

Death by Garrote

Waiting in line at the security checkpoint before entering Malacañang, I joined Metrobank Foundation director Chito Sobrepeña and Retired Justice Rodolfo Palattao of the anti-graft court Sandiganbayan who were discussing how to inspire the faculty of the Unibersidad de Manila (formerly City College of Manila) to become outstanding teachers. Ascending the grand staircase leading to the ceremonial hall, I told Justice Palattao that Manuel Quezon never signed a death sentence sent him by the courts because of a story associated with these historic steps. Quezon heard that in December 1896 Jose Rizal's mother climbed these steps on her knees to see the governor-general and plead for her son's life. Teodora Alonso's appeal was ignored and Rizal was executed in Bagumbayan.

At the top of the stairs, Justice Palattao said "*Kinilabutan naman ako sa kinuwento mo* (I had goosebumps listening to your story)." Thus overwhelmed, he missed Juan Luna's *Pacto de Sangre*, so I asked "*Ilan po ang binitay ninyo?* (How many people did you sentence to death?)"

"*Tatlo lang* (Only three)", he replied. At that point we were reminded of retired Sandiganbayan Justice Manuel Pamaran who had the fearful reputation as The Hanging Judge.

All these morbid thoughts on a cheerful morning came from the morbid historical relics I have been contemplating recently: a piece of black cloth cut from the coat of Rizal wore to his execution, a chipped piece of Rizal's backbone displayed in Fort Santiago that shows where the fatal bullet hit him, a photograph of Ninoy Aquino's bloodstained shirt taken in 1983, the noose used to hang General Yamashita recently found in the *bodega* of the National Museum.

Affected by the old photographs of the garrote, I took a stroll around Rizal Park recently to see the squat white obelisk that marks the spot where Fathers Gomez, Burgos and Zamora were executed in 1872. Most visitors overlook this obelisk, so I decided to pay silent homage at this site but got distracted by the historical marker with erroneous information. Worse, the mistake is made not just once but twice, in two separate markers. The error etched and perpetuated in bronze is that Gomburza were martyred by strangulation using the garrote. That is what it looks like, but aren't executions designed to be swift and relatively painless? To do otherwise is to indulge in cruel and inhuman punishment.

From what I see of this terrible contraption, the garrote kills quite fast. A metal bar is tightened around the victim's neck and at the appointed time, with a quick twist of a handle, the neck of the victim is broken, resulting in instant death. Contrary to popular belief, the garrote does not produce slow excruciating death by strangulation. I don't want to try it out to validate my theory. No one, except perhaps the Marquis de Sade and others who are into sadism, would find pleasure in a public execution.

To find an answer, I reread the dramatic eyewitness account of the Gomburza execution by a Frenchman named Edmond Mauchut, who described the attitude of the condemned priests: "Burgos cried like a child, but managed to greet with a shake of his head all his friends whom he recognized in the huge crowd. Zamora was like one dazed and unconscious of what was going on. But Padre Gomez, with eyes open and with furrowed brow, blessed the multitude that knelt at his feet as he passed by."

There were actually four men executed that day. The first was Saldua who expected a pardon for implicating the three priests. The pardon never came.

Next was Gomez who had a calm resignation proceeding from a clear conscience and trust in God's goodness. His famous last words were: "I very well know that not a single leaf can move except at the will of the Divine Creator. Since it is His will that I die at this place, may His will be done."

Zamora who had lost his will was technically dead even before he was physically dead. He was executed third.

Last was Burgos who publicly forgave someone who did him wrong as he ascended the scaffold. He sat on the garrote and everyone started to pray more fervently then he stood up and shouted "What crime have I committed? Shall I die in this manner? Is there no justice in the world?"

In answer to his questions, 12 friars rushed and pushed him back into the chair. "But I am innocent!" he protested.

One friar hissed. "Even Jesus Christ was without sin." Hearing that, Burgos forgave his executioner and gave up his spirit. The crowd saw the executioner kneeling in front of him and receiving his forgiveness, and they also knelt and prayed harder.

The execution of Gomburza was an inspiration for others who fought for freedom. Even Rizal dedicated *El Filibusterismo* to them. Bonifacio distributed strips of black cloth, allegedly from the robes of Gomburza. No wonder 1872 is a landmark date in Philippine History.

Reference

Looking Back 3: Death by Garrote
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The Other Rizal

A Philippine town plaza is never complete without a statue of Jose Rizal in his winter coat. Seldom does a town hero become eligible to share the honor in the town plaza with the National Hero.

This may be due to the overemphasis on Rizal, which has impeded research on the other heroes. Many Filipinos do not know about the men and women who fought the very revolution Rizal condemned as premature and doomed to failure.

One of these unsung heroes happens to be Rizal's own brother Paciano Rizal, a general in the Philippine Revolution.

Born on March 7, 1851, Paciano was the second of the eleven Rizal children, ten years older than Jose. He was "ñor Paciano" to his siblings, since the Rizals had the custom of adding *ñor* or *ñora* [short for *señor* or *señora*] to the names of older relatives as a sign of respect when addressing them.

Standard biographies state that Paciano Rizal studied at the Colegio de San Jose and later at the University of Santo Tomas in Manila. He had to drop out of school because he was associated with the martyred priest, Fr. Jose Burgos, who was branded a *filibustero* and executed with other two priests, Frs. Mariano Gomez and Jacinto Zamora, in 1872. Paciano was not just a messenger of Burgos. He is said to have lived in Burgos's house which is a part of Paciano's biography contested by the Dominican Fr. Fidel Villaroel in his book, *Rizal in UST*. At any rate, when Jose went to Manila to study, he had to use the surname "Rizal" instead of "Mercado" to avoid being associated with his elder brother. Jose was the only one in the family who used the surname Rizal, and in his youth, he thought he was illegitimate because of this. After his execution the family dropped the name Mercado and adopted the more illustrious surname, Rizal.

Paciano returned and settled in Calamba to oversee their hacienda, thus become the *padre de familia*. It was Paciano who secretly sent his younger brother off in Europe, since their mother disapproved of "too intelligent a son because if one knows too much they will cut off your head." Paciano held a long correspondence with his brother, advising him and sending him his monthly stipend.

Paciano and Jose are said to have made a pact that they would work for the country, and thus only one of them should get married. When Rizal came home from Europe and insisted on marrying his sweetheart, Leonor Rivera, Paciano is said to have discouraged this by saying, "*Inisip mo lang ang iyong sarili*" and sent him off again to Europe. After Rizal's execution Paciano joined Aguinaldo's army and rose to the rank of general. He died in Los Baños on April 13, 1930.

Deeper research on the man is fascinating because he is, unlike his brother, a big mystery. It seems that almost all documentation on Paciano naturally ends with the execution of his brother. Following the lead that he was general in the revolution, one proceeds to the Philippine Insurgent Records (PIR) kept in the National Library but finds only a handful of documents on Paciano and no traces or references to him in the papers on the military command of Laguna! Early on one will wonder: is this general for real?

Some researchers often start with a photograph of their subject. Here again, unlike his much-photographed and fully documented brother Jose, there are only two known pictures of Paciano, who refused to be photographed: one is a candid shot taken without his knowledge by a nephew during a family reunion, and the other is his corpse.

I was fortunate to have been invited to Paciano Rizal's home in Los Baños where his grandchildren, Franz and Edmundo Lopez Rizal and their sister Eugenia Lopez Villaruz, were having a small family reunion. It was an interesting day and one could not help asking about the rumors that the

grandchildren were "illegitimate," since Paciano Rizal did not marry. I was even told that he had many "illegitimate" children, of whom the Lopezes were a small portion. As soon as the delicious lunch was consumed, I gathered enough courage to ask the million-dollar question, only to be floored by the Lopezes' candid answers. Paciano courted a few women but he never married. However, he had a daughter Emiliana by Severina Decena. Franz Lopez the unofficial spokesman for the family, said:

Our *lola* actually married someone else from Calamba, but she used to come here when we were children. We were told she was Lola Binay, but she did not live with us. You see these old people are very discreet, but when you grow older you piece things together. [Laughs] I used to wonder who this old lady was who would come and make '*hinguto*' to my sister.

Then Mrs. Villaruz pointed to the only photograph taken on her *lolo* alive and asked me: "Do you know what the floral thing on the right side of the photo is?"

"Oh, this floral thing?"

"Yes."

I answered: "A table with a floral tablecloth?"

"No, guess again," Mrs. Villaruz said with a smile.

"Ok, it must be a sofa."

"No, guess again."

"*Sirit*."

Trying to contain her laughter, Mrs. Villaruz explained: "This is the *puwit* of our cousin Encarnacion Cruz, the daughter of Maria Rizal. When the picture was taken, they were all laughing and were peeping at someone taking a bath or something, so you can see our *lolo* also looking..."

Amused by this bit of oral history, I asked why their *lolo* refused to be photographed even when he was old, so she added, "He did not want to be photographed because his reason was that he was a wanted man in the past and if there were no photographs of him, then it would be hard for the authorities to arrest him. He could walk everywhere without being recognized."

Mrs. Villaruz added that their *lolo* had a very fair complexion and even had rosy cheeks, which corroborates Rizal's description of his elder brother in a letter to Blumentritt: "[Paciano] is more refined and serious than I, taller, more slender and fairer in complexion than I with a nose that is fine, beautiful and sharp-pointed, but he is bow-legged."

The eminent historian, Epifanio de los Santos (after whom EDSA was named) used to wonder about Paciano's features, often asking the naughty question: "*Bakit hindi niya kamukha ang mga kapatid niya. Siguro nasingitan.*"

Paciano's grandchildren add that their *lolo* was more handsome than the national hero and "oh, much taller... you know, when he died and the body was brought to the *funeraria*, his feet stuck out of the coffin, which was too small for him! He was quite tall, about 5'7, 5'9."

General Rizal's grandchildren have a different view of their *lolo*, most of which they formed when they got older and were able to appreciate the stories related by their grandmother Narcisa Rizal – their mother, Emiliana, was Pacian Rizal's "natural child" who later married her cousin, Antonio Lopez, son of Narcisa Rizal, thus making them Rizal's from both the paternal and maternal side. Their *lolo* was a quiet man who didn't talk much. He never told them stories about his brother Jose nor his life as a *revolucionario*. Paciano was thrifty, but he was a doting grandfather who spoiled his grandchildren by always giving them money for *tsampoy*. They were orphaned quite early and their *lolo* thus became their second father. They remember him keeping them company on the *banig* till they fell asleep, and on their

first Christmas without their father he came to visit them in Manila, gave money to their mother, and said: "*Gastusin mo iyan sa mga bata para hindi nila maramdaman na wala silang ama.*"

All the memories of their grandfather came from their grandmother Narcisa Rizal, who was the family storyteller. It was their Lola Sisa who told them about their *Lolo* Jose and their Lolo Paciano and the hardship they endured under the Spaniards. Can you imagine being lulled to sleep by Lola Sisa, who read the "*Ultimo Adios*" and other poems by Rizal instead of bedtime stories?

The image of the doting grandfather is sort of difficult to reconcile with the man's reputation as a general in the Revolution. In Pedro Paternos account of his negotiations for peace between Spain and the Filipino revolutionaries, "*El Pacto de Biak na Bato*", he relates a meeting with Paciano, who, when informed of his plans for a truce, is supposed to have said:

What do you want? That we make peace with Spain? That we be the bearer and acceptor of that peace, when they shot my brother, Pepe, banished my parents and relatives, falsely accused us to the last member of my family, confiscating our lands and hurling a thousand horrors on our faces? Ah, Don Pedro, dig a deep well. Fill it from the top to bottom with all the *bolos* and lances that you wish. Then, command me to throw myself into it and I, Paciano Rizal, will do just that, but do not ask me for peace because that, Don Pedro, is impossible – absurd!

This and other accounts of Paciano Rizal go against the book by the Dominican historian, Fr. Fidel Villaroel, who uses another source to show Paciano's "civil" [deferential is a word he would like to use] attitude toward the Dominican friars who caused much of their family's misery. All other accounts and anecdotes say the opposite and reveal Paciano's hostility toward the church.

One of Paciano Rizal's exploits is getting the Spaniards to surrender in Calamba. The story is that the enemy had holed up in the church and the town hall of Calamba and the revolutionaries had very few guns to flush them out, so Paciano Rizal is supposed to have ordered that firecrackers be used every time the Filipinos would open fire so that the enemy would think they were heavily armed. After three days of siege, the Spaniards surrendered. The one of the few letters of Paciano in the PIR in the National Library requested clarification on the status of the Americans and suspiciously in his area of jurisdiction, making topographical surveys, taking military notes, etc. Paciano was right to suspect American intentions because when Manila fell on August 13, 1898, and the Filipinos finally realized they had been tricked by the Americans, they fought another battle, this time against what they once thought was the "Benevolent North American nation."

Paciano Rizal, weakened by malaria, was captured by the Americans in 1900 and is said to have refused to swear allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, saying that he would swear allegiance to no other flag than his own. It is odd, however, that the Americans would allow him to stay in Laguna on the strength of a promise that he would lead a peaceful life and not interfere with the American occupation of the islands. Apolinario Mabini, who was a paralytic, was exiled to Guam because he refused to swear allegiance to America. Why, then, would a man potentially "dangerous" as Paciano Rizal be allowed to stay and inspire a revolt at the strength of his being the brother of Rizal?

There are more unanswered questions left by this preliminary research into the life of Paciano Rizal. So until the result of research in our libraries and archives is completed, our comments in articles will all have to be prefaced with "he is supposed to have..." Nothing is definite as of now, except perhaps Paciano Rizal's birthdate and date of death, but this all proves that Paciano Rizal, like the other heroes of the Revolution of 1896 and 1898, should be rescued from obscurity and given his rightful place in history.

Reference: Rizal Without the Overcoat, expanded edition (Anvil Publishing, 2000)