morally permissible to enrich a company that benefits the occupation. Needless to say, the same scenario is repeated at many Starbucks branches, despite the top management's unabashed support of Israel.

I called Ahmed Yousef, the chief political adviser to Prime Minister Ismail Hanyieh of the PA's unity government, to consult with him on whether such a call for boycott is possible, especially prior to the June 9th mass rally in London — and many other major cities — to commemorate the 40-year anniversary of the Israeli occupation. Yousef was distressed; the infighting between Palestinians has taken its toll on his often optimistic attitude. How can one expect a unified leadership position on boycott while Palestinians are fighting at two fronts: Against one another and against Israel?

I am certain that uncountable numbers of conscientious people around the world refuse to place Israeli products in their shopping carts, precisely because of what Israel has done to maintain its illegal occupation of Palestinian land. But how can we be sure without a centralized campaign that supplies figures and numbers which can be utilized politically to pressure other companies that either operate from or do business in Israel and its settlements?

But must we wait for the Palestinian leaderships, one that is in the process of complete capitulation and another that is struggling for mere survival armed with an exclusivist political program, to quit their infighting, unify their ranks, rehabilitate their political institutions and then make a collective and sustainable call for boycott? The wait might be too long and arduous.

One of the main objectives of my many travels has been to build bridges between the various struggles around the world to that in Palestine, and further link the various grassroots and civil society activists. In some ways, these efforts have been successful. I believe that by creating a wider, and a well-coordinated platform for the struggle against injustice, with Palestine being one

of several central focuses, civil society can be both effective and relevant. To achieve this, one must not dwell on specifics (in the Palestinian case, the debate of one vs. two states, armed struggle vs. passive resistance, Hamas vs. Fatah, are cases in point.) but search for unifying themes, leaving the details for the Palestinians to wrangle with.

The conflict in Palestine is at a very critical juncture. Israel, brazenly aided by the two remaining imperialist forces, the US and the UK, is in the final stages of crafting its Bantustanization of the disconnected pockets that remain of historic Palestine. Martin Luther King Jr. once said "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." An Israeli victory against the Palestinian people is indeed a defeat for every struggle for justice, rights and equality everywhere. It simply must not be allowed.

But how to do so is a debate that should immediately commence without reverting to dogmatic approaches and language, political or religious sensitivities, and most importantly without any sense of ownership over the discourse, which is sadly creeping up in Palestine circles everywhere.

## Black Culture Goes Beyond Hip-Hop

**Thomas Chatterton Williams**  
*The Washington Post*

OVER the past three decades black culture has grown so conflated with hip-hop culture that for most Americans under the age of 45, hip-hop culture is black culture. Except that it's not.

During the controversy over Don Imus' comments this spring, the radio host was pilloried for using the same sexist language that is condoned, if not celebrated, in hip-hop music and culture. As the scandal evolved, some critics, including the Rev. Al Sharpton and the NAACP, shifted their attention to the rap industry. Indeed, every couple of years, it seems, we ask ourselves: Is hip-hop poisonous? Is it misogynistic, violent and nihilistic? What kind of message is it sending?

But what critics consistently fail to emphasize in these sporadic storms of opprobrium, as most did during the Imus affair, is that the stakes transcend hip-hop: Black culture itself is in trouble.

Born in the projects of the South Bronx, tweaked to its gangsta form in the 'hoods of South Central Los Angeles and dumbed down unconsciously in the ghettos of the "Dirty South" (the original Confederate states, minus Missouri and Kentucky), there are no two ways about it — hip-hop culture is not black culture, it's black street culture. Despite 40 years of progress since the civil rights movement, in the hip-hop era — from the late 1970s onward — black America, uniquely, began receiving its values, aesthetic sensibility and self-image almost entirely from the street up.

This is a major departure for blacks, who traditionally saw cultivation as a key to equality. Think of the days when W.E.B. Du Bois ("sat) with Shakespeare"; or when Ralph Ellison waxed universal and spoke of the need "to extend one's humanity and one's knowledge of human life."

The historian Paul Fussell notes that for most Americans, it is difficult to "class sink." Try to imagine the Chinese-American son of oncologists — living in, say, a New York suburb such as Westchester, attending private school — who feels subconsciously compelled to model his life, even if only superficially, on that of a Chinese mafioso dealing heroin on the Lower East Side. The cultural pressure for a middle-class Chinese-American to walk, talk and act like a lower-class thug from Chinatown is nil. The same can be said of Jews, or of any other ethnic group.

But in black America the folly is so commonplace it fails to attract serious attention. Like neurotics obsessed with amputating their own healthy limbs, middle-class blacks concerned with "keeping it real" are engaging in gratuitously self-destructive and violently masochistic behavior.

Sociologists have a term for this pathological facet of black life. It's called "cool-pose culture." Whatever the nomenclature, "cool pose" or keeping it real or something else entirely, this peculiar aspect of the contemporary black experience — the inverted-pyramid hierarchy of values stemming from the glorification of lower-class reality in the hip-hop era — has quietly taken the place of white racism as the most formidable obstacle to success and equality in the black middle classes.

As John H. McWhorter emphasizes in his book "Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America," "forty years after the Civil Rights Act, African-American students on the average are the weakest in the United States, at all ages, in all subjects, and regardless of class level." Reading and math proficiency test results consistently show this. Clearly, this nostalgia de la boue, this longing for the mud, exacts a hefty price.

A 2005 study by Roland G. Fryer of Harvard University crystallizes the point: While there is scarce dissimilarity in popularity levels among low-achieving students, black or white, Fryer finds that "when a student achieves a 2.5 GPA, clear differences start to emerge." At 3.5 and above, black students "tend to have fewer and fewer friends," even as their high-achieving white peers "are at the top of the popularity pyramid." With such pressure to be real, to not "act white," is it any wonder that the African-American high school graduation rate has stagnated at 70 percent for the past three decades?

Until black culture as a whole is effectively disentangled from the python-grip of hip-hop, and by extension the street, we are not going to see any real progress.

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