

Recuerdos de Revolucion na Zamboanga: How the Philippine Revolution in Zamboanga is Commemorated

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to find and analyze the past and present measures in memorializing to the public the events of the Philippine Revolution in Zamboanga. Although attempts to commemorate the events relating to the Philippine Revolution in Zamboanga had been in place as early as the 1900s although from an American victorious perspective, a resurgence of interest in the subject emerged after the 1998 centennial celebrations with several academic publications, local and national legislations, and local government commemorations, most of which elevate Vicente Alvarez as Zamboanga City's "revolutionary hero". Such measures contribute to a biased version of the narrative. Therefore, these memorialization efforts should be appraised as they raise more questions and issues, namely: the limited use of other primary and secondary sources such as Spanish sources, American records, and Philippine Insurgent Records; the proposal to change the date of the Philippine Independence Day from June 12 to May 18; and the existence of the so-called "La Independiente Republica de Zamboanga." A re-examination of the narratives portrayed by these public memorialization efforts through the lens of the politics of memory holds the key to tracing Zamboanga's memories of the Philippine Revolution. Further studies must be conducted to deepen the understanding of these memories from both local and foreign perspectives to enrich and solidify its public memorialization efforts.

Keywords: *Zamboanga, Philippine Revolution, Vicente Alvarez, public history, commemoration*

Introduction

Many regions have long studied the memories of the Philippine Revolution, but those in Zamboanga remain limited. Zamboanga, found in southwestern Mindanao, is known for being at the center of political and military struggles during Spanish colonialism, American imperialism, and contemporary local rebellions. Despite this, questions have remained about Zamboanga's role in the struggle for Philippine independence.

Currently, there is an existing official narrative of the Philippine Revolution in Zamboanga City prompted by two city ordinances: City Ordinance No. 213 and City Ordinance No. 334, in which both recognized General Vicente Alvarez as the city's "revolutionary hero". Other memorialization efforts such as the one led by former House Speaker Pantaleon Alvarez claimed that June 12, 1898, is "historically inaccurate and false" and that he recognized that our independence should begin on May 18, 1899, the day the Spanish "surrendered" to Alvarez.¹ Another proposal by Cagayan de Oro 2nd District Representative Rufus Rodriguez is to recognize Vicente Alvarez as a national hero amongst other heroes from Mindanao.²

Legislating the Memory

To justify the legislative measures at the local government level, the city ordinances cite in their respective explanatory notes from the same historian: Dr. Hermenegildo P. Malcampo³. Although there are some differences⁴, the explanatory note presents a version of the Philippine Revolution in Zamboanga that centers around one man: General Vicente Alvarez:

"When Vicente Alvarez returned to Zamboanga, he gathered all the able-bodied men – Christian and Muslim including the convicted and the condemned, all to be under his command to fight a common enemy, first the Spaniards and then, the Americans. At the same time, he organized the local chapter of the Philippine Revolutionary Government in Zamboanga, where he was chosen President and Commander of all the military forces in the Peninsula and in Basilan. On May 14 of the same year 1899, he received from the Revolutionary Headquarters in Malolos, Bulacan, the rank of General of the Philippine Revolutionary

¹ Wendell Vigilia, "Alvarez: June 12 Independence Day Celebration 'inaccurate,'" *Malaya*, June 13, 2023, https://malaya.com.ph/news_news/alvarez-june-12-independence-day-celebration-inaccurate-false/.

² Rufus Rodriguez, *House Bill No. 1461 - Mindanao Heroes Declaration Act* (House of Representatives of the Philippines, 2022).

³ In the first ordinance, Dr. Malcampo is referred to as "WMSU historian" while in the second one, he is referred to as "Representative" of the city's "Historical Society". WMSU is the Western Mindanao State University, Zamboanga City's major state university. Furthermore, the author's recent correspondence with the Sangguniang Panlungsod Records Division produced letters from Dr. Malcampo addressed to the legislature only on how Chavacano was developed and nothing about Vicente Alvarez and the Philippine Revolution. Nonetheless, the text in Ordinance No. 334 can be found in Malcampo's 2007 book entitled *Historia de Zamboanga (En Chabacano): Antes y Durante El Periodo Español 1400-1900*, a year before the second ordinance was enacted. This part of Malcampo's book has no citations at all.

⁴ The major difference between the explanatory notes of both ordinances is that the first one does not contain the sentence: "Following this, General Alvarez declared Zamboanga: *"La Republica Independiente de Zamboanga"*.

Forces. To get the ammunition to defend the town from American take-over, General Alvarez fought the Spaniards who, at that time, were under the command of the highest Spanish official of the land, Governor-General Diego de los Rios. He defeated the Spaniards and kept them prisoners in the fort. Following this, General Alvarez declared Zamboanga: "La Republica Independiente de Zamboanga". He was in control of Zamboanga and succeeded in keeping the Americans at bay for six months. Unfortunately, while General Alvarez was meeting his officials in Mercedes, the military commander of Tetuan turned against the ideals of the revolution by ordering the assassination on Nov. 15, 1899, of Major Melanio Calixto, the most trusted man of General Alvarez to defend the town from the Americans. By Nov. 16, 1899, the Americans took possession of the town of Zamboanga. Upon learning of this sudden change of event, General Alvarez had no choice but to dissolve the local chapter of the Revolutionary Government, and to save lives, he gave up all his plans but never to surrender."⁵

Additionally, the said ordinances have added notes that edifies the said General Alvarez, even comparing him to other "de facto" national heroes. Ordinance No. 213 provides:

"...In strong words he repeatedly said: "We will never surrender Zamboanga and we will fight any foreign invader to the last man."...

...Rizal surrendered his body but not his spirit. General Vicente Alvarez gave up fighting to save lives but like Rizal, he never surrendered his spirit. While Rizal is the epitome of the ideals and virtues of our national heroes, General Alvarez is a combination of the fighting spirit in the battlefield of Andres Bonifacio and the character of compassion of Jose Rizal. Let us consider his place in history and enshrine him beside Jose Rizal so that every time we honor our national heroes on Independence Day, or National Heroes Day, or Rizal Day, the statue will remind us that we too, have our own local hero to honor - the Greatest Zamboangueno that ever lived. General Vicente Alvarez y Solis."⁶

⁵ "Ordinance No. 334 - An Ordinance Naming "Plaza Roma" Situated at the Corner of Don Pablo Lorenzo St., Zaragoza St., and Gen. V. Alvarez St. this City, as "Plaza Vicente S. Alvarez" and Providing Funds for the Necessary Expenses Thereof." City Government of Zamboanga Official Website. July 3, 2008, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/14W-wnSq2qVNkU3Wq1shOoaTHdgL1RZ6U/view>. 2.

Politicizing the Memory

According to Walkowitz and Knaeur (2004), the politics of memory is employed as a tool, for “ruling regimes of all political stripes selectively utilize the past as a strategic resource...”⁷ Based on Hobsbawm’s analysis in *The Invention of Tradition* cited in Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper’s *The Politics of Memory: Commemorating War* (2017), politics of memory is defined further as an “exercise... in social engineering from above: ‘the history which became part of the fund of knowledge or the ideology of the nation, state or movement is not what has been preserved in popular memory, but what has been selected, written, pictured, popularized, and institutionalized by those whose function it is to do so.’”⁸ By virtue of the government or those who wield political power, history can be used as a means to an end by selectively choosing a narrative and employing different devices to institutionalize it including publications, monuments, commemorative programs, and renaming of public spaces.

It is possible that the goal of the ordinances may be based on a harmless desire to further study this lost episode in Zamboanga’s history since Philippine history taught in Zamboanga schools is based on a national perspective at the expense of local history. However, such goals may be distorted to serve a different purpose. With this, we need to view these memorialization efforts through the lens of the politics of memory – how is the narrative being remembered and portrayed. These efforts are categorized by the different tools used by the “political actors” according to Leopuld (2020): (1) narrating, (2) renaming/remapping, (3) performing, and (4) strategic silencing.⁹

Narrating the Narrative

Narrating is where there is an attempt to construct a “seemingly coherent narrative”.¹⁰ Every narrative resorts to storytelling that places heroes, villains, actions, emotions, settings, and other elements to tell the reader what is happening and what should be known. All memorialization efforts

⁶ “Ordinance No. 213 - An Ordinance Declaring General Vicente Alvarez as the Revolutionary Hero of Zamboanga City,” City Government of Zamboanga Official Website. June 25, 1998, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NplzeTb74QwFXAZ9lmr14UiygPUPHxBy/view>, 1.

⁷ Daniel Walkowitz and Liza May Knaeur, ed., *Memory and the Impact of Political Transformation in Public Space* (Duke University Press, 2004), 4.

⁸ Timothy G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson, and Michael Roper, ed., *The Politics of Memory: Commemorating War* (Taylor & Francis, 2017).

⁹ David Leopuld, *Embattled dreamlands: the politics of contesting Armenian, Kurdish and Turkish memory* (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020).

¹⁰ Leopuld, *Embattled dreamlands*.

are surely based on a story, or at least a version of it. This section identifies which versions of the Philippine Revolution in Zamboanga currently exist.

It was in the 1970s when the narrative elevating Vicente Alvarez as a hero was unfolding. Ronaldo Bautista was its champion. For two decades, he wrote manuscripts about the Revolution in Zamboanga emphasizing on the life of Vicente Alvarez. The most prominent of those publications was his 1979 manuscript entitled *Zamboanga's General Vicente Alvarez: His Concept of National Unity* which is based on a paper presented during a seminar on Muslim Heroes jointly sponsored by the National Historical Institute, Ministry of Education and Culture and Southern Philippines Research and Information Group, Bureau of National and Foreign Information, and the Ministry of Public Information that held in Cotabato City on April 29-30, 1978.¹¹ This manuscript would later be used as a reference to an article of the National Historical Commission of the Philippines (NHCP) entitled *Vicente Alvarez and the Battle for Fort Pilar* found on its official website¹² and other local publications in Zamboanga City.

His next prominent work is featured as a section in a hardbound book titled *Zamboanga Hermosa: Memories of the Old Town* (1984) authored by a team led by Antonio Orendain II. The said book is cited in the city's local museum exhibits on the history of the Revolution in Zamboanga.¹³ His section in the book entitled *Zamboanga Through Legend and History: Proud Heritage, Glorious Past* where he writes that Alvarez is the "commander-in-chief" of the "local revolutionary government" and "...that General de los Rios, who was wounded on the knee, was helped to his feet by an aide, and in that position, saluted General Alvarez and turned over his sabre[sic] to him in a symbolic gesture of surrender..."¹⁴ This incident gave rise to the legend of Rios' sword, reported to be buried in his unmarked grave in Labason, a town far north of Zamboanga.

The previous two works only refer to Alvarez's government as "the revolutionary government of Zamboanga" but his later works refer to it as "La Republica de Zamboanga". In his 1999 article in the *Ateneo de Zamboanga*

¹¹ Rony Bautista, *Zamboanga's General Vicente Alvarez: His Concept of National Unity* (1979).

¹² Queenie Ann J. Palafox, "Vicente Alvarez and the Battle for Fort Pilar," *National Historical Commission of the Philippines*, September 4, 2012, <https://nhcp.gov.ph/vicente-alvarez-and-the-battle-for-fort-pilar/>.

¹³ It is the stand of this author that the said citation by El Museo de Zamboanga, a public museum of the Zamboanga City local government unit, should be corrected by citing Bautista as the source, not Orendain.

¹⁴ Ronaldo B. Bautista, "Zamboanga Through Legend and History: Proud Heritage, Glorious Past," in *Zamboanga Hermosa: Memories of the Old Town*, ed. Antonio II E. Orendain (Filipinas Foundation, Inc., 1984), 91-92.

Journal, Bautista uses and emphasizes the term “La Republica de Zamboanga” because it was a “sovereign state” and that the Spanish “recognized” its “sovereignty” and the Americans “tacitly expressed it through their acts”¹⁵. The “surrender” ceremony is also emphasized as it resulted in the “undisputed sovereignty of La Republica de Zamboanga”.¹⁶

The key feature of Bautista’s works revolves around the “romantic” idea that Alvarez conquered the Spanish forces and controlled Zamboanga similar to an independent state. This narrative serves as the foundation of what is referred to as the “glorious” narrative where the Spanish governor-general Diego de los Rios “surrendered” to Alvarez and his men after an exhaustive battle. Over time, this narrative gained prominence and popularity. The so-called existence of the “Republic” is one of the main features of the “glorious” narrative. It also featured that Rios surrendered his saber to Alvarez, feeding the so-called legend, which is also a key feature of the first narrative.

The earliest publication written from a local perspective that narrated the events of the Philippine Revolution was in 1921 when Balbino Saavedra published his *Apuntes Historicos de la Provincia de Zamboanga en particular del Municipio de este Nombre*. Written in Spanish, this book covers Zamboanga’s history from its foundation as a Spanish settlement in 1635 until their evacuation in 1899. According to the author, he obtained “verbal and written information” from the likes of Vicente Alvarez, José Macrohon Tiahua, and others; and utilized the works of Jesuit Fathers Combes, Pastells, and Colin, and many others.¹⁷ The final section of the book, entitled 'Gobierno Filipino,' focuses on the Revolution. Saavedra’s book is regarded as the foundation of Malcampo’s version of the Philippine Revolution.

Dr. Hermenegildo Malcampo, cited by the two ordinances in the introduction of this study, published his book *History of Zamboanga: Pre-Spanish and Spanish Period (1400-1900)* both in English in 2005 and Chavacano in 2007.¹⁸ Malcampo’s dissertation and books clearly show his high dependence on Saavedra by literally translating Saavedra’s *Apuntes Historicos* into English. It is to be noted that both Saavedra and Malcampo do not subscribe to the “glorious” narrative and they are under the category of the “tempered” narrative. The main differences between this narrative with

¹⁵ Rony B. Bautista, “War in Zamboanga,” *The Ateneo de Zamboanga Journal* 5, no. 1 (1999): 42, 56.

¹⁶ Rony Bautista, *Revolt in Zamboanga (Abridged) on the unparalleled achievements of General Vicente Alvarez* (n.d.), 6.

¹⁷ Balbino Saavedra, *Apuntes Historicos de la Provincia de Zamboanga: en particular del Municipio de este Nombre* (The Sulu Press, 1921), front pages.

¹⁸ The books are based on his doctoral dissertation at the Western Mindanao State University Doctor of Education program entitled *Zamboanga Prior to the 20th Century: Historical Accounts for Educational Directions* submitted in August 1996.

the “glorious” one championed by Bautista are: (1) while the former stated that Rios “surrendered” to Alvarez, this narrative said that on “...the 18th of May 1899, General Rios **turned over** the town of Zamboanga to the revolutionary government...”; (2) that in the said turnover ceremony, Alvarez was not present nor was any mention of a saber being turned over; and (3) that there is a “Revolutionary Government” and not a “Republic”.¹⁹ (emphasis by author)

The most ambitious of all the narratives is from Clemencio Bascar’s book entitled *Mindanao: Where the Castilian Lion Roared Last* published in 2005. Categorized under the “glorious” narrative with an extreme view, Bascar drew heavily from Bautista’s *Zamboanga’s General Vicente Alvarez...* (1979) and his main conclusion is that Zamboanga was “the greatest republic in history”. He laid out four points to support his assertion: (1) May 18, 1899, the day that Fort Pilar was surrendered to Alvarez was the “...historically marked the true date of independence of the Philippines from the Spanish Crown, not June 12, 1898 as proclaimed by Gen. Emilio F. Aguinaldo...”; (2) Alvarez’ skill in diplomacy and brilliance in military tactics led to the alliance between Muslims and Christians that enabled the “true emancipation of the Philippines... from the Spanish regime”; (3) the “Zamboanga Republic is credited for the capture of 2 high ranking Spanish Officers...” that is, Montero and de los Rios; and (4) “...no other republics in either Luzon or Bisayas ever placed in custody a Spanish Governor General of the Philippines and succeeded in capturing a major Spanish fortress, except for the Zamboanga Republic under the Presidency of Gen. Vicente S. Alvarez...”²⁰

The first piece of evidence supporting his assertion is that May 18, 1899, the day when the Spanish governor-general surrendered Fort Pilar to Alvarez was the “true date of independence of the Philippines” in contrast to June 12, 1898, was declared by Emilio Aguinaldo. However, the first evidence contradicts his earlier assertion that the revolutionary movement of Alvarez was “separate and distinct” from Aguinaldo’s. The question raised is why May 18, 1899, the “true date” of the Philippine independence when it is claimed that the Zamboangueno struggle was separate from Aguinaldo. Also, the argument elevated Zamboanga as the greatest against Aguinaldo’s government as a failure by mentioning the fact that it lasted for two years and was betrayed by men in the revolutionary army. Since it cited Bautista’s *Zamboanga’s General Vicente Alvarez: His Concept of National Unity*, this

¹⁹ Hermenegildo Perez Malcampo, *History of Zamboanga: Pre-Spanish and Spanish Period (1400-1900)* (Western Mindanao State University Press, 2005), 113.

²⁰ Clemencio Montecillo Bascar, *Mindanao: Where the Castilian Lion Roared Last* (Western Mindanao State University Press, 2005), 72-73.

publication did not include what was written in the former that the revolution in Zamboanga lasted less than Aguinaldo's. It only ran for six months versus the latter's two years. Coincidentally, both were made possible by a betrayal within the ranks. With this, none of it would genuinely support the notion that this is the "greatest republic in history".

The second piece of evidence laid out that it was the "diplomatic genius and military competence" of General Vicente Alvarez that enabled the "effective and formidable alliance between Christians and Muslims". This is hardly the "greatest" as greatness is not limited to religious groups, nor between the major religions present in Mindanao at that time. The only aid given by the Muslims stated in this publication is the recovery of the arms from the Spanish and assistance in reconnaissance activities. The alliance is also in question as other sources say that not all Muslims were in support of Alvarez, particularly Datu Mandi and his men.

The last evidence states that it is the "greatest" because this "republic" captured two high-ranking Spanish officers, Montero and De los Rios, and that no other revolutionary movements in the rest of the Philippines were able to capture a major Spanish fortress. This argument can be attributed to the revolutionaries' victory in battle but not enough to qualify it to be the "greatest republic in history".

As mentioned previously, the author assumed that a "republic" was proclaimed and set up; however, none of the sources cited used the nomenclature. Although Gowing mentions a "Republic of Zamboanga", it is not cited by the author of this publication in narrating the events about it. Using the evidence in its argument, the claim with "objectivity and unreserved frankness" that had been the "greatest republic in history" is not enough to prove it. The publication failed to prove that this "Zamboanga Republic" is a state that has a "democratic or representative constitution". So far, there is no primary source relating to the Philippine Revolution that mentions the constitution of this "state". Although it may be argued that no constitution may exist because there is an ongoing war, it does not support the fact that it is the "greatest republic in history". There is only one criterion used by the author in making this conclusion and that is – it is based solely on the victory the Zamboangueno revolutionaries achieved in defeating the Spanish. The author, therefore, should be careful in making these judgments, especially in the absence of other criteria. Furthermore, it should prove the "Republic" existed before labeling it as the "greatest". Such claims are unfounded since Zamboanga being "the greatest republic" is very debatable and sources on the Philippine Revolution would point out that Alvarez has connections with Aguinaldo and the national independence struggle.

The earliest publications and documents to narrate the events of the Philippine Revolution in Zamboanga were American and Spanish sources. To examine the Spanish narrative, Fr. Pablo Pastells' *Misión de la Compañía de Jesús de Filipinas en el siglo XIX* and *Cartas Edificantes de Los Misioneros de la Compañía de Jesus En Filipinas, 1898-1902* of the Society of Jesus can be cited. An account from a military perspective found *Apuntes Biograficos del Excmo. Sr. General de Brigada D. Adolfo Gonzales Montero y Acontecimientos Militares de Visayas y Mindanao*, published in 1900. The dominant view of the Spanish narrative is that they are focused on preparing for the evacuation of Zamboanga and their refusal to grant the wish of the natives to surrender their weapons. One account in *Cartas Edificantes* is that the "Republic" was "a fake thing" and that during its time there was "horror" where "violent demands and fears" were so "abundant".²¹ From the American point-of-view, the *Annual Reports of the War Department*, John Foreman's *The Philippine Islands*, Albert Robinson's *The Philippines: The War and the People*, and *Harper's History of the War in the Philippines* are some that can be used. Their narrative portrays Zamboanga's situation as dire and desperate as "...life was held in little esteem..." and the "insurgents" led by Alvarez committed "...many outrages upon their own(sic) people..." in which there is a need to rescue them from the said lawlessness.²² These foreign views can be categorized under what is called the "chaos" narrative. The main thesis of this narrative is in contrast with Bautista's "glorious" narrative that Zamboanga's condition was chaotic during the Revolution, and the occupation of it by the Americans is necessary to restore peace and order.

²¹ Compañía de Jesus En Filipinas, *Cartas Edificantes de Los Misioneros de la Compañía de Jesus En Filipinas, 1898-1902* (Henrich y Compañía en Comandita, 1903), 241-242.

²² John Foreman, *The Philippine Islands: A Political, Geographical, Ethnographical, Social and Commercial History of the Philippine Archipelago Embracing the Whole Period of Spanish Rule With an Account of the Succeeding American Insular Government*. (Kelly and Walsh, Ltd., 1906), 552; John P. Finley, "The Non-Christians of the Southern Islands of the Philippines – Their Self-Government and Industrial Development," In *Report of the Twenty-Ninth Lake Mohonk Conference of Friends of the Indian and Other Dependent Peoples. October 18th, 19th And 20th, 1911*, by Lake Mohonk Conference of Friends of the Indian and Other Dependent Peoples, (Lake Mohonk Conference of Friends of the Indian and Other Dependent Peoples, 1911), 117-118.

One reference in this category can be found in the City Government of Zamboanga's 50th anniversary book entitled *Charter Day*. Published in 1987, it dedicates three paragraphs on the Revolution where it mentions Alvarez and his council but primarily focusing on Datu Mandi's efforts to maintain peace and quotes his affidavit from Worcester (1914) in which he states that the existence of the Republic is where "the life of a man was worth no more than that of a chicken".²³ The section was written by Pelagio Mandi, his descendant.²⁴

A decade after the publication of Malcampo and Bascar saw new publications about the Revolution: two books by Francisco, et. al.'s *Historia de Zamboanga* (2016, 2018); Gregorio, et. al.'s *A Glimpse of Zamboanga History and Beyond: A Local History for College Students* (2017); and Gregorio, et. al.'s *Rising Sun in Olden Zamboanga* (2018). All these books were written for the purpose of being used as college textbooks. Francisco et al.'s two books each includes a chapter on the Revolution, drawing heavily from Malcampo's doctoral dissertation categorizing it under the "tempered" narrative.²⁵ Gregorio, et. al.'s *A Glimpse of Zamboanga History*... has a short section on the Revolution that can be attributed to a website entitled zamboanga.com.²⁶ Gregorio, et. al.'s *Rising Sun in Olden Zamboanga* is about the Second World War in Zamboanga, but its first section was dedicated to the Philippine Revolution. Unfortunately, it did not cite sources, but it can be attributed to Bautista's works.²⁷ Both books can be categorized under the "glorious" narrative.



Photo 1. The 2010 tarpaulin found in the Rizal Park detailing Alvarez' life and achievements. Photo courtesy of Zamboanga.com

²³ Dean C. Worcester, *The Philippines: Past and Present* (MacMillan, 1914), 255.

²⁴ Pelagio S. Mandi., "A Sociological and Cultural History of Zamboanga." In *Charter Day*, by City Government of Zamboanga, 83-93. (City Government of Zamboanga, 1987), 91.

²⁵ Mark Francis Francisco, Rovic John Eslao, Erbert Medellin, and Ryan Dua Biong, *Historia de Zamboanga* (City Government of Zamboanga, 2016), 229-235; Mark Francis Francisco, Rovic John F. Eslao, and Erbert L. Medellin, *Historia de Zamboanga: Lecciones Y Actividades* (City Government of Zamboanga, 2018), 125-135.

²⁶ Bienvenido L. Gregorio, Robert V. Panaguiton, Perla S. Ledesma, and Michael Vincent P. Caceres, *A Glimpse of Zamboanga History and Beyond: A Local History for College Students* (Rex Printing Company, Inc., 2017), 65-69.

²⁷ Bienvenido L. Gregorio, Hezekiah A. Concepcion, Michael Vincent P. Caceres, and Jeny An S. Costales. *Rising Sun in Olden Zamboanga* (Rex Printing Company, Inc., 2018), 15-22.

It is important to note that Malcampo's excerpt in Ordinance No. 334 diverges from the "tempered" narrative with which his works are typically associated. The said excerpt mentions that Alvarez declared Zamboanga the "La Independiente Republica de Zamboanga" after he captured Fort Pilar from the Spanish.²⁸ This makes Malcampo's letter categorized under the "glorious" narrative. Subscribing to the same narrative is the large tarpaulin during the 2010 Dia de General Vicente Alvarez. Installed in Zamboanga's Rizal Park, the tarpaulin has excerpts of the said explanatory note displayed, presenting it as the city's 'official' narrative of the Philippine Revolution in Zamboanga, with Alvarez as the central figure. Although the reference to the "Republic" is notably absent.

The various sources on the Philippine Revolution in Zamboanga City can be categorized into three narratives: (1) glorious, (2) tempered, and (3) chaos. The following table summarizes the key features of each narrative:

Table 1. A Summary of the Differing Narratives of the Philippine Revolution in Zamboanga City

FEATURES	"GLORIOUS"	"TEMPERED"	"CHAOS"
References	Bautista, Bascar	Saavedra, Malcampo	Various American and Spanish sources
Protagonist	General Vicente Alvarez	Not explicit; possible Alvarez, along with other revolutionaries	Midel and Datu Mandi (only in American sources)
Antagonist	Spanish and the Americans, and some "quislings" among the revolutionaries	Not explicit	Alvarez and his men
How Spain left Zamboanga	<u>Surrendered</u> Zamboanga to the revolutionaries; Rios' sword is given to Alvarez	<u>Turned over</u> Zamboanga to the revolutionaries; a commission between Rios and the revolutionaries happen	<u>Evacuation</u> of Spanish forces; rushed, unfortunate, and sad.
Name of Alvarez' government	La Republica de Zamboanga	Revolutionary Government	"Republic of Zamboanga"; "insurgent government"
American occupation of Zamboanga	Facilitated by a traitor within Alvarez' men	Bloodless occupation	Necessary because the conditions in Zamboanga are chaotic and disorderly
Post-occupation activities	Alvarez continued to fight until his capture in Misamis	Alvarez surrendered and settled down	Alvarez continued to fight until his capture

²⁸ City Government of Zamboanga, *Ordinance No. 334*, 1-2.

Recalibrating the Reminder

Renaming or remapping refers to placing the narrative into a “monumental and toponymic landscape”.²⁹ The narratives can take many forms and many of these may be “condensed and congealed” into “monuments”.³⁰ Monuments and historical markers are “time-honored, spatially fixed and unquestioningly acknowledged as ‘public history’ sites” as the public is “trained to view” both “as carrying an aura of unity, universality, and timelessness”. Monuments can also manifest as a form of renaming streets and public spaces. However, the decision to recalibrate these memory markers is “often highly politicized and contentious” and historians are ‘generally excluded’ from the decision-making process.³¹ This section discusses both the built and unbuilt devices of commemoration of the Philippine Revolution in Zamboanga City.

The first government attempt to publicly memorialize the events of the Revolution was in 1949, when the Philippine Historical Committee, the forerunner of the recent National Historical Commission of the Philippines, installed Fort Pilar’s historical marker. The marker’s text is as follows:

FORT PILAR:

FOUNDED AS SOUTHERN OUTPOST OF SPANISH DOMAIN UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF MELCHOR DE VERA, 1635; ATTACKED BY THE DUTCH, 1646; DESERTED WHEN TROOPS WERE CONCENTRATED IN MANILA TO DRIVE AWAY CHINESE PIRATES, 1663; RECONSTRUCTED BY THE SOCIETY OF JESUS, 1666; REBUILT UNDER THE MANAGEMENT OF JUAN SICARRA, 1719; STORMED BY DALASI, KING OF BULIG, WITH 3,000 MOROS, 1720; CANNONADED BY THE BRITISH, 1798; WITNESSED THE MUTINY OF SEVENTY PRISONERS, 1872; ABANDONED BY THE SPANIARDS, 1898; OCCUPIED BY THE AMERICANS UNDER GENERAL J.C. BATES, 1899; SEIZED BY THE JAPANESE, 1942; TAKEN OVER BY THE REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES, 4 JULY 1946.³² [Emphasis by author]

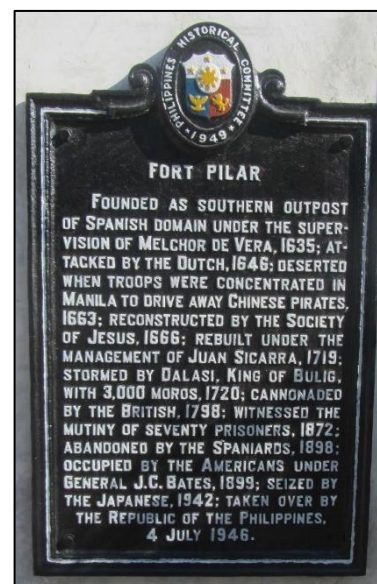


Photo 2. Fort Pilar's historical marker by the PHC. Photo courtesy of author.

²⁹ Leopuld, *Embattled dreamland*.

³⁰ Walkowitz and Knaeur, *Memory*, 9.

³¹ Walkowitz and Knaeur, *Memory*, 5, 19.

³² “Fort Pilar”, National Registry of Historic Sites and Structures, https://philhistoricsites.nhchp.gov.ph/registry_database/fort-pilar/.

The absence of the reference to the Revolution cannot be ignored as the said fort was witness to the Revolution and the marker did not mention anything about the battle between Alvarez and the Spanish nor the Revolution. Instead, it only showed that the Spanish evacuated Zamboanga in 1898 and occupied by the Americans a year later. Balbino Saavedra, however, did mention Alvarez and the Revolution in his “historical compendium” which was a speech he delivered during the unveiling of Fort Pilar’s “commemorative plaque” on October 11, 1949, a day before Zamboanga’s grand fiesta of the Lady of the Pillar. Published as a book entitled *La Fuerza Real del Pilar de Zamboanga* in 1949, Saavedra referenced that the Spanish governor-general “handed over” Zamboanga to General Vicente Alvarez on May 18, 1899, and that the “Spanish flag came down from the pole of this fortress when the Spanish left...”³³ All of the facts listed in the marker were fleshed out in the speech but it is obvious that the historical note on the Philippine Revolution was omitted from the marker for reasons unknown. It should also be noted that the marker erroneously places the Spanish evacuation in 1898, when it should be in 1899.



Map 1. The proposed General Vicente Alvarez Boulevard according to City Ordinance No. 954, currently Mayor Nicasio Valderosa Street. The map used is the 1944 Zamboanga City Map of the US Army.

The earliest legislation to publicly memorialize the events of the Revolution in Zamboanga were two ordinances: City Ordinance Numbers 954 and 972. Both had been enacted in 1969. It is also noted that a street in Zamboanga has been named after Melanio Calixto, an important figure during the Revolution. A street is named after him in the western side of the city’s central business district. Unfortunately, the author has not found any document that legislates the naming of Melanio Calixto Street. A map of Zamboanga City in 1944³⁴ shows the existence of the street which the said

³³ Balbino Saavedra, *La Real Fuerza del Pilar de Zamboanga* (JCI, 1949), 13.

³⁴ "Philippines City Plans: U.S. Army Map Service, 1944-1945: Zamboanga Map." *University of Texas Libraries*, https://maps.lib.utexas.edu/maps/ams/philippines_city_plans/zamboanga_philippines_1944.jpg.

legislation was possibly enacted when Zamboanga was still a municipality or before World War II began.



Map 2. The current street named after General Alvarez pursuant to City Ordinance No. 972-A.

In 1969, City Ordinance No. 954 was enacted naming certain streets to known personalities who have greatly contributed to Zamboanga City's identity and nationalism, including the men associated with the Revolution, namely: General Vicente Alvarez, Datu Mandi, and Hadji Nuño.³⁵ In the explanatory notes, only Alvarez' achievements in the Revolution were mentioned unlike Mandi and Nuño whose notes were centered on their contributions during the American occupation. General Vicente Alvarez is cited as the "first Zamboangueno General" and "who collaborated with the revolutionary government of General Emilio Aguinaldo in its fight against the Spanish and American arms".³⁶ Interestingly, the same notes said that Alvarez "held temporary sway over the Fort of Zamboanga as its military governor..." which was not present in the fort's historical marker. In the said ordinance, the city's premier street in front of City Hall all the way to old Fort Pilar is renamed to "General Vicente Alvarez Boulevard". However, two months later, another ordinance was enacted that amends the earlier one assigning a minor street named Marahui as "General Vicente Alvarez Street" and the "Boulevard" is renamed as "Mayor Nicasio Valderosa Street"³⁷. There was no explanation given to the amendment. It is to be noted that one former Jesuit priest criticized Ordinance No. 954 as the "most unkindest cut of all" when it renamed Calle Voluntarios in honor of a former city mayor. He

³⁵ City Government of Zamboanga, *Ordinance No. 954 - An Ordinance Naming Streets in the City in Honor of Mayor Nicasio S. Valderrosa, Mayor Pablo R. Lorenzo, General Vicente Alvarez, Assemblyman Juan S. Alano, Datu Raja Muda Mandi, Dr. Januario Estrada and Hadji Abdullah Nuño* (City Government of Zamboanga, 1969).

³⁶ City Government of Zamboanga, *Ordinance No. 954*, 1.

³⁷ City Government of Zamboanga, *Ordinance No. 972 - Ordinance Amending Section I of Ordinance No 954, Current Series...* (City Government of Zamboanga, 1969). Valderrosa served as the first mayor of the city of Zamboanga in 1937.

argued that the history of Zamboanga may be well gone due to these legislative measures.³⁸

The next legislative measure was Ordinance No. 213 enacted on June 25, 1998. This was done as part of the 1998 Philippine Independence Day centennial celebration. The ordinance is entitled *Declaring General Vicente Alvarez as the Revolutionary Hero of Zamboanga City*. Approved and on June 29 of the same year, it officially recognized Alvarez who “...defeated and captured the last Spanish stronghold at Fort Pilar under General Diego de los Rios which[sic] marked the end of Spanish rule and set the historical opportunity for the reawakening[sic] of the Filipino spirit for national transformation; fulfilled the ideal of brotherhood and unity among Filipinos of different religious and cultural persuasions for the liberation of the Filipinos from foreign domination, and portrayed the model leadership demanded by the changing political ideology of 1898 when he stood by as true Filipino and revolutionary leader...³⁹” Additionally, it connects the efforts of Alvarez to the national consciousness by stating that along with other Filipino heroes he “...laid the groundwork for the people's right to self-determination and later the birth of the first democratic state in Asia...”⁴⁰ The ordinance reinforced the “glorious” narrative and mandated for two tools for memorialization in its Section III: (1) building a monument for him and (2) a date that will be used for its annual commemoration.⁴¹

The second measure was formalized with Ordinance No. 334, designating May 18 as the day of annual commemoration. This ordinance revised the plans for the first measure and added four more. The first measure relocated the monument to the plaza, renaming 'Plaza Vicente S. Alvarez,' formerly known as “Plaza Roma”.⁴² The additional tools provide that: (3) a space in Fort Pilar enshrines the “life, pictures, memories” of General Vicente S. Alvarez, Nestorio Arquiza, Carlos Camins, Santiago Torejon, Eduardo Rodriguez, Julian Fernandez, Hadji Abdullah Nuño, Engineer Juan Meras, Major Melanio Calixto, Captain Juan Ramos, and his allies from Sulu, Basilan and Subanen Chiefs of Zamboanga del Norte are to be “kept and preserved

³⁸ Hilario Atilano Lim, *A Brief History of Zamboanga and Her Beautiful People* (n.d.), 36–37. The Voluntarios were a company of soldiers hired by the Spanish Empire composed of natives of Zamboanga. Former Jesuit priest Hilario Lim, a Zamboangueno, stated here that the reaction of the City Council to his objections is that the Voluntarios remained in memory with the naming of Veterans Avenue, a separate street found northeast of the city proper. Lim lamented by saying that Veterans Avenue was about the veterans of World War II, hence, his frustration on politicians dictating history. –Author

³⁹ City Government of Zamboanga, *Ordinance No. 213*, 1.

⁴⁰ City Government of Zamboanga, *Ordinance No. 213*, 3.

⁴¹ City Government of Zamboanga, *Ordinance No. 213*, 3.

⁴² City Government of Zamboanga, *Ordinance No. 334*, 3.

for the public to appreciate and remember.”; (4) all elementary and secondary schools in the city shall include in their curricula a subject for these topics; (5) the city government shall “print books and reading materials, for distribution to the schools, in Chabacano language”; (6) the city government “shall make the necessary steps to research, and recover historical documents, artifacts or materials” about the said topic.⁴³



Photo 3. Plaza Vicente S. Alvarez, located at the nucleus of Zamboanga City, in between Plaza Pershing, the central business district plaza and City Hall. Photo courtesy of Google Photos.

Regarding the first tool, there is currently no monument in the designated plaza. Yet unknown to many, there is a bust of Alvarez at Rizal Park in Luneta, Manila. His bust belongs to the Gallery of Heroes in the said park alongside Apolinario Mabini, Marcelo Del Pilar, Lapu-Lapu, and other unknown heroes of the country. It reads:

VICENTE ALVAREZ
(Zamboanga, 1854–1910)

Already serving as a high official in the Spanish colonial government, he joined the Katipunan and started the Revolution in Zamboanga in March 1898. He led his forces in the successful capture of Zamboanga in 1899. Aguinaldo appointed him as head of the revolutionary government of Zamboanga and Basilan. He bravely fought the American forces until his capture.



Photo 4. Alvarez’ bust at Luneta Park’s Gallery of Heroes. Author’s personal photo.

⁴³ City Government of Zamboanga, *Ordinance No. 334*, 4.

In the absence of a monument in the plaza named after him in Zamboanga City, a historical marker about Vicente Alvarez was installed at that same plaza by the National Historical Commission of the Philippines in 2010. It reads:

VICENTE S. ALVAREZ

(1862–1942)

LIDER REBOLUSYONARYO AT LINGKOD BAYAN. ISINILANG, 5 ABRIL 1862. SUMAPI SA KATIPUNAN, NAGTATAG AT NAMUNO NG SANGAY DITO SA ZAMBOANGA, 1892. NANGUNA SA PAGSUKOL NG MGA PUWERSANG PANDIGMA NG ESPANYA, 7 ABRIL 1899; KUTA NG ZAMBOANGA AT FORT PILAR, 4 MAYO 1899. HINIRANG BILANG BRIDGADYER-HENERAL NI PANGULONG EMILIO AGUINALDO. NAGING KATAAS-TAASANG PINUNO NG REBOLUSYONARYO SA ZAMBOANGA AT BASILAN, HUNYO – DISYEMBERE, 1899. LUMABAN NOONG DIGMAANG FILIPINO-AMERIKANO AT NADAKIP, MARSO 1902. NAGING PANGULO NG KOMITE NG MGA LALAWIGANG MORO PARA SA ST. LOUIS EXPOSITION, 1904. NAGLINGKOD BILANG OPISYAL NG KONSTABULARYA NG PILIPINAS; PANGALAWANG GOBERNADOR NG ZAMBOANGA AT HUWES NG TRIBAL WARDS. YUMAO, 4 NOBYEMBRE 1942.⁴⁴

Interestingly, the plaque in his Luneta bust and the marker in Zamboanga have notable differences, particularly his birth and death years. Additionally, it does not mention the May 18 date and that he was supreme head of the revolutionaries starting June to December, not May to November. These conflicting versions of Alvarez's monuments reflect the need for more research to resolve it.

The third tool does not even help solve the issue. The provision mandates research for those men in which are clearly attributed to Bautista's *Revolt in Zamboanga (Abridged)*. They are referred to as the "revolutionary council" of Alvarez.⁴⁵ Majority of these names do not appear in other sources, particularly Bautista's other works. Nestorio Arquiza is mentioned by Saavedra, Malcampo, and even American sources like Robinson, and Bates.⁴⁶ Calixto and Ramos are also mentioned in various American sources such as the Annual Reports of the War Department and American newspapers.

⁴⁴ "Vicente S. Alvarez (1862–1942)". National Registry of Historic Sites and Structures, https://philhistoricsites.nhcp.gov.ph/registry_database/vicente-s-alvarez-1862-1942/.

⁴⁵ Bautista, *Revolt in Zamboanga (Abridged)*, 3.

⁴⁶ Saavedra, *Apuntes Históricos*, 89-90.; Malcampo, *History of Zamboanga: Pre-Spanish and Spanish Period (1400-1900)*, 113. ; Albert G. Robinson, *The Philippines: The War and the People* (McClure, Philipps & Co., 1901), 216-219.; John C. Bates, "Report and Accompanying Papers of Brig. Gen. John C. Bates in Relation to the Negotiation of A Treaty or Agreement Made by Him with the Sultan of Sulu on the 20th Day of August, 1899." In *Message from the President of the United States, Transmitting, In Response to Resolution of the Senate of January 24, 1900, Copy of the Report and All Accompanying Papers of Brig. Gen. John C. Bates in Relation to the Negotiation of a Treaty or Agreement*, by William McKinley (Government Printing Office, 1900), 93. Bates spelled Arquiza's first name as "Nestoria".

Santiago Torejon is misspelled since the Bautista manuscript has it as Santiago Torrejon with a double “r”.⁴⁷ Torrejon is also mentioned in the *Pettit Report* as the “commander for the infantry”⁴⁸ while in Bautista’s *War in Zamboanga* (1999) his name is Angel Torrejon⁴⁹. Carlos Camins, Julian Fernandez, and Eduardo Rodriguez do not appear in other sources. Bautista’s other works say there is a Camins without a first name and there is another Camins whose first name is Salvador.⁵⁰ This reveals that Ordinance No. 334 is based not only on Malcampo but also on Bautista.

The fourth tool is now embodied in the recently enacted Ordinance No. 606 which mandates that the city’s official policy is “...to take every opportunity to preserve, promote, and propagate the unique history and heritage of Zamboanga City”. An example in the provision of the said ordinance that will “constitute local learning content” to be included in the curricula of all Zamboanga City schools, General Vicente Alvarez is the only one listed in the roll of “local heroes”.⁵¹

For the fifth tool, the city government is actively working on publishing books. A number of books in the Chavacano language have already been published, and two books in English on Zamboanga’s history were released in 2016 and 2017, as mentioned in the previous section.

The sixth tool is now on its work but on a different scale. In 2015, a YouTube video of a local news agency featured a handful of Zamboanga City councilors along with a contingent of students and government

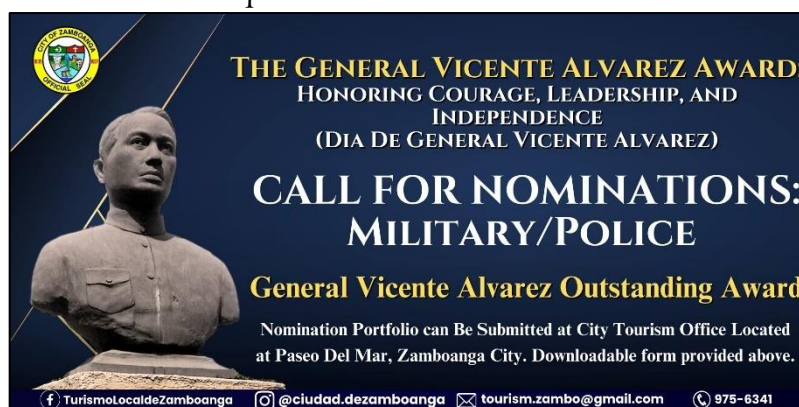


Photo 5. The publication material used by Zamboanga City's tourism office for their call for nominations for the General Vicente Alvarez Outstanding Award. Photo courtesy of Turismo Zamboanga Facebook page.

⁴⁷ Bautista, *Revolt in Zamboanga (Abridged)*, 3.

⁴⁸ James S. Pettit, “Report of the commanding officer at Zamboanga, September 16, 1901,” In *Annual Reports of the War Department for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1902. Report of the Lieutenant General Commanding the Army and Department Commanders*, by United States War Department. (Government Printing Office, 1902), 553.

⁴⁹ Bautista, *War in Zamboanga*, 52.

⁵⁰ Bautista, *War in Zamboanga*, 52.; Bautista, *The Consummate Warrior*, 16; Saavedra, *Apuntes Historicos*, 89.

⁵¹ City Government of Zamboanga, *Ordinance No. 606 - The Mandatory Teaching of Local History, Culture, Arts, Customs, Eco-Tourism, Social and Public Norms in both the Elementary and Secondary Schools in Zamboanga City*. (City Government of Zamboanga, 2023).

employees who visited the supposed unmarked grave of Vicente Alvarez in Kalawit, a municipality north of Zamboanga City. A simple program was organized, accompanied by an offering of flowers and a gun salute. One of the councilors even proposed to convert his graveyard into a park. One of the councilors also lamented that Rizal has a monument while Alvarez has none.⁵² In the 2023 forum for the Dia de General Vicente Alvarez, city councilor Vincent Paul Elago revealed plans to exhume the grave of the “real hero” Alvarez in Kalawit to be transferred to Zamboanga City as soon as funds are available.⁵³ In 2024, the city government launched a “General Vicente Alvarez Heroism Award” that “...aims to recognize and honor outstanding Military and Police personnel who exemplified courage, leadership, and independent thinking in their line of work...”⁵⁴

The efforts have also reached the national level. Statements made by former Speaker of the House of Representatives and incumbent Representative from the 1st District of Davao del Norte Pantaleon Alvarez look to have May 18 as the new Philippine Independence Day. In a statement issued during the June 12 celebrations, he remarked that June 12, 1898, is “historically inaccurate and false”⁵⁵. He believes that “...we only achieved full and complete independence on May 18, 1899, following the surrender of the last Spanish general Diego de los Rios to a Filipino Revolutionary General based in Zamboanga...”⁵⁶ Representative Alvarez also mentioned that he commissioned a “fact-finding mission” to write a book on the general.⁵⁷

Another proposal by Cagayan de Oro 2nd District Representative Rufus Rodriguez is to recognize 14 Mindanao “revolutionaries and warriors” as heroes. The list includes Vicente Alvarez. The said proposal is found in House Bill 1461 which the said congressman filed in the 19th Congress on July 6, 2022 although previous bills have been filed since the 14th Congress

⁵² EMediaMo.tv, *Visita Na Sepultura Del Heneral Vicente Alvarez Na Kalawit Part 2*. June 21, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXk2TDMgnr0&list=PLuQocu7SyMMPodo2Ag2zhnHiLN4stF86J&index=1>.

⁵³ AI Marketing, “DIA DE GENERAL VICENTE ALVAREZ PH Marlon Sebastian”. May 18, 2023, https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=246489194637657.

⁵⁴ Turismo Zamboanga, “VAMOS! In celebration of the anniversary of Zamboanga City,” Facebook, May 9, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=845849704229431&set=a.455822116565527>.

⁵⁵ Vigilia, *Alvarez: June 12*.

⁵⁶ Billy Begas, “May 18, 1899, Not June 12, 1898 The Correct Date Of PH Independence – Alvarez”. June 12, 2023, <https://politics.com.ph/2023/06/12/may-18-1899-not-june-12-1898-the-correct-date-of-ph-independence-alvarez>.

⁵⁷ Vigilia, *Alvarez: June 12*. To date, the planned book is in the editing stage.

as evident in the official website of the House of Representatives.⁵⁸ Entitled the “Mindanao Heroes Declaration Act”, its first objective is to “correct the bias against the heroic participation of the people from the different regions of the country outside of Metro Manila and adjacent regions in the revolution against Spain and the United States” and to “make the centennial celebration of our Philippine Independence complete with the due recognition of the participation of the different regions of the country...” The proposal declared Vicente Alvarez and the rest as “national heroes” and mandates the NHCP to do the following: (1) “undertake a full blown research” on these persons, (2) “publish a book” about them, and (3) “erect monuments and the historical markers of the different sites of the war” in coordination with the respective local governments. General Alvarez is referred to as the one who “led the revolutionaries against the Spanish forces which withdrew to Zamboanga from various parts of Mindanao” and that the Spanish surrendered to him on “May 8, 1899”.⁵⁹

To date, the tools used to remember the Philippine Revolution in Zamboanga City are limited to historical markers, the renaming of streets and public spaces, and public commemorations. However, as local and national legislations are now laying the foundation for additional measures, it will only be a matter of time before monuments, public spaces, libraries, and museums fill the gap in preserving the narrative of the Philippine Revolution in Zamboanga City.

Presenting the Performance

Performing in the “politics of memory” aspect is where there are activities “reifying the narrative”.⁶⁰ These activities demonstrate or exemplify the story in tangible ways. It can be “animated as [a] public spectacle, in performances and parades, or translated and transcribed into popular music and song.”⁶¹ However, such measures can also be a point of contention where some stories will be selected under the guise of “creative licenses”. This section outlines the various attempts to perform the Zamboanga City’s narrative on the Philippine Revolution.

⁵⁸ HB3842 of the 14th Congress (2007-2010), HB5767 of the 17th Congress (2016-2019), HB0435 of the 18th Congress (2019-2022), and HB1461 of the 19th Congress (current) remained pending in the Committee on Basic Education and Culture; HB1414 of the 15th Congress (2010-2013) was scheduled for first hearing; and HB2508 of the 16th Congress (2013-2016) was pending in the Committee on the Revision of Laws.

⁵⁹ Rodriguez, *House Bill No. 1461*.

⁶⁰ Leopuld, *Embattled dreamlands*.

⁶¹ Walkowitz and Knaeur, *Memory*, 9.

Since 2008, the City Government of Zamboanga, along with military and police personnel, has led the charge in commemorating Alvarez and his accomplishments by laying a wreath at the marker in the plaza that bears his name. Over the years, programs have featured a commemorative mass at Fort Pilar, followed by a program in which speeches are delivered by politicians and members of the Alvarez family. The program also organizes contests and special activities. In 2014, it hosted an oratorical contest focused on Alvarez, open to college students.⁶² Four years after, there was a neo-ethnic dance competition in 2018 where contestants will “compete in a neo-modified modern contemporary dance competition based on a cultural group in the city.”⁶³ In 2019 it became the venue where the winners of a photo contest and vlog competition were announced.⁶⁴ Activities in 2020 were suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The practice of organizing commemorative programs resumed in 2022 when the pandemic restrictions were lifted. In 2023, a forum was held “...to raise awareness among the youth on the life and contributions of Alvarez to this city...” and the panelists of the said forum were the city museum curator, an incumbent councilor, a representative from the Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas representative; and a representative of the Alvarez family.⁶⁵ The press releases posted by the City Government in their Facebook account and



Photo 6. The float of the City Government of Zamboanga in its participation during the 2024 celebration of Philippine independence that highlighted the siege at Fort Pilar in 1899. Photo courtesy of the City Government of Zamboanga Facebook page.

⁶² Bong Garcia, “All set for Gen. Alvarez Day,” *SunStar*, May 17, 2014, <https://www.sunstar.com.ph/article/344808/all-set-for-gen-alvarez-day>. The author of this article is one of the contestants in the said oratorical contest representing Ateneo de Zamboanga University.

⁶³ Jasmine Mohammadsali, “ZC to observe Dia de Alvarez,” Facebook, May 17, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/zambocitygovt/photos/a.127326601273339/168726613800004>.

⁶⁴ Jasmine Mohammadsali, “ZC honors Gen. Alvarez May 18,” Facebook, May 17, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/zambocitygovt/posts/pfbid0HTj4VCyUNMZYC7xxzPqCQQ7J5o7ATZitbgWXq6eE82oHnVQN7Nqakab9SdD4TEwVl>.

⁶⁵ Liza Jocson, Zamboanga City celebrates Dia de Gen. Vicente Alvarez. *Manila Bulletin*, May 19, 2023, <https://mb.com.ph/2023/5/19/zamboanga-city-celebrates-dia-de-gen-vicente-alvarez>.

newspaper subscribes to the “glorious” narrative by virtue of the city ordinance that mandated the yearly commemoration. In 2018 and in succeeding years, it posted that Alvarez facilitated “the surrender of the last Spanish Governor-General of the Philippines Diego de los Rios, effectively ending the Spanish occupation in the country.”⁶⁶ In its recent involvement during the celebration of Philippine independence in 2024, Zamboanga City participated in the float parade highlighting Zamboanga’s role in the independence movement. In its caption, the Facebook post clearly references either the NHCP article written by Palafox or Bautista’s *Zamboanga’s General*. It writes,

“The float has a central element, Benji Alvarez, the main actor, and also the great-great-grandson of the late General Vicente Álvarez. He will portray the late Gen. Alvarez as the heroic figure commanding a diverse group of revolutionaries. He will be joined by the Nawan Performers who will act to stand and take posts as civil guards and revolutionaries... Moreover, the inclusion of the “End of Siege of Fort Pilar” in Zamboanga City underscores the vital role played by General Vicente S. Alvarez...”⁶⁷

Interestingly, other sources provide a counter-memory for these contemporary performances. Right after the Revolution ended in Zamboanga, the memorialization of its events would be on the side of the victor. As the maxim “*history is written by the victor*” goes, Zamboanga hails the Americans as its savior from the “tyranny” of the “Republica de Zamboanga”.⁶⁸ November 16, the day the Americans occupied Zamboanga is celebrated every year.⁶⁹ According to an issue of *The Mindanao Herald* dated November 18, 1905, it narrates the sixth anniversary commemoration:

“On that day, six years ago, the first American troops to set foot on the Island of Mindanao disembarked at the Chineses Pier, Zamboanga, and formally took possession of the Island in the name of the United States.

The "Fighting 23rd," to whom this duty was assigned, came ashore prepared for "business" but were not called upon to

⁶⁶ Vic Larato, “Climaco wants Gen. Alvarez's heroism emulated,” Facebook, May 21, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/zambocitygovt/posts/pfbid026WLhrs2Xgf2obAB6NFRCGj2CLi91zxuRMZeRA6z41iuxbw16sDV5XHyEvVWjfaQYL>.

⁶⁷ PR City Tourism Office, “ALL SET FOR THE GRAND PARADA NG KALAYAN,” Facebook, June 12, 2024, <https://web.facebook.com/100066926834090/photos/781594720748082/>.

⁶⁸ “Occupation Day Celebration,” *The Mindanao Herald*, November 18, 1905, 1.

⁶⁹ Finley, *The Non-Christians of the Southern Islands of the Philippines*, 118.

exhibit their prowess; the people, pleased at their liberation from the tyranny of the "Republica de Zamboanga," as the insurrectionary government was known, receiving them with open arms. This good feeling between the natives and Americans has never been disturbed, and hence it is that the day is celebrated with the greatest enthusiasm by all classes of the community.

The celebration this year was on a very elaborate scale, and the committee having the affair in charge are entitled to the highest praise..."⁷⁰

The sixth anniversary lacked a grandiose spectacle as it saw a parade. Frank (1992) narrates the activities of the sixth anniversary:

"The "Fighting 23rd" was represented in the 9:30 a.m. parade by P. H. Frank and R. W. Craft along with thirty-oe other veterans who had served in various units in the Spanish-American War. The 20th Infantry Band and a Zambaonga[sic] native band supplied the martial strains. Company H, 20th Infantry, and an honor guard of Moros, under command of Datu Mandi, escorted the veteran soldiers..."⁷¹

In addition to the usual parade, the seventh anniversary the following year featured a rousing speech by the Governor of the Moro Province, Brigadier General Tasker H. Bliss. *The Mindanao Herald* issue on November 17, 1906, quotes his speech in which he invoked that the "occupation day" will "...come to be recognized by all – by Filipino, by Moro, by the wild tribesman of the distant hills, as their memorial day of independence not independence from the United States but freedom from the anarchy and lawless passions..."⁷²

Both celebrations featured Datu Mandi and his men in the parades. This is fitting since it was Datu Mandi, along with Isidoro Midel, who was responsible for the occupation of Zamboanga by the Americans. The "traitors" are the "heroes". Hence, the American military reports positively portray both men, but more prominently the former. Americans who were able to meet Datu Mandi commented that he is an "interesting man"⁷³, a "man

⁷⁰ *The Mindanao Herald*, "Occupation Day Celebration", 1.

⁷¹ P. J. Frank, "Boss: A Philippine Legacy (II)," *Bulletin of the American Historical Collection* XX, no. 2(79) (April-June 1992): 58.

⁷² "Occupation Day Celebrated," *The Mindanao Herald*, November 17, 1906, 1.

⁷³ Foreman, *The Philippine Islands*, 553.

of ability and strong character”⁷⁴, and that he was “held in respect by all, his counsel was sought, and his advice was followed...”⁷⁵ Midel, the one who ordered the assassination of Calixto, is also positively labeled as “friendly” to the Americans. Upon his death in 1910, he is cited as a “firm friend of U.S. in Zambo” who “always consistently supported the American government as for the best interests of the Filipino people”.⁷⁶ It remains unclear whether Occupation Day was celebrated annually after the 1900s, until further research can provide clarification.

In the world of music, Saavedra (1921) attributes a popular song entitled *No Te Vayas de Zamboanga* to a Spanish named Don Juan Lopez Cuadrado. According to Saavedra (1921), in Cuadrado’s love for Zamboanga, he composed the lyrics and its music to the point it became popular in the Philippines and the United States. Saavedra ascribed that the evacuation of the Spanish forces from Zamboanga in 1899 inspired Cuadrado to write the song.⁷⁷ The song begins with the lines “no te vayas no te vayas de Zamboanga que me puedes que me puedes olvidar” which means that the listener should not leave Zamboanga or she will be forgotten, invoking emotions of abandonment. The song had been mentioned in the letters of American soldiers assigned to Zamboanga and the lyrics have evolved through time, particularly the “racially deprecating” *Monkeys Have No Tails in Zamboanga*.⁷⁸

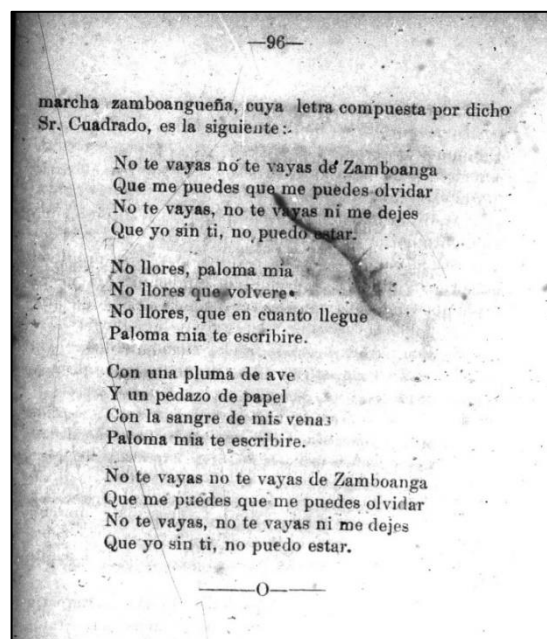


Photo 7. A page from Saavedra’s *Apuntes Históricos* containing the lyrics of the Zamboangueño classic *No Te Vayas de Zamboanga*. Copy courtesy of Rizal Library Microform and Digital Resources Library.

⁷⁴ Robinson, *The Philippines: The War and the People*, 225.

⁷⁵ David Potter, *Sailing the Sulu Sea: Belles and Bandits in the Philippines* (E. P. Dutton & Co, Inc., 1940), 224.

⁷⁶ “Death of Isidoro Midel. Firm Friend of U.S. in Zambo,” *The Cablenews-American*, May 31, 1910, 10.

⁷⁷ Saavedra, *Apuntes Históricos*, 95-96; Antonio E. Orendain II, Ronaldo B. Bautista, Rafael C. Climaco, Emigdio A. Enriquez, and Rose Lamb-Sobrepeña, *Zamboanga Hermosa: Memories of the Old Town* (Filipinas Foundation, Inc., 1984), 128-129.

⁷⁸ Thomas P. Walsh, *Tin Pan Alley and the Philippines: American Songs of War and Love, 1898-1946, A Resource Guide* (Scarecrow Press, 2013), 127-129. The lyrics to the song were replaced with racial connotations: *Oh, the monkeys have no tails in Zamboanga, Oh, the monkeys have no tails in Zamboanga, Oh, the monkeys have no tails, They were bitten off by whales, Oh, the monkeys have no tails in Zamboanga.*

To date, the only memorialization effort in this section is the annual commemoration of May 18 as Dia de General Vicente S. Alvarez as mandated by Ordinance No. 334 where he is the center of the program as compared to the earlier performances where the victors are celebrated. Although the “pakulo” may vary, the commemorative devices remain: a wreath-laying ceremony, speeches, and the presence of government personnel. Interestingly, the people of Zamboanga remain indifferent as evidenced by their simple passing by during these public programs. The song *No Te Vayas de Zamboanga* remains very popular in Zamboanga as different versions of it sprang out and yet many remain clueless on how it began.

Strategizing the Memory

The politics of memory asks us these questions, particularly in public history: Who makes it? In what kind of social spaces? In what forms?⁷⁹ Notably, the majority of current efforts to memorialize the Philippine Revolution in Zamboanga are shaped by politicians and adhere to the so-called ‘glorious’ narrative. That narrative adheres to the fourth tool according to Leopuld (2020), “strategic silencing”. It refers to the systematic selection of the narratives by “masking out” historical facts that “contradict one’s interpretation”.⁸⁰ This problem arises when history is legislated. As evidenced by the lacuna of the official narrative listed previously, the memorialization efforts remain “suspect” since it follows a pattern of “exclusion, appropriation, and legitimization through an instrumentalization of history”.⁸¹

The strategic silencing in the official narrative begins by selecting General Vicente Alvarez as the main character and labels his actions as “heroic”. “Exclusion” begins as this narrative portrays Alvarez as the protagonist while Datu Mandi and Isidoro Midel are considered the “traitors”. The reasons for their siding with the Americans are dismissed as anti-revolutionary although their narratives point to Alvarez as the troublemaker with the chaos caused by his Republic as claimed by other sources. The views of the common Zamboangueño are also unheard of in the official narrative. “Appropriation” exists as it shows that Alvarez’s revolution was a glorified victory over a three-hundred-year-old colonizer whose colonization has ended and his apparent dissolution of the revolution when the new colonizer arrived was justified so that lives can be spared from the agony. It overlooked

⁷⁹ Walkowitz and Knaeur, *Memory*, 14.

⁸⁰ Leopuld, *Embattled dreamlands*.

⁸¹ Walkowitz and Knaeur, *Memory*, 185. This conclusion was made in a study by Anna Krylova on the never-built monument to the Unknown Russian Soldier of World War II as it is caught between the politics of Russia and the former Soviet states that broke away in 1991.

the fact that the Treaty of Paris was signed between Spain and the United States, transferring all Spanish properties, including Fort Pilar, to the Americans. Spain continued to hold the fort, which no longer belonged to them.

The dissolution of the revolutionary chapter by Alvarez when the Americans occupied Zamboanga contradicts his dictum proudly proclaimed in the ordinance, “We will never surrender Zamboanga and we will fight any foreign invader to the last man.” Why emphasize this quote if he gave up the fight at the end of the story? Lastly, the ordinance, although not explicitly stated, “legitimizes” the existence of “La Independiente Republica de Zamboanga” by mentioning it in the narrative. Sources on the existence of such is still limited and to place it on the ordinances raises more questions rather than answers.

The danger of such ordinances is that they selectively use facts and narratives to elevate a particular agenda: to invoke a personality where Zamboanguenos can unite. This is done despite the different gaps in the narrative. This must not be taken lightly.

Conclusion

The monuments and the different memorialization efforts made for Rizal imply that he is the national hero of the Philippines, albeit, “unofficial”. To date, no national law in the Philippines has declared him a national hero. Neither does Bonifacio, even though there is a national holiday for him, so does Senator Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino, Jr. This did not stop Zamboanga City’s local government from legislating the city’s hero and naming a day for his commemoration. In this case, they chose General Vicente Alvarez as the embodiment of heroism. Such heroism stems from not only the ideals of the Revolution but rooting from his identity as a Zamboangueno, drawing heavily from the “glorious” narrative. The local politicians of today would invoke this idea of heroism in connecting with Zamboanga’s current political and social landscape—the call for unity between Christians, Muslims, and Lumads.

The “glorious” narrative claims that Alvarez is a “combination” of Rizal and Bonifacio trying to elicit a “Filipino nationalistic feeling”. There is no recorded work by Alvarez compared to Rizal. For sure Alvarez led a battle, but to date, sources are still scant on whether Alvarez was a member of Katipunan. The fact that these efforts are legislated by those in power places it under the framework of an “imagined community” as Benedict Anderson

proposed.⁸² By invoking Rizal and Bonifacio in the official narrative, it tries to “imagine” the relationship between the national struggle and Zamboanga. Did Alvarez even read Rizal’s books which inspired Bonifacio to revolt? Did Alvarez meet Aguinaldo in person or write him letters pledging allegiance to his revolution? It also tries to “imagine” the dynamics of the Zamboanga populace. Did all Zamboanguenos support Alvarez in his fight against the Spanish, despite other sources suggesting that many remained loyal to Spain? Why did Datu Mandi refuse to join his cause? Why did Isidoro Midel surrender Zamboanga to the Americans so easily? These questions bring into focus the issue of 'nationhood.'

Such inquiries highlight the gaps in the narrative of the Philippine Revolution in this region; therefore, further studies are essential to enrich the existing literature. Memorialization efforts are necessary but should be well-researched to ensure historical accuracy. These efforts and gaps must be addressed and clarified within the academic sphere before politics, not after. History should guide policies, not politics dictate history.

⁸² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Anvil Publishing, 1983), 7.

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