

Smoking guns of history

by Vergel Santos September 16, 2017



Once he dodged Trillanes' challenge, Paolo Duterte, academic specialization notwithstanding, could not stop his secret tattoo going into the ledgers under the same column as Ferdinand Marcos' transplanted kidneys, and Joseph Estrada's unopened envelope

A [tattoo](#) on the back of the President's son Paolo Duterte is the latest to go into the box of telltale secrets of recent history. Its very concealment inspires suspicions attaching a smoking-gun quality to it.

In fact, similar secrets have attracted enough credibility unseen to contribute to the ouster of two presidents – Ferdinand Marcos and Joseph Estrada.

In Marcos' case, it was two kidney transplants, the first done, unsuccessfully, in 1983, around the time his archrival Benigno Aquino Jr was assassinated, the second the following year. The coincidence gave rise to generous speculations that Marcos, having been not merely out of commission but flat out, was incapable of plotting or ordering the assassination.

The transplants, like all their other martial-law secrets, remain unacknowledged by the Marcoses in spite of self-betraying evidence – Ferdinand became progressively clueless, bloated, and weakened toward his death, in 1989.

In fact, 4 years earlier two doctors had made firsthand confirmations of the transplants; one was the American surgeon who had himself taken part in the second surgery, the other a personal physician of Marcos', a Filipino, who shortly after talking was killed, stabbed many times in an attack that the gasping Marcos regime blamed on the communists, its customary bogey.

Less than two years after his second transplant Marcos was deposed by a people-power street vigil and escaped with his family to Hawaii, in the United States. They had taken loot estimated at 10 million dollars, mostly unrecovered to this day.

Joseph Estrada was accused of plunder himself, though not on any scale comparable with that in Marcos' case. That's probably why, once Estrada was booted out of the presidency, in midterm, in 2001, also by people power, public interest in his own case all but dissolved. Even his judicial conviction became anticlimactic.

His story reached its dramatic height at his impeachment trial in the Senate. An envelope supposedly containing a most damning document was offered in evidence, but its unsealing was voted down on privacy grounds. In protest, throngs poured onto the same stretch of highway, EDSA, as 15 years before, against Marcos, and forced Estrada to quit.

Subsequently, he was found guilty in court and sentenced to 40 years in prison. Only P700 million in money and a prime piece of property, valued all together at a mere quarter of the 4.1 billion pesos worth of booty he allegedly had amassed, were judged due the state. He was pardoned by his successor, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, and voted mayor of the nation's capital city. The legendary envelope was forgotten, meanwhile.

A mere provincial-city vice mayor, Paolo Duterte is definitely not in the same class as Marcos or Estrada, but Papa Rodrigo is. Not only is he also President, he is a [professed Marcos emulator](#) and has Estrada – and, as it happens, his pardoner, Arroyo, too – for a political ally. But still, if Senator Antonio Trillanes' information is right, Paolo's secret puts him in an especially notorious class of his own.

[Implicated in the smuggling](#) of all sorts of merchandise, drugs included, and called to a Senate inquiry, Paolo, looking keen to show casual confidence, is quick to answer Trillanes's question: Does he have a tattoo on his back?

“Yes.”

Before proceeding with his questioning, Trillanes specifies what sort of tattoo he's looking for – one designed as a code of membership of the transnational Chinese criminal syndicate Triad (not unlike the Sicilian Mafia or the Japanese Yakuza). He goes on to challenge Paolo Duterte to prove him wrong.

It's a moment of truth, an all-in battle for credibility between not only Paolo but more so his father and his nemesis, Trillanes himself. A bared back decides it, at a public forum, on national television. But...“No way!”

Paolo is not baring or biting; neither is he admitting or denying anything, let alone any Triad connection. He told the press some days after his Senate appearance he's a graduate of banking and finance; he cannot be fooled.

At any rate, once he dodged Trillanes' challenge, Paolo Duterte, academic specialization notwithstanding, could not stop his secret tattoo going into the ledgers under the same column as Ferdinand Marcos' transplanted kidneys, and Joseph Estrada's unopened envelope.

Ref.: [Rappler.com](#)

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