

philippine studies: historical and ethnographic viewpoints

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

Erwin S. Fernandez's

*The Diplomat-Scholar:
A Biography of Leon Ma. Guerrero*

Review Author: Severo C. Madrona Jr.

Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints
vol. 66 no. 1 (2018): 119–22

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies.soss@ateneo.edu.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>

reading promises to yield fascinating insights with analytic implications that go beyond Philippine media and political studies.

Rommel A. Curaming

History and International Studies, University of Brunei Darussalam
<rommel.curaming@ubd.edu.bn>

ERWIN S. FERNANDEZ

The Diplomat-Scholar: A Biography of Leon Ma. Guerrero

Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2017. 359 pages.

Erwin S. Fernandez is a biographer, poet, and local historian with graduate and baccalaureate degrees from the University of the Philippines-Diliman. He used to be a lecturer both at the Department of History and the Department of Filipino and Philippine Literature of the said university. At present, he is the director of Abung na Panagbasay Pangasinan (House of Pangasinan Studies), an independent research center promoting Pangasinan studies. He has published extensively on topics that include Philippine diplomacy, social movements, and the local history of his home province of Pangasinan. *The Diplomat-Scholar: A Biography of Leon Ma. Guerrero* is a historical and biographical account of one of the prominent Filipino diplomats in the Cold War.

Because Guerrero is a controversial figure in Philippine diplomacy and is widely known for his “Asia for Asians” advocacy and realist foreign policy approach during the Cold War, Fernandez situates his life in the evolution and development of Philippine diplomacy. Fernandez claims that this book is his interpretation of Guerrero’s story, “holding on to the precepts of traditional and modern life-writing and relying on the sources and the recognition of their limitation” (5). By doing so, he applies “transnational and comparative contextual analyses” (5) in his inquiry into Guerrero’s life, positing that a descriptive historical approach may suffice but will not be adequate to understand the diplomat-scholar amid the broader intellectual developments at that time. He asserts that, for the purpose of the book’s authenticity, Guerrero’s voice is reechoed from his speeches and interviews, although he admits that gaps might exist in his narrative which cannot be supplied by historical sources.

The book is organized in five parts, with a total of twenty-five chapters. Each chapter describes an episode in Guerrero's life, starting from his bourgeois lineage and Jesuit education at the Ateneo de Manila to his career as a literary critic, playwright actor, journalist, government lawyer, and ultimately a pioneering Filipino diplomat. Fernandez shows that Guerrero's grounding as part of the landed Manila-based Guerrero family is contradictory to his nationalist and realist stand on Philippine foreign policy during the Cold War. Likewise, Guerrero's upbringing goes against his "Americanization" at the Ateneo, where he excelled in what Fernandez terms Guerrero's "Anglo-American models" for his literary writing and versatility. Fernandez narrates how Guerrero made use of the *Guidon*, Ateneo's student publication of which he was once editor-in-chief, as a literary medium not to support the American colonial masters but to defend the former Spanish rulers and ultimately the Roman Catholic Church, which Guerrero believed could eventually "save the world from itself" (35). Although Guerrero was proficient in English and appreciative of American culture as shown by his exemplary marks at the Ateneo, Fernandez argues that Guerrero maintained his "pro-Hispanic, pro-Catholic sentiments nurtured in his home," while also "denying the richness of indigenous culture" (35). Equally, while Guerrero can be considered a liberal progressive in his foreign policy stance, Fernandez depicts him as an avid defender of strong leaders like Manuel Quezon and Ferdinand Marcos. These paradoxes in Guerrero's life—which Fernandez presents to reveal the kind of nationalism Guerrero imbibed—are the main concerns of this book, as Fernandez traces the origins and resulting effects of Guerrero's nationalist standpoint. The author also demonstrates how institutions like the Ateneo created social networks for Guerrero in his later years in journalism, law, and diplomacy.

What is commendable about *The Diplomat-Scholar* is the meticulous utilization of sources. There is no doubt that Fernandez's employment of Guerrero's speeches and interviews allows him to reecho the diplomat-scholar's voice as Guerrero pursued his advocacy for close relations with socialist countries, diplomacy of development, the reexamination of Philippine-US relations, and defense of martial law in the international community. The narrative is engaging in that it invites readers to do further research to satisfy their thirst for more information. However—and this may be considered one of the book's weaknesses—Fernandez fails to address important gaps in Guerrero's life-story, which could have been remedied by situating Guerrero in his historical milieu.

Three important aspects of Guerrero's life should have been contextualized further. The first concerns Guerrero's years at the Ateneo. The author should not have relied merely on details about academic achievements and works published in the *Guidon*, but should also have discussed the academic environment of the Ateneo in the early years of American occupation. Did Ateneo encourage pro-Hispanic sentiments (despite the arrival of the American Jesuits), or was Guerrero's pro-Hispanic stance a result of the Jesuits' zeal to instill religious fervor in its students and the Roman Catholic Church's strong Hispanic influence?

The second is Guerrero's legal career. Readers may find it interesting how Guerrero as an associate solicitor confronted the then 23-year-old Marcos before Supreme Court Associate Justice Jose P. Laurel in the Julio Nalundasan murder case. Fernandez misses this important contradiction: Guerrero asserted before Laurel Marcos's culpability, and he moved for the reaffirmation of the trial court decision convicting Marcos and others for Nalundasan's death despite the personal plea of Marcos's mother. However, Guerrero later became an ardent defender of Marcos and martial law in the international community, in his capacity as ambassador to Mexico, Cuba, and Yugoslavia and as a member of the Philippine delegation to the United Nations (UN). What made Guerrero change his opinion and perception of Marcos? Fernandez mentions that Guerrero was a Quezon loyalist and a believer in the need for strong leadership during times of crisis, which could have helped explain his support for Marcos as well. Sadly, Fernandez fails to notice and clarify this paradox.

The third is Guerrero's controversial speech on "Asia for the Asians," which should have been analyzed alongside Claro M. Recto's nationalist and realist foreign policy approach. In his speech before the faculty and students of the Manila Law College in February 1954, then Foreign Affairs Undersecretary Guerrero asserted: "I believe I can say with truth that this administration [Pres. Ramon Magsaysay's] is not only Nacionalista but nationalist. It believes in nationalism, not only for itself but also for others. It believes that Asia belongs to the Asians for the same reason that the Philippines belongs to the Filipinos" (138). Magsaysay was not pleased with Guerrero's speech for fear that the US might not accept such policy and that it echoed the "Asia for the Asiatics" policy of the Japanese invaders during the Second World War. As a result, Magsaysay removed Guerrero from the Department of Foreign Affairs and "banished [him] to London" (144), i.e.,

appointed ambassador to the United Kingdom (UK), which was considered a penalty and not a promotion for Guerrero.

Fernandez could have provided background information on the Recto decade in Philippine foreign policy, a narrative that would have placed Guerrero in the same pantheon as Laurel and in clear contrast to Magsaysay. Instead of criticizing Vice President Carlos P. Garcia's ambivalence (Garcia was acting Secretary of Foreign Affairs to Magsaysay), the author could have shown the entire picture of Philippine diplomacy during the Cold War: the "conservatives" of the pro-American side (Magsaysay and Carlos P. Romulo) and the "progressive-neutralist" side (Recto, Laurel, and Guerrero). Guerrero's speeches as ambassador to the UK, Spain, India, Mexico, Cuba, and Yugoslavia and as a member of the Philippine delegation to the UN showed his allegiance to Recto's progressive-neutralist side. Recto was known for his advocacy for the reexamination of Philippines–US relations, closer Asian ties, and the adoption of a neutralist foreign policy during the Cold War.

Despite the identified shortcomings, Fernandez succeeds in some ways in situating Guerrero's story in the intersections of family, literary, diplomatic, and transnational history of the postwar Philippines. Fernandez gives us a glimpse of how Guerrero's nationalist and realist approach might have contributed to the Philippines's quest for identity in the community of nations. Through a meticulous analysis of the diplomat-scholar's speeches and dispatches, Fernandez secures Guerrero's place in Philippine diplomatic history.

Severo C. Madrona Jr.

Department of History, Ateneo de Manila University
<smadrona@ateneo.edu>

CAROLINE S. HAU

Elites and Ilustrados in Philippine Culture

Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2017. 398 pages.

The 2016 presidential election brought back the spotlight on an age-old quandary that has inundated the Philippines: the social and political