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## Editor's Introduction

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# Editor's Introduction

**O**n this year of the Ateneo de Manila's sesquicentennial celebration, it seems appropriate to feature an article about an Ateneo de Manila alumnus who wrote a landmark biography and major translations to English of the works of its greatest alumnus, José Rizal. Erwin S. Fernandez illuminates the life story of León Ma. Guerrero and the latter's authorship of *The First Filipino*, which was first published in 1963. To arrive at a deeper understanding of Guerrero, Fernandez not only probes into the background of the biographer but also examines the subject of the biography in terms of the appropriation and reappropriation of the textualized figure of Rizal under different historical circumstances. Guerrero, however, was far from being a detached observer of those who would use Rizal's image to suit their own agenda. We learn from Fernandez that Guerrero was deeply engaged in the discursive struggle over the representations of Rizal, from the years of the Japanese occupation through to the postwar period. Impelled by patriotism and the goal of making Rizal accessible to a new generation, Guerrero, already a diplomat, translated Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, coincident with the passage of the Rizal Law in 1956, which required these novels to be studied in schools. Guerrero's translations ineluctably generated their own contradictions.

In response to a government-sponsored biography-writing contest, which closed in 1960, Guerrero wrote *The First Filipino*, a work written in dialogue with the author's contemporary and bosom friend, Fr. Horacio de la Costa, S.J. Guerrero sought to make Rizal speak in his own voice, but the biographer's voice was unmistakable in his theory of Rizal's religious beliefs. Importantly, engaged as he was in a particular type of nationalist politics, Guerrero's biography gave preeminence to Rizal's Filipinoness rather than his Malayness, which until then was a dominant motif. Probably hinted at by his personal alignment with Claro M. Recto, Guerrero, Fernandez believes, encouraged a "subversive" reading of Rizal, which fed into the student

movement that would challenge the Marcos-dominated Philippine state. Was this an unintended effect of Guerrero's work? Did he welcome it? In any event, this interpretation needs to be squared with the same movement's preference for Bonifacio over Rizal.

Unintended consequences are pronounced in the study of Hiromitsu Umehara, who surveys the state-initiated settlement of the Koronadal Valley in Mindanao from the 1930s to the present. Umehara demonstrates that, contrary to the state's goal of forming a class of peasant owner-cultivators—deemed to be a potent strategy against agrarian unrest and communist influence—settlement in the valley eventuated in tenancy, on the one hand, and landownership, on the other. The larger landowners also tended to be absentee landlords. Moreover, rather than integration of the indigenous B'laan with the migrant settlers, their displacement took place. Instead of the avowed protection of Mindanao from the entry of large plantations owned by foreign capital, the reverse was exactly what happened in Middle and South Koronadal. Amid the nonfulfillment of the state's goals in fostering the settlement of the valley, Umehara acknowledges that the region has seen vibrant economic growth. General Santos City is a symbol of that transformation. Although the causes of growth still need to be examined, one could ask if this growth would have occurred nonetheless had the settlement goals been achieved..

The ambiguities of state legislations enunciated at the national level offer room for maneuver at the local level, as Koki Seki shows in his study of a fishing community in Palawan. The 1998 Fisheries Code of the Philippines mandated the enclosure, zoning, and classification of municipal waters and the banning of "commercial fishing" in those waters. Initial implementation saw violators being charged with fines that members of the fishing community could ill afford. The bigger problem was the prohibition of traditional fishing activities that, at the national level, were deemed to be ecologically inappropriate, but which spelled economic dislocation for the village economy. Faced with this challenge, key local actors "translated" the law by passing a municipal ordinance that in effect reformulated the national fisheries code and adapted it to local conditions. Rather than posing a simple opposition between state power and people's resistance, Seki argues in favor of a view of human agency that, although defined by broader parameters, engages in complex, even unpredictable, practices guided by local rationality.