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Mon Tulfo's Column About Ninoy Aquino is Also a Learning Opportunity About History

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Gotta hand it to Ramon Tulfo: The guy has *cojones* something. Fresh from challenging the entire triage system and the Philippine medical profession—after, mind you, a busy day of "bumping" small children whilst being chauffeured in a convoy—he somehow found the energy to take on a nationally recognized hero *and* a couple of historical figures to boot.

On August 18, Friday (the same day, incidentally, that his "PGH Experience" went viral), Tulfo asked in his column for the Philippine Daily Inquirer, "[Did Ninoy mastermind assassination?](#)" These sentiments are somewhat expanded in [his](#)

blog, [Ramon Tulfo, Journalist/Philantropist](#), where he has an entry titled "[Ninoy's Death and How to Manipulate People](#)", written somewhat in the style of adolescent favorite Rupi Kaur:

It's just like in chess.

Sometimes, the lowest piece, the pawn, can move forward and become a queen.

To do that, you sometimes have to sacrifice other more powerful pieces.

But when the pawn becomes the queen, the game really changes.

So, who killed Ninoy?

It may be that he won the game by killing himself.

Like [his PGH experience](#), this too is a learning opportunity—about history, both recent Philippine and ancient Greek and Roman.

With Ninoy Aquino's death anniversary coming up with a nationally recognized holiday tomorrow, it's a good time for a history refresher.

Tulfo begins his column by saying that he has interviewed Air Force M/Sgt. Pablo Martinez

"several times." Sgt. Martinez, for those of us who have forgotten his place in the assassination of Senator Benigno Aquino, Jr., is one of 16 people convicted of killing Ninoy and Rolando Galman. Martinez was granted pardon by then President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo in 2007, partly due to his age (he was 70 at the time), but was killed in a road accident in 2014.

Martinez's involvement was especially noteworthy, since he admitted to his part in the assassination plot and provided leads to possible masterminds in the case. But never mind that: Tulfo downplays this in favor of pointing out that "Martinez said all the other coaccused, who were convicted with him, were innocent" and that "Martinez pointed to Rolando Galman as the lone assassin."

This is apparently his setup for his point: **"My police reporter's mind is malicious, pardon me, but if [Ninoy] knew that the end was near, was it possible he masterminded his own death?"**

Now, that Ninoy was aware of the risk of assassination upon his return to the Philippines from exile in the U.S. isn't in question. Footage survives of Ninoy acknowledging that he might be killed: "My feeling is, we all have to die sometime.

Now, if it's my fate to die by an assassin's bullet, so be it. But I cannot be petrified by inaction."

Tulfo is right so far about Ninoy knowing that he might be facing death. But Tulfo goes on to speculate, cryptically: "I would say that the right phrase for Ninoy, given all of what he said before he died, is that he knew too much about his own death...It's too convenient, and because of that, the idea of Ninoy orchestrating his own death could be an inconvenient truth."

Or, as he writes in the aforementioned column:

"There were people in history who masterminded their deaths to make themselves heroes in perpetuity: Cleopatra, to end the war between Octavian and Mark Anthony, with whom she had three children; Socrates, to preserve his philosophy."

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And there Tulfo's parallels reveal themselves to be on truly shaky ground, because he is, quite simply, mistaken in his understanding of ancient history.

While it is true that Cleopatra and Socrates died by their own hands, everything else Tulfo wrote has no basis in history.

Cleopatra did not kill herself to "end the war between Octavian and Mark Anthony [sic]." By the time of Cleopatra's death, Octavian had already won decisive victories against Mark Antony; in fact, Mark Antony was already dead, having killed himself in the belief that Cleopatra had also committed suicide. After burying Mark Antony, Cleopatra also committed suicide to avoid the humiliation of being paraded around as a trophy. Other historians allege that Cleopatra didn't kill herself at all, but was instead murdered.

"The popular story of Cleopatra's death is that she committed suicide rather than be captured alive, because Roman tradition is that the defeated leader is included in a victory parade in Rome, then executed. Also, following that same popular story, is that Cleopatra committed suicide AFTER Marc Antony, not before, and definitely not to end a war," clarifies Jo-ed Tirol, professor of history at the Ateneo de Manila.

Likewise, Socrates did not die willingly "to preserve his philosophy." Socrates was sentenced to death in ancient Greece after being charged with moral corruption and for impiety against the city's gods. Far from masterminding the trial and the eventual death sentence meted out at the end, Socrates

mounted an epic defense, immortalized in Plato's Apology of Socrates. While he agreed to the sentence to live up to his principles, he did not mastermind the trial or the death sentence.

"Socrates, on the other hand, committed suicide, to prove a point—that he respected the laws of Athens, even if he did not agree with them. So it was not a case of masterminding his death, but rather succumbing to the will of the city, even if he personally felt it was wrong," Prof. Tirol continues.

Says Tirol: "You could say that if Cleopatra's cause of death was indeed murder rather than suicide, there was no masterminding to begin with. And in the case of Socrates, that's not masterminding. That's accepting his fate."

So, according to all historical records that exist, Socrates, Cleopatra, and Ninoy Aquino were alike in the fact that they each faced their deaths stoically. It may even be argued that Ninoy's decision to return to the Philippines and Socrates' acquiescence to capital punishment are tantamount to suicide. But facing one's fate is a long way from masterminding an entire plot that ends in one's death.

