

# OPINION & FEATURES

## A chance for the truth

IF IT didn't take Sen. Panfilo Lacson nine years to disclose what he says are more sins of his former boss, Joseph Estrada, his story would have a greater ring of truth. The motive behind Lacson's speech at the Senate on September 14, wherein he focused on a handful of cases that he said implicated Estrada, is also suspect, indicating that he is fighting for survival rather than truth, justice and the rule of law.

Still, this could be a case of better late than never. The timing of Lacson's promised bombshell was not entirely off, since Estrada looks genuinely interested, despite all the seemingly insurmountable legal obstacles, to seek the presidency for the second time in 2010. The nation has a right to know more details about the first Philippine president to be arrested, detained without bail and convicted of large-scale corruption, and who now wants to seek re-election.

Estrada, his son Jinggoy and some of the parties mentioned in Lacson's speech immediately denied the allegations. They said Lacson was simply trying to deflect charges against him in connection with the torture and murder of publicist Salvador Dacer and his driver Emmanuel Corbito in the twilight of Estrada's presidency. Lacson has been indicted for the brutal killings by his former sub-

ordinates in the elite Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Task Force, on September 14 he indicated that he was already out of the loop in the final months of the Estrada administration because he was protesting the president's coddling of criminal activities, and that one of his PAOCTF subordinates received orders directly from Malacañang.

Lacson has promised to reveal more in the coming days, and Estrada's camp is expected to hit back on September 15. Both camps should be prepared to present hard evidence to defend their stories. As the nation watches this very public fight between Estrada and his former trusted top cop, the question is whether the truth will finally come out and justice will be served — both in the case of Dacer and Corbito, and in the excesses of the Estrada administration. (Philstar.com)

### GUEST EDITORIAL



## Mutual annihilation

### SKETCHES

Ana Marie Pamintuan

FOR several years Joseph Estrada and Panfilo Lacson seemed inseparable.

When Fidel Ramos became president, he inherited two headaches that needed urgent action: the crippling blackouts, which he promptly addressed, and a rash of kidnappings for ransom, which he assigned to a chief crime-buster, his vice president, Joseph Estrada.

Erap not only accepted the challenge but relished the role, and he was a big success. The kidnappings and, later, bank robberies stopped.

Much of that success he owed to the elite police team that Ramos created and which Estrada headed, whose brand of law enforcement would never get the approval of the Commission on Human Rights. The bodies of the bad guys, with several innocent civilians thrown in, piled up. The public, tired of lawlessness and the snail's pace of Philippine justice, cheered.

Erap's Presidential Anti-Crime Commission (PACC) initially had as its top enforcer Reynaldo Berroya. But he was later eclipsed—and then sent to prison for kidnapping — by one of his recruits, Panfilo Lacson.

As narrated last Sept. 14 by Lacson, Berroya was not the one who introduced him to Estrada. The first encounter, Lacson told the Senate, was when he arrested Erap in San Juan in 1973 for beating up actor Rudy Fernandez in one of those fits of violence that Erap now tries to gloss over in his past.

There are many other episodes in his past that Erap would now want buried forever, as he dreams of regaining the presidency that he lost under the most ignominious circumstances.

But not if Lacson can help it. Lacson is one of the few people who should know where many of the bodies are buried.

His risk in his kamikaze tell-all public speeches is that he could end up implicating himself.

The gain for the public is that many of the dirty secrets that have long been hidden might finally be known. From that knowledge of how power is used and abused at the highest levels of government, reforms could be implemented and the guilty punished.

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Several people who have known Lacson since his days as a member of the Philippine Constabulary-Metrocom Intelligence Service Group told me that he would never turn against his former boss, Erap.

The same people cast doubts on Cezar Mancao's story of how he allegedly overheard Lacson, as head of the Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Task Force, giving instructions to PAOCTF officials to take out publicist Salvador "Bubby" Dacer in 2000. Those who know Lacson said it was not the way he operated.

Lacson never tossed the blame to Erap for the murders of Dacer and driver Emmanuel Corbito. Lacson has simply maintained that he was not part of the plan to eliminate Dacer, purportedly code-named Delta.

But I guess every individual can be pushed against the wall. When Mancao testified in court that the former president himself was in on the plot, Erap washed his hands of the crime and said the PAOCTF was under the direct supervision of Lacson.

That apparently prompted Lacson to go on the offensive.

Now he's dredging up all the skeletons in Erap's closet, including those that are no longer even

secret, such as the jueteng payoffs that contributed to Erap's impeachment and prosecution.

In the denunciations and counter-denunciations on the Senate floor in the past two days, Lacson is enjoying the upper hand, even if it took him years to hurl his accusations.

He's not exactly too late the hero, since the object of his campaign—with a promised Part 2 next week—is aiming once again for the nation's highest office.

Ping Lacson is not seeking the presidency in 2010; he has other problems requiring his full and urgent attention. But he can campaign against an Erap presidency, Take 2.

If Lacson is acting in typical fashion, he is zeroing in only on criminal activities where he has evidence to present, just in case the concerned parties decide to add to his legal woes.

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The cases Lacson raised were hardly new. Mass Media ran stories about those 20 shipping containers full of dressed chicken that were brought in by a notorious smuggler who's still at it, who has successfully laundered his illegal wealth and now enjoys the protection of the current capo di tutti cappi.

Rice has been smuggled under every administration. Lacson has not yet mentioned the smuggling of sardines ostensibly for relief operations.

What was new, though already rumored, was Lacson's story about how Alfonso Yuchengco was forced to sell his shares in Philippine Telecommunications Investment Corp. to Metro Pacific, which is headed by businessman Manuel Pangilinan. The Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. Group of Pangilinan has said it maintains cordial relations with the Yuchengcos.

Lacson insinuated that Erap received a commission from the sale after Yuchengco's son was

framed on drug charges in the first months of Erap's presidency. How deep Yuchengco wants his family dragged into this mess is anybody's guess.

In the next installment of this drama, Lacson has promised to talk about the first major scandal in Erap's rise to the presidency: the disappearance of casino worker Edgar Bentain.

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Bentain's loved ones don't know whether he is still alive, but Lacson is hinting that the casino worker is dead.

One person with a possible motive to have Bentain eliminated is Erap, who was in a video that the casino worker reportedly passed on to sweepstakes chief Manuel Morato at the height of Erap's campaign for the presidency in 1998.

That video, as we still remember, showed Erap playing high-stakes poker in the VIP pit of a government-run casino.

Erap should not have worried about the video at all. He still won the presidency by the largest margin ever, despite a campaign against him by the Catholic Church, despite the release of the video, and despite his known drinking and confusion over which of his women and children would join him at Malacañang.

The counter-attack by Erap's camp was a dud, with his son, Senator Jinggoy, voicing what they also suspected in 2004, that Lacson was secretly working for the Arroyo administration to destroy the opposition.

There was no real bombshell against Lacson, who truly tried to keep his nose clean when he was a cop when it came to payoffs.

Sen. Miriam Defensor Santiago called the battle between the two former allies MAD—mutually assured destruction—and she's right. (Philstar.com)

## Cro-Magnon

THERE'S one not very popular song by Cole Porter that I've always liked. It's called *Miss Otis Regrets* and goes like this:

*Miss Otis regrets, she's unable to lunch today, Madam/ Miss Otis regrets, she's unable to lunch today/ She is sorry to be delayed/ But last evening down in lover's lane she strayed, Madam/ Miss Otis regrets she's unable to lunch today.*

*"When she woke up and found that her dream of love was gone, Madam/ She ran to the man who had led her so far astray/ And from under her velvet gown/ She drew a gun and shot her love down, Madam/ Miss Otis regrets she's unable to lunch today.*

*"When the mob came and got her and dragged her from the jail, Madam/ They strung her upon the old willow across the way/ And the moment before she died/ She lifted up her lovely head and cried, Madam/Miss Otis regrets she's unable to lunch today."*

There's another extremely popular song sung by Tom Jones that I've never liked. It's called *Delilah* and goes like this:

*"I saw the light on the night that I passed by her window/ I saw the flickering shadows of love on her blind/ She was my woman/As she deceived me I watched and went out of my mind./ My, my, my, Delilah/ Why, why, why, Delilah/ I could see that girl was no good for me/ But I was lost like a slave that no man could free.*

*"At break of day when that man drove away, I was waiting/ I crossed the street to her house and she opened the door/ She stood there laughing/ I felt the knife in my hand and she laughed no more. My, my, my Delilah/ Why, why, why Delilah./ So before they come to break down the door/ Forgive me Delilah I just couldn't take any more."*

No one of course sings *Miss Otis Regrets* in this country while

everyone sings *Delilah*. Which is the reason, quite apart from its lyrics, that I do not like the latter. It tumbles upon me like a flood from the banks of the loudspeakers of my neighbors' karaokes, their belters applying themselves to the refrain with Tom-Jonesy fortissimo.

I remembered those two songs after I read some of the reactions to Chavit Singson's savage mauling of his wife, Che Tiongson, and her companion, notably from some of this country's keepers of the peace. "It's his way of dealing with his rage at that time," said Chief Supt. Pedro Tango. "Dapat lang, kulang pa 'yong inabot nila (Well and good, they got less than they deserved)," said Supt. Gerardo Ratuia. "Pag nahuli ko asawa ko na ganyan, dila lang ang walang latay (If I catch my wife that way, only her tongue will be unmarked)," said Nano Malilin, an entrepreneur.

Over the past weeks, I've read from newspapers and heard from TV/radio the various reactions of people, authority figures and non-authority figures alike, to the incident. The concern has largely been whether the "crime" merited that scale of punishment, some saying the punishment exceeded the "crime" and others like those above saying it fell short of it. In fact, where I stand the problem is simple. Which is: Would the same judgments apply if Che Tiongson had done exactly the same thing to Chavit Singson?

Would the same judgments apply if she had gone to the house of the deputy security chief with some goons and finding him to be cohabiting there with another woman ordered the goons to beat him up? No, more than beat him up, pistol-whip him and his companion again and again within an inch of their lives? And having done that exposed and belittled Chavit in public as a man of such contemptible morals he doesn't deserve to get within a hundred yards of his children?

It's unthinkable of course, not least because you cannot possibly get within a hundred yards of Chavit to wreak anything remotely like a beating upon him. Which adds to the oppression.

But even if it were possible, would the reactions be the same? Would police superintendents be saying, "It was Che's way of dealing with her rage at the time," "*Kulang pa nga yung inabot ni Chavit,*" and "*Dapat dila lang n'ya ang walang latay?*"

Not at all. Everyone would be aghast and demanding that Tiongson be hanged from the nearest tree. Which is the reason *Delilah* is exceedingly popular in this country and *Miss Otis Regrets* exceedingly not so. It's not just because *Miss Otis* is subtler and *Delilah* cruder musically—karaoke has a special fondness for the loud and vulgar—it is also because the sentiments of the latter are appreciated in this country and the former not so. A man murders his wife/partner/"my woman," because of infidelity and the people of this country, men and women alike, sympathize with him and damn the two-timing she-devil to hell. A woman murders her husband/partner/significant other for infidelity and the people of this country, men and women, sympathize with the victim and damn the insanely jealous she-devil to hell.

Chavit's reputation for being a stickler for marital fidelity is not exactly legendary. Nor is that of the average Filipino male. Hell, men boast about their infidelity all the time—it is the stuff of drinking sessions. And the devil take the hindmost, or the "good boy" who gets to have his manhood or the capabilities of his tool ridiculed. Erap freely advertised his status, harboring a harem in his neighborhood. A woman does the same thing, or less, and the world comes down hard on her.

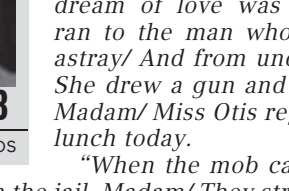
That is the point. It is not whether the punishment was commensurate to the crime—that is secondary—it is whether the punishment applies equally to Che, whose guilt we only have the word of Chavit on, and Chavit, whose guilt he parades openly before the world. Unless we are prepared to decree "Iba ang lalaki," then whatever ruthless exactions we apply to the women of this country, we must apply as well to its men.

Let's see how many men will be walking around with only their tongues unmarked. (Inquirer.net)



THERES THE RUB  
Conrado de Quiros

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