



By Neal H. Cruz

AS I SEE IT

MANILA – March is women’s month, or rather, a month for celebrating womanhood, and President Macapagal-Arroyo ushered the month in by insulting housewives when she told Gina de Venecia, “You are just a housewife, I am the President.”

“Just a housewife.” She is belittling housewives without which she would not have been born and which she is one now. At least one-fourth of the population are housewives but we have only one President. As a general rule, all housewives are honest, humble, hard-working, and believe in God’s commandment “Thou shall not steal”

GMA Insulted All Housewives

which presidents usually do not.

It is the housewife who rocks the cradle, and without whom there would be no family and no new generation. Every person owes his or her life and upbringing to a housewife. Children and grownups run to housewives for help and comfort but many people only curse their President and want her to go away—as was shown last Friday all over the Philippines. Indeed, they’d rather have a poor, loving housewife than a lying, thieving President.

I don’t know what the women will do—especially women’s groups like Gabriela—to this insult to them, and on Women’s Month yet. Will they take it sitting down?

I don’t know how GMA can stay in Malacañang one moment longer when she can

see how much Filipinos hate her. Although she took pains to stay away and pretended it was business as usual for her, she was watching television and she saw the huge crowd in Makati all demanding that she resign. Many more stayed at home and followed the happenings by watching TV, but they shared the sentiments of those in the rallies.

That’s only in Metro Manila, GMA’s rah-rah boys say, but we have seen the “Gloria Resign” rallies are all over the country—and even in Filipino communities in America. How can she stay in Malacañang when she can see and hear very clearly that her countrymen want her to go away? My mother always told me, “Don’t stay where you are not wanted.” Didn’t her mother teach her that?

From the security prepara-

tions of the police and military, it is obvious that Malacañang was on the verge of panic, deathly afraid that the rallies may grow into another People Power that will kick out GMA. Besides police and soldiers in full battle gear, barbed wire and huge container vans barred the approaches to Malacañang. The military made a show of their tanks and armored personnel carriers by parading them in the streets. Thousands of troops were scattered all over Metro Manila and even at the approaches to it. Thousands more were held in readiness at the camps nearby.

Military checkpoints at the North and South Luzon Expressways stopped convoys from the provinces on the way to Makati to join the rally. The intention obviously was to prevent the crowds in

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EDITORIAL Gloria’s Strengths

EVER since the testimonies from star witness Jun Lozada came out, up to the recent huge rallies calling for her to resign out of the administration’s glaring involvement in the National Broadband Network scandal, President Gloria Arroyo has been unyielding, stressing that the country needs to move on. And as if that was not enough, she said matter-of-factly that despite everything that’s happening against her, she sleeps soundly at seven hours a night.

The opposition is upbeat, however. While a few others are resigned to the belief that it is not in Pres. Arroyo’s nature to ever quit her post, and would rather that she finishes her term until 2010, more and more Filipinos take to the streets each time. As former President Cory Aquino put it, it’s going to be a long fight.

What’s keeping Gloria in power then?

First, she has the strong backing of the Armed Forces and the Police. Thanks to the huge chunk of benefits she has been showering them. The first people power in 1986 began with the withdrawal of military support. Then they turned against former President Marcos, the Filipinos knew they were nearing the end of the dark tunnel of Marcos’ dictatorship.

Second, she has the support of some church groups. The Philippines being predominantly Catholic country still relies on the views of the church. The well-anticipated statement from the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) which had no recommendation for Pres. Arroyo’s resignation was an upset to many.

Third, she has Vice President Noli de Castro - her successor if she steps down, whom many view as less competent. De Castro is often playing safe, if not silent, with his political views. The whole nation may want Pres. Arroyo out of Malacanang, but many are not sold on de Castro taking her place. Will he be more corrupt? Will the economy stay afloat with him? Will he be easily influenced? And so on.

Pres. Gloria gains her strength and maintains her power in a nation that’s divided. For instance, when protest groups and opposition personalities gather to call for her resignation, certain groups and politicians would also gather separately to show their support for her.

This is why all along, despite the “Hello Garci” scandal and the 2004 vote-rigging, and all other political controversies hounding her administration, Pres. Arroyo remains firmly standing on her ground.

Unfortunately for the Filipino people, these strengths of hers are the nation’s sources of weakness. As long as we are a nation divided, Pres. Arroyo will remain unwavering. (AJ)

REBEL WITHOUT A CLUE

By Patricia Evangelista

AS I type this, there are others who write their own manifestos, compelled by chance and conscience and circumstance to plug away on keyboards across the country. Every few minutes a new entry flashes across cyberspace: Lozada, ZTE, indignation in its varying forms, pleas for caution, calls to action, justifications for inaction, the long narratives of disillusionment seconded by the angry and frustrated.

I can’t pretend to represent my generation. All of us are faced with a choice, and the fact of my youth does not mean that my choices reflect those made by my contempo-

The Center Cannot Hold

aries. And yet there is something very wrong with CBCP president Jaro Archbishop Angel Lagdameo’s claim that “Our youth seem to be very satisfied about what is going on in their lives.” I cannot believe that anyone would be satisfied with this sort of life, with the rape of the Filipino nation occurring with daily regularity, and lie after moronic lie echoing from the gates of the Palace. Satisfied? I doubt if non-presence in an indignation rally is the only manifestation of public satisfaction. The millions of people scabbling for a meal a day in this country do not go to rallies either, and yet I would hesitate to call them satisfied.

On Saturday, an article in Young Blood condemned all those who trooped to indignation rallies as essentially “blind and selfish clowns,”

who were either “misguided idealists” or “hypocrites to the bone.” And while the writer spoke with righteous rage, he accused those “misguided idealists” of believing they have a monopoly on righteousness. What I find more astounding than his hasty generalizations on the motivations of all who protest the current corruption is his argument that all this rage against Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo is a waste of time, money and energy; as if the billions in public funds lost to corruption is not a waste, as if corruption has not deprived people of the housing and education the writer believes they deserve. I respect his choice to stay away, but perhaps it would be best for him to understand why others choose to go.

Many have said that all the confetti, all the rallies, all

the thousands of people who have crowded in Ayala last Friday can do little more than derail traffic. Perhaps they are right. But I will join the next rally anyway, because I believe that it is wrong, appallingly, incredibly, brutally wrong, to allow those in power to believe they have the right to mortgage my future because they are wily enough to claw their way to power. To be silent is to tell every future Filipino leader that there is no limit to power.

Everyone is dirty in government, a pro-Arroyo rally-ist told me. And perhaps that is true, but it is no reason to condone corruption and rank dishonesty when we see it, especially when it implicates the country’s chief executive.

And this is where I’ll tell you where I stand. I do not

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Why Rally Didn’t Succeed as Touted

to kill time after office hours, or who wanted to watch a political sideshow, the accurate figure would perhaps be somewhere in between.

But whatever the real rally figure was, the fact remained that despite the widespread anti-administration sentiment in Metro Manila, the people were not ready to respond in full force to the clarion call of Ms Aquino and the opposition.

There were many reasons for last Friday’s tepid turnout. One was the appearance of the usual opposition leaders who have been discredited in an earlier round of people power, such as former president Joseph Estrada and cohorts like Makati City Mayor Jejomar Binay. Another is that the star witness on whom

Ms Aquino has sought to anchor her moral crusade, Rodolfo Noel Lozada Jr., is quite tarred and unfit to lead it.

On the eve of the rally, the radio news program Radyo Patrol came out with a story about Lozada’s second family and managed to locate their residence. Moreover, Lozada’s record at the government office from which he recently resigned is studded with evidence about not-so-petty corruption and high living, such as taking out three insurance policies paid for by the office on his behalf, with his wife collecting the commissions, and various nepotism practices. As the hearings continued, the star witness was also unmasked as double dealing—with government officials as well as the opposition—in what

seems like a plot to contribute to the destabilization of government.

All Lozada has done so far is to admit to all his sins and say he’s sorry, but he does not even bother to explain why he committed them. Some citizens are affronted by the schools’ and churches’ seeming confusion and double-standard about the star witness. In a strongly worded statement, Mahal Ko, Bayan Ko Foundation, led by Evelyn Kilayko, lamented the schools’ “evident irresponsible parading of a self-confessed adulterer and smalltime grafter as a hero in their premises,” which could impart wrong values to the youth. It also suggested that instead of allotting funding

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PINOY KASI

By Michael L. Tan

HEALTHCARE in the United States has been receiving a lot of attention lately, mainly because it is a major issue in the current presidential campaign, with the candidates expressing different views on solving America’s serious problem of access to healthcare.

A few months back, controversial documentary film director Michael Moore released “Sicko,” which contrasts the US healthcare system with that of Canada, Britain, France and Cuba. Last month, CNN broadcast its own documentary, “Broken Government: Healthcare Critical Condition,” and asked

Critical Care

American voters to deliver a “prescription” for their ailing healthcare system, by voting in the presidential polls.

Because the Philippine healthcare system is basically patterned after that of the United States, we Filipinos should be following these documentaries, the US presidential debates and the results of the elections. If a Democrat becomes president, especially if it is Hillary Clinton, there are likely to be significant reforms there and, maybe after some time (a decade or two?), the Philippines might follow.

Rich but poor

The United States is the world’s most powerful and richest nation, and has the highest per capita expenditure on health, at more than \$6,000 a year, yet it lags behind many other countries, including some of the so-

called developing ones, in terms of health indices, from life expectancy to child death rates.

One reason the US health situation is so poor is that one has to buy health, at great cost. Those most vulnerable are those who have no health insurance, and that’s about 50 million Americans, according to CNN and 60 million, according to Moore. But even those with some kind of health financing, through private health maintenance organizations, for example, often find themselves in trouble trying to pay for the treatment of serious illnesses, or a major accident.

Among developed countries, the United States is the only country that leaves healthcare almost completely to the “free” market. All the others chose to develop systems with universal health

coverage, through compulsory health insurance and a national health service run by government.

We get a glimpse into these national health services in “Sicko.” The parts on Britain were particularly informative, and entertaining. Moore interviews a chemist (British English for a druggist), who explains that people pay a flat fee of 6.60 pounds for each prescription, no matter what the medicine is, or in what quantity. Moore moves on to a hospital asking patients how much they paid, for emergency room services, for a child delivery. All answered, “Nothing,” with one man naughtily adding, “This isn’t America.”

Incredulous, Moore roams the hospital looking for a cashier’s office. He finally finds one and is about to gloat, and

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