

Book Review: Ricarze, Aida Mirasol. *General Leandro Fullon of Antique*. National Historical Commission of the Philippines, 2024.

An Appraisal of the Life of a Visayan General

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ABSTRACT

The period of the Philippine Revolution is often seen as a complex, labyrinthine event wherein the researchers often found themselves in a precarious yet prevalent position: First, their focus is mostly concentrated in the Luzon region, less so in the other regions; and the personalities in focus are often repetitive in nature, which in turn curtails the opportunity for other important figures to be highlighted. As shown in this book review, Aida Mirasol Ricarze's compact work, *General Leandro Fullon of Antique*, offers a brief account of the relatively unknown revolutionary's life and contribution, that can be seen as a means in shifting the focus of the Philippine Revolution from the Luzon area to the Visayan province of Antique and its neighboring areas, through the use of oral history and archival research as its main methodological procedures to extract pertinent and essential information about the life of the revolutionary general. In sum, the booklet planted seeds of scholarly interest that, if carefully nurtured, may reap more timely, productive, and valuable research opportunities in terms of highlighting the life and contributions of an uncelebrated figure in the eventual molding of our country.

Keywords: *Leandro Fullon, Philippine Revolution, Philippine-American War, Antique*

Introduction

Time and again, the period of the Philippine Revolution has received its fair share of scholarly attention from local and international researchers alike when it comes to understanding the multifaceted aspects of the event. Wherein one of the recurring themes of study is the biographical sketch of the figures who have partaken or have a hand in the unfolding of the said event. Though the scholarly attention given to figures who hailed from provinces outside of Luzon was not as in-depth as that given to their Luzon counterparts. Henceforth, to show that the two-fold phase of the Philippine Revolution does not beset only in the provinces of Luzon but also in the Visayan region, coupled with the desire to add to the growing literature of the Visayan aspect of the Philippine Revolution, Ricarze's scholarly work (originally published as a journal article in 2000) —turned into a booklet—presents a biographical sketch examining the life of General Leandro Fullon and his notable role in the Philippine Revolution.

As for the sources used by the author, in coping with the responsibility of presenting an impartial and definitive account of the lives of figures within the period of the Philippine Revolution, it is an imperative for interested scholars to peruse the Philippine Insurgent Records (nowadays, called as the Philippine Revolutionary Records), which is a treasure trove of information, to conduct a meticulous examination of the actors and their participation in the event, from which Ricarze extracted relevant details in creating her work. Unlike other biographical works of figures within the period of the Philippine Revolution such as, to name a few: Teodoro A. Agoncillo's *The Revolt of the Masses* and *Malolos: The Crisis of the Republic*, Raul Manikan and Teresa Canon-Garcia's *General Fernando Canon: His Guitar and the Revolution*, Takao Watanabe's *Father of Philippine Independence: The Struggle of General Emilio Aguinaldo*, and Jim Richardson's *The Fight for Liberty: Notes on Andres Bonifacio and the Beginning of the Philippine Revolution*, Ricarze have distinctively consulted and utilized the Historical Data Papers as it contains accounts of the local history of a certain locality (in this case, the province of Antique) that traces its origins back to the efforts of the Quirino Administration, which is now held at the National Library of the Philippines. It provided insights into the unfolding of the Philippine Revolution in the area of Antique. In addition, the author's use of the Report of Major General Arthur MacArthur Jr. to the United States War Department should not be seen in a detrimental light, but rather, it is a window to tease out pertinent details about the encounters of General Fullon against the Americans, providing information that is likely not included in other contemporaneous accounts from the Filipino side.

However, there were built-in problems from the packaging of the other sources used by the author, as the work became a nesting ground of shortcomings that hindered it from becoming a full-scale and impartial narration of Fullon's life: First, the author's conspicuous over-reliance on the information acquired from interviews conducted with the descendants of Fullon and the Xavier siblings. While not discounting the importance of the information gotten through oral history as it is not entirely bereft of any significance, the lack of corroborative sources to ascertain the truthfulness of the details lies the problem. Second is the deficiency of relevant secondary sources used by the author in crafting the work, which led to the author being restrained in painting a truthful account of the life of Fullon. These problems echoed in this paragraph will be touched on and discussed later in this review, as they became one of the serious defects in the booklet.

Analysis of the Book Content

The author's discussion begins with his birth and genealogy. Ricarze stated that the would-be General Leandro Fullon was born to parents "who were prominent persons in the town of Hamtic, Antique" as his father had once become the *cabeza de barangay* of their town, and his mother was of Chinese descent and was active in various church activities.¹ It is worth noting what the author is conveying by using the adjective 'prominent' to describe the parentage of the would-be general, as the term itself has varied meanings. When it comes to socio-economic matters, the term "prominent" is synonymous, to a considerable extent, with well-to-do or affluent.

Henceforth, Ricarze's statement implies that, in the backdrop of the growing commercial activities and interest in the Visayan region during the 19th century owing to the opening of trading ports as well as the introduction of novel technologies that spurred economic productivity, which transformed the existing societal stratification within the province, it is leading to the claim that the socio-economic status of Fullon's immediate family is to be categorized as middle-class or higher, for his parents could send him to Manila for further education opportunities. It is a feat that was relatively uncommon for 'average families' living in the province during those times.² Though in an off-hand note, as written in her account, Fullon did not finish his course at the *Colegio de San Juan de Letran* due to financial difficulty and was forced to take odd jobs in Manila to save money, which seems to challenge the 'prominent' stature.³

¹ Aida Mirasol Ricarze, *General Leandro Fullon of Antique*, (Manila: National Historical Commission of the Philippines, 2024), 4.

² Ricarze, *General Leandro Fullon of Antique*, 4-5.

³ Ricarze, *General Leandro Fullon of Antique*, 5.

Afterwards, Ricarze covered the grounds regarding the involvement of General Fullon in the two phases of the Philippine Revolution: first, against the Spaniards, and later on against the American forces. In this part, a meticulous reader could see the deficiencies when it comes to the analysis and disorder in the narration of facts about the involvement of Fullon in these turbulent times.

The first instance was when Ricarze had written that Fullon became a member of the Katipunan under General Emilio Aguinaldo, and upon the commencement of the revolution, Aguinaldo trusted him and “appointed him as the commanding general of the Expeditionary Force to Panay Island, particularly Antique.”⁴ However, the trouble with that is she tends to provide passing statements. The author was silent as to how Fullon gained the trust of Aguinaldo to the extent of being appointed to the highest possible posting in that of the Expeditionary Force to Panay Island, or, seen from another perspective, did Fullon get involved in any of the skirmishes in Luzon against the Spaniards while under the wing of Aguinaldo that helped him gain the latter’s trust?

Delving further into the facts presented, aside from the statement made earlier and from an excerpt of a report of Fullon to Aguinaldo on the skirmish that happened between the Filipinos and the Americans in Iloilo, one could not find any other direct evidence of Fullon to Aguinaldo, more so during the First Philippine Republic and the Philippine-American War.⁵ The mere gesture of appointment of Aguinaldo of Fullon to the position of “commanding-general” implies that Fullon is still bound to report back to Aguinaldo on the situation of his campaign in Antique; therefore, it is unlikely that there has been any evidence presented that would solidify the command relationship of the two figures.

The second instance, and a more serious regard when it comes to historical methodology, involves the account of how the Filipino revolutionaries under Fullon drove off the Spanish troops under Colonel Brandais in Culasi, Antique. Ricarze narrated the event with the data coming from Mark Dubria, a local scholar of Antique who had the opportunity to interview the descendants of Don Juan Xavier and his daughters, Carmen and Modesta, who helped in the cause of the Filipino revolutionaries.⁶

Without much room to operate to reconstruct a fair depiction of the general’s life, it is unfortunate to see the author’s overreliance on the information provided primarily by the descendants of Carmen and Modesta

⁴ Ricarze, *General Leandro Fullon of Antique*, 6.

⁵ Ricarze, *General Leandro Fullon of Antique*, 12.

⁶ Ricarze, *General Leandro Fullon of Antique*, 9-10. It is cited as footnote no. 13.

Xavier which needs to be treated with caution. A rule of thumb in oral history is that there must be a qualification of the statements made by the point person, for there cannot be historical truth without any rigid manner of validation. There is a high likelihood that the information that was passed on through generations has been compromised, caused by the receiver's memory retention and interpretative capacity, resulting in the adulteration of the true event with information that might not necessarily be what really transpired in the past. We are also not sure whether or not the descendants of Carmen and Modesta Xavier really saw what transpired in the past, or even if they did, are they well-cognizant of the period they are in, or about the ongoing revolution itself? Thus, without following the standard of cross-checking with corroborative sources, we are left to accept the bitter fact that the version written in this booklet is treated the same as what had occurred in the past, unless a new definitive source surfaces that would corroborate or refute the author's claim.

The third instance was about the suppression of pertinent information that has significance in forming an impartial treatment of Fullon's life. It came in two forms. The first one was in the narration of the aftermath of the incident that happened on September 28-29, 1898, between the Spanish forces under Colonel Brandais and of General Fullon's forces. Ricarze's treatment of its aftermath, sourced from the HDP of Antique, stated that Fullon and his men retreated to Culasi after fighting to recover from the losses they incurred resisting the Spaniards.

However, a thorough and curious reader who is interested in verifying the information presented by the author will be inclined to inquire further. Gleaned from the HDP she used, following the above-mentioned specific event, one would read that Fullon was arrested by the civil officials of Antique for an undisclosed reason, which hindered him from reporting personally to Aguinaldo about the conditions of the revolutionary effects in Antique. Where was this in the booklet? Notably, there was no mention of such an event in her booklet. It, therefore, raises the issue as to why this information was clearly omitted by the author, even if the event really took place, as presented clearly in the source she used. Inclusion of such narrative, in the author's eyes, could lay down the blueprint tending for the tainting of his imagery as a heroic figure, which is quite the opposite of what the author is trying to do.

Another related instance, though less serious, but nonetheless significant to discuss, was about the date of the surrender of Fullon to the Americans. She argued that Fullon surrendered to the Americans, under Lieutenant-Colonel W.S. Scott, on March 22, 1901. However, one could be puzzled as

there exists a telegram from Lieutenant-Colonel W.S. Scott to his superiors that Fullon and his men surrendered on March 21, 1901, not March 22.⁷ Therefore, one could again ask why the author clung to the idea that Fullon surrendered on that specific date, despite the fact that there exists a document stating the contrary. The author must have been too shy to elaborate, in addition to not offering a single source that would substantiate her claim and *ipso facto* disprove the veracity of the telegram sent by Lieutenant-Colonel Scott, concerning the date of Fullon's surrender.

Moving forward, Ricarze then narrated the events leading to the eventual decision of Fullon to use guerrilla warfare tactics against the American forces. By December 1899, Ricarze pointed out that Antique was the only province in the Western Visayas region that was not fully controlled by the Americans, wherein the main military resistance was commanded by Fullon as well as Lieutenant Colonel Martin Maza and Ruperto Abellon, but by January of 1900, the province has already fallen to the Americans, which stemmed the decision of Fullon to fully engage the invaders with guerrilla warfare strategy.⁸

It is seemingly inconceivable to the bright minds of the readers that within a month upon arrival, Antique had fallen without much resistance to the American invaders, and in addition, knowing that Fullon and his men have a prior encounter with the Americans in Iloilo, he must have done something strategically to at least impede the imminent advancement of the Americans the moment they waded the shores of Antique. There *was*, but the explanation given by the author undermines and does not suitably acknowledge the bravery of Fullon and his fellow Antiqueños. In the end, she admitted that Fullon was “not that very successful” in this regard, but it could be strongly argued that he was largely unsuccessful against the American forces.⁹

To cap off the list of ailments that this booklet possesses, the reader will not feel satisfied with how the author narrated the life of Fullon after he surrendered to the Americans. In just three sentences, she just plainly narrated that Fullon was elected governor of Antique until his death in 1904 and became one of the point people with regard to the census taken in 1903.¹⁰ There is, of course, a lack of depiction and a deeper understanding of the

⁷ See Telegram No. 7 located in “Appendix D: Reports of Operations in the Fourth District, Department of the Visayas” in *Annual Reports of the War Department: Report of the Lieutenant-General Commanding The Army*, Volume 4, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901), 258-259.

⁸ Ricarze, *General Leandro Fullon of Antique*, 15-16.

⁹ Ricarze, *General Leandro Fullon of Antique*, 18.

¹⁰ Ricarze, *General Leandro Fullon of Antique*, 17.

transition of Fullon from a military commander to a civil servant. There was even no discussion made on the platforms or programs he pursued while he was the governor of Antique.

In addition, there are a couple of interesting clippings that Ricarze has added to the 'appendix' of her work that seemingly hold the answers to the cliffhanging questions regarding the life of Fullon after he surrendered to the American forces. First, she added a photograph of the Filipino representatives at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904, to which Fullon had participated. So, why suddenly, we do not have any recount of the experience of Fullon in the St. Louis World Fair seen in the booklet? And second, there is an obituary from *El Renacimiento* about the demise of Fullon wherein it described how the citizenry and various groups lamented the death of Fullon. From this, the author has the golden chance to write about the death of Fullon, but apparently, she chose not to. Thus, considering all the statements, the author has squandered a lucrative opportunity to open a window that would permit the readers to see another chapter of Fullon's life. Ergo, how would it be considered a 'biographical sketch' if not all aspects of a person's life are treated *equally*?

Having mentioned these shortcomings and deficiencies in advance, there is still a nugget of contribution of this booklet to the overall understanding of the Philippine Revolution. Ricarze's treatment of the difficulties faced by General Fullon in terms of establishing a military government for Antique which runs contrary to the established civil government of Santos Capadocia, compounded with the financial difficulties being experienced in the province provided a fleeting glimpse that there is indeed a serious erosion of credibility faced by Filipino officials upon gaining independence from the Spanish forces concerning political reorganization, as well as, in terms of exercising their rigid authority over their constituents for taxation purposes, which is particularly crucial for the interests of the ongoing revolutionary efforts.¹¹

It may not be inappropriate to elucidate that the common folks had this resolute belief that upon attainment of independence from the Spanish colonial oppressors, they expected that they would be 'free' from the oppressive economic system that exploited them for a long period of time, but as it turned out, their hopes fell flat on the ground. The system of taxation had to continue to sustain the ongoing revolutionary and political reorganization efforts. Thus, it resulted to the antagonism between the civil-military government and the common folks. The case in Antique marginally provided a snapshot similar to the one presented by scholar Milagros Guerrero, in her monograph *Luzon at War: Contradictions in Philippine Society*,

¹¹ Ricarze, *General Leandro Fullon of Antique*, 13-14

1898-1902, in terms of the societal contradictions that existed within the provinces from the period of 1898 up until the surrender of most Filipino revolutionaries, including Fullon, by 1901.

A Final Word

In the overall understanding of the historiography of the Philippine Revolution, Ricarze's *General Leandro Fullon of Antique* is a courageous scholarly attempt to compensate for the lack of works that put lesser-known figures, like General Fullon, who have participated in the unfolding of the event but were often overshadowed by more infamous personalities of the time, into public and academic attention. Courageous, in a sense, as the booklet became the first of its kind when it comes to tackling the life and contribution of General Fullon. Suffice to say that the author dares to find fault with how the Philippine Revolution is constantly being written (or rewritten) and presented to both scholars and laymen alike, by redirecting the lens of the event from a national perspective towards the realm of local history.

As one reads it, Ricarze is actively committed to demonstrate the crucial role of Fullon in the local history of Antique and the unfolding of the Philippine Revolution in the area, thus it would be ungenerous to deny the author the chance to put an uncelebrated and underappreciated historical figure in the academic as well as public limelight. Ricarze's narrative is not the definitive account of Fullon's life – it was never intended as such – but it can serve as a stepping stone to future related research endeavors. It certainly is interesting and refreshing to have a work that covered the life and contributions of a figure other than the same personalities typically associated with the said period. *

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