

# Aurelio Alvero: Outstanding Student Leader, Poet, Writer, Traitor, A Misunderstood Nationalist?

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## ABSTRACT

In his book *The Fateful Years*, historian Teodoro Agoncillo narrated how the pro-Japanese group Malayang Kalipunan ng mga Pilipino (MAKAPILI) was formed. According to Agoncillo, sometime in July or August 1944, the Japanese summoned former GANAP leader Benigno Ramos and commissioned him to form an army dedicated to suppressing bandits and other lawless elements. Acting on these instructions, Ramos called for a meeting at his residence that was attended by several personalities one of whom was a youth leader named Aurelio Alvero.

Who was this Aurelio Alvero? Why was he summoned to this meeting of prominent personalities? And why was he largely forgotten by the Filipinos. The research conducted by the author showed that Alvero was a rising star in the field of literature before World War II. He was also a Filipinologist who spoke about a love for the country and defending the its honor. During World War II, he sided with the Japanese because, in Alvero's view, the Spaniards and Americans corrupted the Filipino nation through their influence. He believed that it was through an alliance with fellow Asians, can the Philippines truly free itself. During the Japanese occupation Alvero, championed the revival of the Filipino culture by establishing the Kulturap and the New Leaders Institute. Later

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Dr. De Viana authored several books in Philippine History among which were *Laon Laan: A Guide for the Study and Understanding the Life and Contributions of Jose Rizal to Philippine Nationhood and Society* and *Pahiwatig: A Guide for Readings in Philippine History*.

on, Alvero's pro-Filipino group, the Bisig Bakal ng Tagala, fought against the atrocities committed by the MAKAPILI and likewise fought the Americans early in 1945. He was later arrested and tried for being a collaborator resulting to being imprisoned twice. He died shortly after his release from prison. Today, Alvero is hardly mentioned, not even in literature books. For this reason, this paper revisits Alvero's life and discusses why his patriotism was interpreted as treason against his own people during World War II.

**Keywords:** *Aurelio Alvero, Filipinologist, student-leader, nationalist, traitor*

## THE STORY OF AURELIO ALVERO: HOW NATIONALISM WAS INTERPRETED AS TREASON

### HIS EARLY YEARS AND EDUCATION

 aurelio Sevilla Alvero was born on October 15, 1914 at No. 10 Santiago de Vera Street in Tondo, Manila. This young man who would become a brilliant intellectual and a man of letters was the son of Emilio de Vera Alvero and Rosa Sevilla-Alvero.

Among his parents, his mother had a great influence on him. The family of his mother was identified with the great reformist and propagandist Marcelo H. del Pilar. It was from Del Pilar did she develop a strong sense of nationalism. She saw how opportunities for advancement were denied to the *indios* by the Spanish colonizers and she was disgusted by the discriminatory distance set between the less fortunate and the more recognized and privileged classes—the *indias* (brown-skinned native women) from the *mestizas* and Spaniards.

She later decided to become a teacher—convincing her father to let her study at the Escuela Municipal in Manila that was managed by the Sisters of Charity. Here, she learned active methods of teaching that encouraged discussion and incorporated practical demonstrations whenever relevant.<sup>2</sup>

When the Philippine Revolution broke out, her studies were interrupted. She and her sister, Susana, then helped in feeding the troops, preparing the bandages and caring for the wounded soldiers. During the Filipino-American War, she wore a soldier's uniform to fight the Americans. She also served in the staff of

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<sup>2</sup> David E. Gardiner and Josefina Z. Sevilla-Gardiner, Rosa Sevilla Alvero and the Instituto de Mujeres de Manila, *Philippine Studies*, Vol. 37, 1989, 29-51, 33-37. [https://www.jstor.org/stable/42633130?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/42633130?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents). Accessed: June 28, 2019.

La Independencia, which was edited by Antonio Luna. After the war, she resumed her education at the Assumption Superior Normal School and after her graduation she established the first lay school for women, the Instituto de Mujeres.

In 1910, Rosa Sevilla married Emilio Alvero, a glass artist and interior decorator. She and Emilio had five children, namely, Emilio Teodoro, Jesus, Fredesvindo, Miguel, and Alvero who was the eldest among his brothers.

As a young boy, Aurelio Alvero studied at the Centro Educativo y Instructivo and completed his primary education at his mother's school, the Instituto de Mujeres. He then moved to the Ateneo de Manila High School. Here, he exemplified his interest in letters as he was a writer in *Guidon*, the official student newspaper of the school. After finishing his secondary education, he studied at the College of Liberal Arts of the University of Santo Tomas where he took a course leading to an Associate in Arts degree. As a student, Alvero submitted poems to the literary section of the *Varsitarian*, the school organ of the pontifical university.

While studying in the College of Education from 1933 to 1935, Alvero excelled in literature courses such as Literary Criticism, World Literature, Short Story Writing, and Review Course in Literature. He also showed his talent in speech and earned a high grade in Public Speaking. He also acquired excellent grades in Religion courses.<sup>3</sup>

Alvero also participated in organizations and activities that required expertise in subjects he did not excel in. Though his teaching skills were mediocre, Alvero had excellent grades in Christian Apologetics. He graduated cum laude with a degree of Bachelor of Arts in Education in 1935.

As a student at the College of Education, Alvero was elected as the President of the Student Council in 1933-1934. He reaped various awards and honors, and being chosen to take up prestigious positions in the student government. From 1933 to 1934, Alvero was a poet-laureate, a winner of the three-cornered poetical joust. He also became a member of another honor society named the Fra Sigma, Delta Alpha Phi in 1934-1935. In the College of Education, Alvero became the Editor of *The Thomasian*, the yearbook of the University of Santo Tomas. He won a Gold Medal in the Law Bicentennial Oratorical Contest in 1934 to 1935 and was also the Chairman of the Round Table Conference on

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<sup>3</sup> Diligencias De Grados Education Book 24 1928-1935, 174 D.P.I. Form No. 9 Record of Candidates from Collegiate Courses, 174.

Modern Literature. In the field of athletics, Alvero was the Manager of Champion Education Bowling Team from 1934 to 1935. In his senior year during 1935-1935 in the College of Education, he became the President of the Senior Education from 1934 to 1935.<sup>4</sup>

While still studying as a sophomore in the College of Education, he entered the Faculty of Civil Law, which, during the time were allowed in the University of Santo Tomas.<sup>5</sup> Alvero, however, did not perform excellently at Faculty of Civil Law—graduated with the degree of Bachelor of Laws in 1937. By that time, Alvero was already working as a teacher at the San Beda College and at the Instituto de Mujeres. His preoccupation with teaching was the main reason for not getting any academic distinction.<sup>6</sup>

While still studying for his law degree, Alvero was active in extracurricular activities. He won several prizes and awards from debating and public speaking. As a law student, he was the Secretary of the Freshman Law Organization at the time. During the same period, he won a Bronze Medal in the Law Oratorical Contest. As a sophomore in the Law Organization he won a Laureate Crown and Gold Medal in the Law Bicentennial Ode Contest. He became a member of the honor organization, Grand Mu Alpha Gama Tau.<sup>7</sup> He was also the chief editor of the *Spectrum*, a supplement of the *Varsitarian*. In other activities, he was a chief cheerleader. He went to the University of Washington as the representative of the UST Debating Team. In 1934-1935, Alvero was the Representative of the law Student Council. During the same period, he became the Director of the UST Debating Club.<sup>8</sup>

## POETRY

Even as a young boy, Alvero composed several poems and “1896” was the most recognized work among the rest, a piece also known as “*The Cry Awoke Balintawak*,” which took inspiration from the Cry of Balintawak led by Andres Bonifacio in 1896. His other poems are the following:

Realization (1931)

Reflections (1931)

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<sup>4</sup>*The Thomasian Yearbook* (1935).

<sup>5</sup> Diligencias De Grados Education Book 24 1928-1935, 174 D.P.I. Form No. 9 Record of Candidates from Collegiate Courses, 174.

<sup>6</sup>University of Santo Tomas Office of the Registrar (1937) List of the Candidates for Graduation in the Faculty of Civil Law.

<sup>7</sup>*The Thomasian Yearbook* (1935).

<sup>8</sup> *The Thomasian Yearbook* (1935).



To a Lover of Beauty (1931)  
 To a Silent Friend (1931)  
 Lines (1931)  
 Anacreontics (1931)  
 For You and Me (1931)  
 Mirrors (1932)  
 At Parting (1932)  
 Moan (1932)  
 Palms (1932)  
 To Rev. James P. Mahoney, S.J. (1933)  
 The One Who Went Away (1933)  
 Sonnet (1935)  
 Alveronis (1935)  
 Communion (1935)  
 To a Proud One (1935)  
 Nuances (1939)

## EDUCATOR AND A SHORT FORAY INTO POLITICS

After obtaining his education degree in 1935, Alvero taught English at the San Beda College. That year he married Librada Belmonte, an education student whom he met at the University of Santo Tomas. She graduated with a BSE in 1938. He also taught at the Instituto de Mujeres, the school founded by her mother. The school was originally established exclusively for women but later transitioned into a co-educational institution. It offered preschool, secondary, and tertiary education that focused on teaching English, Filipino, and Spanish rooting from Alvero's mother placing importance on language because it was the vehicle to express oneself and one's decisions. The lessons, however, were not limited to this nor literature, for the directress organized debates and oratorical contests.

In 1938, Alvero began teaching at the University of Santo Tomas where he taught Spanish and Apologetics in the College of Education. In 1941, he founded his own school called the State Institute located in Pasay, which was a part of Rizal province during the time. Unfortunately, it was not clear how the college fared as there were insufficient records about its operation.<sup>9</sup>

Though Alvero had a law degree it was not clear whether he practiced as a lawyer. However, he showed a particular interest in politics. In 1937, Alvero's

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<sup>9</sup> Gardiner. *Rosa Sevilla de Alvero and the Instituto de Mujeres of Manila*. Accessed March 2019 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42633130>.

political views started to manifest themselves and, in turn, affect his life. According to him, the Filipinos were greatly corrupted by the influences of the Spaniards and Americans. Wenceslao Q. Vinzons, with the support of Alvero, founded the Young Philippines party—a political party that advocated for pan-Asianism and a closer union with the Philippines' Southeast Asian neighbors. It espoused the idea of forming a confederation of Malayan states in the fashion of the old Sri Vijaya Empire. In this union, various states function as one political body while maintaining a wide degree of autonomy. An aspiration that could only be achieved when the Western colonizers and their treaties with the Southeast Asian colonies were expunged from the region.

Unlike Vinzons who figured in many confrontations with Quezon, Alvero praised Quezon and his efforts of gaining self-rule for the Philippines. For him, Quezon was an exceptional leader of the Philippines and it was Quezon who encouraged Alvero to run for public office.<sup>10</sup> Thus, at the young age of 24, he ran for councilor of Manila under Vinzons' Young Philippines Party. Unfortunately the Nacionalista Party led by President Quezon was simply much more supported than the young upstart—resulting to losing his bid to a Nacionalista opponent.<sup>11</sup> However, despite his loss, Alvero ran again for the same position in 1940. This time he ran as a member of Quezon's Nacionalista Party, but it was his fellow party mate, Carmen Planas, who won the post, making her the first woman councilor of Manila.<sup>12</sup>

With his political plans thwarted, Alvero concentrated on his career as an academician, writer, poet and orator where he expressed his political beliefs through writings and speeches. During an oratorical contest on November 13, 1935, he gave a speech criticizing Resident Commissioner Pedro Guevara who proposed that the Philippines should become a protectorate of the United States. The speech entitled *The Fallacy of Protectorate* criticized the Commissioner for acclaiming his philosophy of defeatism and despair,<sup>13</sup> an oratory that was later published in the *Varsitarian* on December 20, 1935. Through this medium, Alvero proclaimed that all nations began at the bottom and because they (the United States) “had the courage and the determination to carry on, they have reached a state of strength.”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Aileen Baviera (Ed). *Philippine External Relations A Centennial Vista* (Manila: Foreign Service Institute, 1999): 138.

<sup>11</sup> Grant Goodman, *Aurelio Alvero: Traitor or Patriot* Grant Goodman, Aurelio Alvero, Traitor or Patriot? in *Journal of Southeast Asia Studies* 27, No. 1 (1996).

<sup>12</sup> Civil Affairs handbook Philippine Islands Section 1: Geographical and Social Background by United States Office of the Provost Marshal General Columbia University Libraries (1944): 58.

<sup>13</sup> Aurelio Alvero, “*The Fallacy of The Protectorate*”, *The Varsitarian*.

<sup>14</sup> Aurelio Alvero, “*The Fallacy of The Protectorate*”, *The Varsitarian*.

To stress this point, Alvero said:

“Fifty years ago, Japan did not consider power. Today Japan ranks number three in armed strength. The United States began with thirteen weak, struggling, pushed-down colonies and now because of the spirit of freedom such men as Washington who loved freedom, fought for it, the United States holds an enviable position in the hall of nations.”<sup>15</sup>

At that time, Alvero was developing a fascination for Japan, seeing it as a model for the Philippines. Japan, according to Alvero, was a small nation yet it became a strong and dominant one because of the determination of its people. Writing in 1935, Alvero said, Japan is number three in the world in armed strength.<sup>16</sup>

### **ALVERO’S ROLE DURING THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION (1942-1945)**

When the Pacific War broke out and the Japanese began their occupation of the Philippines, they closed down many schools in Manila. The Sampaloc campus of the University of Santo Tomas was turned into an internment camp for the Allied forces and Alvero’s own school was likewise closed leaving the educator jobless. Despite this, he did not harbor any ill-feelings against the invaders.

The Japanese had the agenda of erasing Western influence by replacing it with Asianism and allowing the promotion of local cultures suppressed by American imperialism. Alvero found a common cause with Benigno Ramos, Quezon’s former clerk who later became his political enemy. Like Alvero, Ramos was a poet. He and Alvero believed that Filipinos should champion the promotion of their own culture and fight the inroads of its Western colonizers.

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<sup>15</sup> Aurelio Alvero, “*The Fallacy of The Protectorate*”, *The Varsitarian*.

<sup>16</sup> Aurelio Alvero, “*The Fallacy of The Protectorate*”, *The Varsitarian*.



Benigno Ramos, leader of the Sakdal, then  
the GANAP and the MAKAPILI

Ramos must have known about Alvero from his orations that are nationalistic in content as well as from his books promoting the Filipino language. The only political party allowed during the Japanese occupation was the Kapisanan ng Paglilingkod sa Bagong Pilipinas (KALIBAPI), which was formed on December 8, 1942. Here, Ramos was appointed as the spokesman for the Japanese and Director of Publicity of the KALIBAPI, while Alvero was taken into the KALIBAPI as a member of its propaganda unit. According to Goodman, this was where Aurelio Alvero applied for work. The once famous “*makata*”<sup>17</sup> applied to Benigno Ramos<sup>18</sup> where he later became the supervisor of the Educational and Scientific Section of the KALIBAPI and the head of its Cultural Division in the group’s Bureau of Political Affairs.

The objective of the KALIBAPI was to assist the Filipinos in comprehending the significance of the principles of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. It was tasked to encourage Filipino support to secure the new Philippines in its rightful place in the said sphere, instill strict adherence to the policies of the Imperial Japanese forces in the Philippines, and render service in the establishment and advancement of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. As an official of the KALIBAPI, Alvero conducted lectures in its Labor Institute three times a week. He also urged his listeners that Filipino culture can only be saved from destruction by the Occidentals, in joining hands with other Orientals to establish a new order under the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere.

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<sup>17</sup> *Makata* meaning poet.

<sup>18</sup> Grant Goodman, Aurelio Alvero, Traitor or Patriot? 22.

Alvero claimed that the new order demanded the dissolution of the institutions which, in their nature and organization, are symptoms of the past regimes.<sup>19</sup>

Alvero proposed the creation of an Institute of Spiritual Training to carry out the purposes of the KALIBAPI. He said that "342 years of indoctrination towards things and thoughts Occidental and the 42 years of the inculcation of blind confidence in America make of spiritual regeneration a task that demands doing immediately and within the shortest possible time."<sup>20</sup> The Japanese authorities offered him a scholarship at the Imperial University of Taihoku in Taiwan, an offer he later declined.<sup>21</sup>

During the Japanese occupation, Alvero organized a group called Kulturap, which was an association to promote Filipino culture. He was said to have organized other groups. He also established another group called the New Leaders' Association which aimed to produce leaders in tune with the new political order and in sync with the objectives of the KALIBAPI.<sup>22</sup>

Aside from his job in the propaganda arm of the KALIBAPI that promoted national culture and adherence to Japan's goals, Alvero used his contacts in the occupation government to engage in trading with the Japanese military. He founded a business called ASA Trading—the initials of his own name from Aurelio Sevilla Alvero. His business the buying and selling of spare automotive parts, and was located at the corner of Dasmariñas and Mariquina Streets in Binondo. He started out with a capital of P15,000 and by the time he closed his business in 1944, he had accumulated a net profit of two million pesos—a big amount at that time. With the money, he managed to buy a house in July 1944 worth P300,000. During his trial at the People's Court after the war, it was alleged that he subsidized the New Leaders' Association from the profits of his trade with the Japanese.<sup>23</sup>

Following Laurel's declaration of a state of war with the United States and Great Britain on September 21, 1944, Alvero sent a check worth P10,000 to raise funds for the Philippines' national defense.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Supreme Court of the Philippines. *People of the Philippines vs. Aurelio Alvero (Alias Reli)*, G.R. No. L-820 (April 11, 1950): 9-10.

<sup>20</sup> Supreme Court, *People of the Philippines vs. Aurelio Alvero*, 9-10.

<sup>21</sup> Niccolo G. Hilario, *Aurelio Alvero: The Story of a Poet, Editor, Educator, Writer and a Thomasian* (1931-1946) Unpublished Thesis, University of Santo Tomas.

<sup>22</sup> Supreme Court, *People of the Philippines vs. Aurelio Alvero*, 9-10.

<sup>23</sup> Supreme Court, *People of the Philippines vs. Aurelio Alvero*, 9-10.

<sup>24</sup> Supreme Court *People of the Philippines vs. Aurelio Alvero*, 7.

## FORMATION OF THE MAKAPILI AND THE BISIG BAKAL NG TAGALA

Meanwhile, the Japanese under Prime Minister Hideki Tojo were trying to get Filipino leaders to side with them more openly by declaring war on the United States and Great Britain. To entice the Filipinos, Tojo offered to recognize the independence of the Philippines when sufficient level of cooperation was given to Japan. The result of Tojo's promise was the inauguration of the Philippine Republic with Jose P. Laurel as President on October 14, 1943. The Japanese expected that Laurel would cooperate more closely with Japan now that independence was granted. They expected the Philippine Republic under Laurel to declare war on the United States and the Allies and conscript Filipino troops to fight for Japan. They also wanted Laurel to include Filipinos like Pio Duran in his cabinet, personalities who were more willing to cooperate with them. However, Laurel steadfastly refused these and continued to cooperate with the Japanese in other aspects such as supplying them with material resources. He also submitted a pact of alliance with Japan that did not include the conscription of Filipinos to fight for Japan.<sup>25</sup>



Inauguration of the Second Philippine Republic on October 14, 1943

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<sup>25</sup> Official Gazette. Vol. 1, October 14-13, 1943, 13.





President Jose P. Laurel giving his inaugural speech  
at the inauguration of the Philippine Republic in 1943

In frustration, the Japanese got tired of Laurel's uncooperative attitude and General Shigenori Kuroda, the Japanese Commander-in-Chief, sought the assistance of Benigno Ramos to form a "peace army" to fight bandits and other lawless elements. To form this army, Ramos called for a meeting at his residence in Mandaluyong. Among those present were General Artemio Ricarte, Sotero Baluyot, Pio Duran, Leon Villaferte, and Andres Villanueva. Aurelio Alvero was also present at the meeting and acted as Secretary.<sup>26</sup>

Ramos raised the issue of the Bureau of Constabulary not able to ensure peace and order in the countryside. Sotero Baluyot, who was Laurel's representative in the group, replied that the Constabulary could not enforce the law because the Japanese had confiscated all their weapons and that only the Presidential Guards at Malacañang had the privilege of bearing arms. Ramos then proposed to have an army to assist the Constabulary in keeping peace and order. When Baluyot asked if President Laurel was consulted about the formation of this army, Ramos replied in the negative. The meeting that day ended without any final decision.<sup>27</sup>

However, the following day the group, including Alvero, convened once again and when the issue of consulting the president came about, Ramos said

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<sup>26</sup> Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *The Fateful Years* Vol. 2. (Quezon City: R.P. Garcia Publishing, 1965), 832-833.

<sup>27</sup> Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *The Fateful Years*, 832-333.

that President Laurel's consent is not necessary because this peace army would be supported by the Japanese Military Administration. During the meeting a representative of the Japanese Military Administration was present to put pressure on the group. Thus, the Malayang Kalipunan ng mga Pilipino or the Patriotic League of Filipinos (MAKAPILI) was born. Ramos became its Commander-in-Chief and Pio Duran became the chief of military training. Baluyot was chosen as the chief of its labor section. Ricarte, Alvero and others served in other capacities.<sup>28</sup> Later, Alvero was appointed as the Secretary of the organization.

When Baluyot reported to Laurel about the formation of the so-called peace army and that it will operate outside the authority of the Republic of the Philippines, Laurel protested to Ambassador Syozo Murata. However, instead of telling Ramos to disband the MAKAPILI, Murata told Laurel to attend its inauguration ceremony. Laurel replied that he would not attend the occasion and Murata gave an ominous warning that should Laurel fail to attend, this will be seen as non-cooperation by the Japanese.<sup>29</sup>

As a group, the MAKAPILI was armed by the Japanese military and its members numbered in the thousands. At its formation, the MAKAPILI was given 2,000 rifles and had its headquarters at the Christ the King compound in Quezon City. It was composed mostly of Ramos' GANAP followers. Also, within its ranks were opportunists and criminal elements who were attracted by the pay given to its members. Laurel saw the MAKAPILI as a threat because with its armed members it can easily make a grab for power in a coup d'état.

On December 8, 1944, Laurel and a few officials attended the formal launching of the MAKAPILI at Malacañan. During the ceremony, Ramos boasted that the MAKAPILI was independent of the Philippine Republic and that it is only responsible to the Japanese Commander-in-Chief, Lt. Gen. Tomyuyki Yamashita. When Laurel was given the chance to speak, he told all of those present to remain united and loyal to the Philippine Republic and gave an obvious warning to the MAKAPILI members against betraying their own country.<sup>30</sup>

Although Alvero was one of the founders of the MAKAPILI, he disagreed with the political views of Ramos. While both shared common characteristics as

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<sup>28</sup> Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *The Fateful Years*, 832-333.

<sup>29</sup> Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *The Fateful Years*, 832-833.

<sup>30</sup> Gregorio F. Zaide, *Remarks of President Jose. P. Laurel Repudiating the MAKAPILI Documentary Sources of Philippine History*, Vol. 12: 94-95.

writers and poets, advocates of the Filipino language and culture and hatred of communism, Alvero did not share Ramos' hatred for the elites. Already, disagreements happened within the MAKAPILI, the original plan was to have General Ricarte as its Supreme Head and President Laurel was supposed to be its Supreme Adviser. However, Ramos set Ricarte and Laurel aside and made himself supreme commander of the MAKAPILI.

To Ramos, Laurel was not pro-Japanese enough and he and his fellow members in the political elite running the Philippine Republic should be swept aside by a more radical and pro-Japanese Filipino like himself. Ramos even boasted that if he had it his way, he would have Laurel hanged.<sup>31</sup> In contrast, Alvero admired Laurel and even sent a letter congratulating him for the declaration of a state of war between the Philippines and the United States.

Ramos and Alvero were poles apart in their differences. Ramos was a demagogue and had wide appeal among the illiterate peasants. He was also tactless in what he said. He once told the Japanese that the Filipinos were 95% Pro-American and 5% were liars. This was a great act of betrayal by Ramos to his own people. Alvero, running contrast to him, was an elitist in approach. He did not share Ramos' very loud denunciation of his fellow Filipinos. Another source of animosity between the two was that Alvero was supposed to be installed as the Head of the Department of Enlightenment under the MAKAPILI. However, Ramos placed one of his followers named, Lumbré, in the position. Also, Alvero saw Ramos as a dictatorial hard-head that did not follow the plan that the founders of the MAKAPILI agreed to.<sup>32</sup> Later, Alvero distanced himself from the MAKAPILI and founded another pro-Japanese group, the Bisig Bakal ng Tagala in January 1945.

The Bisig Bakal ng Tagala was formed during a meeting of the New Leader's Association on January 5, 1945. In explaining why he formed the group, he expressed in speech the New Leaders' Association that:<sup>33</sup>

Because we must become "Bisigbakal," iron-armed, however, iron arms not for abuse, instead of for the defense of our suffering people. We must control ourselves thus: otherwise we shall be unworthy of this association we have formed.

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<sup>31</sup> Hernando Abaya, *Betrayal in the Philippines* (New York: A.A. Wyn, 1946), 236.

<sup>32</sup> Wada, *Sakdalista's Struggle for Philippine Independence, 1930-1945*, 188

<sup>33</sup> Address to the New Leaders Assembled at the North Headquarters On January 5, 1945

He said that the group will be composed of Tagalas (Tagalogs) and that the group will never be allowed to be an instrument used by other nations.<sup>34</sup>

Ever so. Never to become the instruments of other  
nations,  
never to be blinded by personal thoughts,  
sentiments, and  
considerations as to forget the Country for the  
advancement  
of other nations.

Alvero used the term “Tagala” not to limit the membership to the Tagalogs but because “Tagalog” was the same term used to refer to all Filipinos. Tagalog or Tagala in Alvero’s vision referred to the entire Philippines, thus, the translation of Bisig Bakal ng Tagala is the Iron Arms of the Philippines. In the same speech, he said that his group was not pro-Japanese, not pro-American, and not even pro-Spanish, but for the Filipinos.<sup>35</sup>

We should keep in mind ever the full scope of this  
assertion: Of Tagala. Not of Philip of Spain as those  
who called us Filipinos would make us. Nor of  
America,  
Nor Japan. Nor of any people or nation in the world.

This pro-Filipino approach made the Bisig Bakal ng Tagala a nationalistic organization that promised to fight any foreign threat to the Philippines. He also said the goal of the Bisig Bakal ng Tagala was to fight the abuses of the MAKAPILI, which have started killings and torture of fellow Filipinos. The Bisig Bakal was mostly composed of trainees from the New Leader’s Association. But unlike Ramos’ MAKAPILI, the Bisig Bakal ng Tagala was small and its presence had little effect in stopping the atrocities of the MAKAPILI and their Japanese associates. Aside from the Bisig Bakal ng Tagala, Alvero organized another group called People’s Own Guerilla.<sup>36</sup>

However, despite distancing himself from the MAKAPILI, Alvero was still involved in pro-Japanese and anti—Filipino activities. Alvero and his group

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<sup>34</sup> Address to the New Leaders Assembled at the North Headquarters On January 5, 1945.

<sup>35</sup> Address to the New Leaders Assembled at the North Headquarters on January 5, 1945.

<sup>36</sup> G.R. No. L-820 April 11, 1950, THE PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES, *Plaintiff-Appellee*, vs. AURELIO ALVERO (alias RELI), *Defendant-Appellant.*, Chan-Robles Virtual Library, [www.chanrobles.com](http://www.chanrobles.com) › ... › Philippine Supreme Court Jurisprudence. Accessed June 14, 2019.

received arms and money from the Japanese. During the battle for Manila, Ramos, with a pistol in hand, was said to have ordered and caused the burning of buildings west of Taft Avenue and south of Libertad Street Pasay in an attempt to delay the Americans from liberating Manila. When the Japanese forces began evacuating the Pasay area, the Bisig Bakal ng Tagala found large stocks of food and supplies. They begun distributing the food to the locals while keeping all the military supplies and weapons. While distributing food to the civilians, Alvero and the members of the Bisig Bakal ng Tagala urged the citizenry to resist the Americans.

## ARREST AND TRIAL

When the Americans and their Filipino guerrilla allies ultimately won the battle for Manila, everyone who were associated with the Japanese were arrested. Alvero was arrested by the US Army at his home in Pasay on February 12, 1945. His captors also seized various documents that would help prosecutors build a cases against him. Alvero was imprisoned at the Old Bilibid Prison in Manila.

Alvero who was arraigned as Alias “Reli,” was charged with treason with 23 counts of political, economic, and military collaboration.<sup>37</sup> The treason charges were reduced to 22 counts. His case was heard before the Third Division of the People’s Court presided over by Judge Arsenio Dizon.<sup>38</sup>

The twenty-two counts are broken down into political, economic and military collaboration, which are as follows:<sup>39</sup>

### Political Collaboration

<i>Count No. 1</i>	Membership in the KALIBAPI
<i>Count No. 4</i>	Alvero’s letter to President Jose P. Laurel congratulating him for his declaration of war against the United States and the United Kingdom

<sup>37</sup> G.R. No. L-820 April 11, 1950, THE PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES, *Plaintiff-Appellee*, vs. AURELIO ALVERO (alias RELI), *Defendant-Appellant.*, Chan-Robles Virtual Library ,

[www.chanrobles.com](http://www.chanrobles.com) › ... › Philippine Supreme Court Jurisprudence [Accessed June 14, 2019]

<sup>38</sup> G.R. No. L-820 April 11, 1950, THE PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES, *Plaintiff-Appellee*, vs. AURELIO ALVERO (alias RELI), *Defendant-Appellant.*, Chan-Robles Virtual Library ,

[www.chanrobles.com](http://www.chanrobles.com) › ... › Philippine Supreme Court Jurisprudence [Accessed June 14, 2019]

<sup>39</sup> G.R. No. L-820 April 11, 1950, THE PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES, *Plaintiff-Appellee*, vs. AURELIO ALVERO (alias RELI), *Defendant-Appellant.*, Chan-Robles Virtual Library ,

[www.chanrobles.com](http://www.chanrobles.com) › ... › Philippine Supreme Court Jurisprudence [Accessed June 14, 2019]



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<i>Count No. 10</i>	Interview with Leonardo Garcia (in which he was alleged to have shown adherence to the objectives of Japan)
<i>Counts No. 6, 7, 8, 12, 19, 21, and 22</i>	Formation and organization of the New Leaders Association

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### **Economic Collaboration**

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<i>Count No. 2 and 3</i>	Alvero's business or trading activities of buying war materials and selling them to the enemy under his company called ASA TRADING
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### **Military Collaboration**

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<i>Count No. 5 and 20</i>	Membership in the KALIBAPI
<i>Count No. 17</i>	Meeting at the Ayuntamiento de Manila ([City Hall] regarding formation of the MAKAPILI
<i>Count No. 11</i>	Organization of Our Peoples' Own Guerilla
<i>Counts No. 18</i>	The burning of buildings in Pasay

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During the trial, Alvero knew that the outcome of his case rested on the documents that were confiscated by the US Army from his house, so he filed a motion stating that the documents should be inadmissible as evidence because they were illegally taken by the arresting officers. Alvero argued that the US Army planned to remove those alleged collaborators regardless if they were political, economic, or military collaborators. He said that the private properties of the accused should be exempt from confiscation by the arresting officials. The Court, however, sustained the power of the US Army or the Philippine government to seize documents of suspected collaborationists like Alvero who violated his allegiance to the Philippines.

It was also during his trial did Alvero make a statement that President Laurel was not a puppet of the Japanese, thus, giving credence that Laurel actually defied the Japanese and worked for the welfare of the Filipinos during the Japanese occupation.

However, Alvero was found guilty of treason on July 17, 1946 and was sentenced to *reclusion perpetua* or life imprisonment. He was found guilty of all but two count (Counts No. 10 and 18). According to the *Philippines Free Press*,



Alvero was the second out of more than 3,000 persons charged before the People's Court.<sup>40</sup>

On the same day, he appealed his case to the Supreme Court and said that the Peoples' Court committed 42 errors that resulted in his conviction. Central to his complaint was the use of his diaries as evidence. Parts of his diaries were written by Alvero's secretaries as he dictated its contents. Parts of it were considered admissible based on the background they were made.<sup>41</sup>

When interviewed by the press, Alvero likened himself to Jose Rizal and Andres Bonifacio who were tried by their own countrymen. He said it would be an honor to follow their footsteps.<sup>42</sup>

While under detention, fellow prisoners described Alvero as the master of the Tagalog language for which he was called "The Professor."<sup>43</sup> Alvero vehemently denied that he was one of the organizers of the MAKAPILI. He also said that the Bisig Bakal ng Tagala was not an armed group.<sup>44</sup>

Alvero believed that the impression of him being one of the founders of the MAKAPILI was created by his association with Pio Duran whom he greatly admired. According to Alvero, Duran was sincere and a man of conviction. He sought nothing for himself. He loved his country no less than the most patriotic Filipino. In fact, he was admired by everybody who knew him intimately. He honestly believed that the course he had taken was the best means of helping the country. He was never pro-Japanese. As a matter of fact, he was thought to be pro-Chinese. He denied being pro-Chinese and insisted that he had nothing in his heart but the liberty and welfare of his country. For it, he was willing to sacrifice his life.

According to Alvero, Duran's greatest blunder was being linked to Benigno Ramos. Ramos, as he described him, was an ambitious man, wholly unprincipled whose sole aim was to be in power and amass wealth. Yet Alvero also proclaimed that Ramos organized an the "MAKAPILI," which fight against the Americans.

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<sup>40</sup> "Aurelio Alvero Pre-war Youth Leader Accused of Helping Organize the Makapili has been Charged with Treason" Philippine Free Press, October 6, 1945. Actually, there were approximately 5,600 cases of collaboration filed for trial before the Peoples' Court.

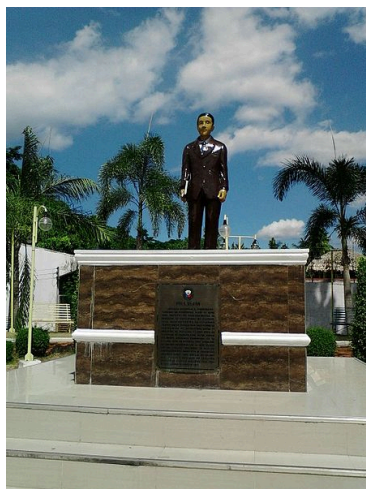
<sup>41</sup> See Supreme Court ruling on the diaries of Aurelio Alvero

<sup>42</sup> Alvero to Appeal Case, Manila Daily Bulletin, July 18, 1946, p. 1, 7.

<sup>43</sup> Antonio de las Alas, Diary <https://philippinediaryproject.wordpress.com/tag/aurelio-alvero/> [Accessed July 9, 2019]

<sup>44</sup> Alvero to Appeal Case, Manila Daily Bulletin, July 18, 1946, p. 1, 7.

Many of them did fight. Duran joined Ramos as his assistant and one of the leaders of the organization. He was later reported to be dead, losing a patriot whose life had been dedicated entirely to the cause of his country.



Monument and statue honoring  
Pio Duran in Pio Duran, Albay

Alvero allegedly disagreed with Duran on the organization of the MAKAPILI, so they parted ways. Duran continued with the MAKAPILI and organized a new one called the New Leaders Association. The organization had the aim of teaching the love of country, to propagate the national language, to keep peace and order, and to help the people in the procurement of food so that they may live and survive. Those purposes, according to Alvero, were indeed praiseworthy.

While in prison, Alvero suffered as his health was deteriorating. Though still a young man, he suffered from rheumatism. He also had some discipline issues with the prison guards who told him to clean up his cell and go to the next camp. The guard threatened to confine him in a *bartolina*<sup>45</sup> if he insisted. Alvero said that he does not mind if he were confined in a *bartolina*, but his fellow prisoner, Jose de las Alas, said that Alvero should have been examined by a doctor. If Alvero's claims were true, he should not be compelled to work and that he was

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<sup>45</sup> The “*bartolina*” described by Alvero’s fellow detainee Antonio de las Alas in his diary. De las Alas like Alvero was detained because of collaboration with the Japanese. According to him the *bartolina* is only about one and half meters by two meters in size and there is no ventilation except a small opening. It must be hell to be in there, especially when it is hot and with bread and water only for subsistence.

Antonio de las Alas. Diary. Diary <https://philippinediaryproject.wordpress.com/tag/aurelio-alvero/> [Accessed July 9, 2019]

afraid to get wet in the rain because it may worsen his condition. He was, however, willing to do any other kind of work.<sup>46</sup>

While fighting for an appeal before the Supreme Court, there was a motion for bail that was granted in 1947. On January 28, 1948, a significant event for the treason inductees developed when President Manuel Roxas issued Proclamation No. 51 granting amnesty to political and economic collaborators. The proclamation became effective after it was concurred by Congress on February 13, 1948. Under the proclamation, the counts of treason involving his membership in the KALIBAPI, his letter congratulating President Laurel on his declaration of a state of war with the United States, and his trading with the enemy under his ASA company were dismissed.

Despite the dismissal of political and economic collaboration charges, Alvero was not exempted from the charges of military collaboration. The People's Court had earlier proven Alvero's adherence to the Japanese military and his links to the MAKAPILI, the New Leaders' Association, and the Bisig Bakal ng Tagala. It is also said that the New Leaders' Association converted into a military organization that became the Bisig Bakal ng Tagala. On April 11, 1950, the Supreme Court handed down its decision on his motion for reconsideration, it upheld the decision of the People's Court sentencing him to life imprisonment. The High Court also ordered Alvero to pay an increased fine of P10,000 to P20,000. He was remanded to the New Bilibid Prison in Muntinlupa. However, he did not stay long in prison as he was released in 1952 as he was pardoned by President Elpidio Quirino.

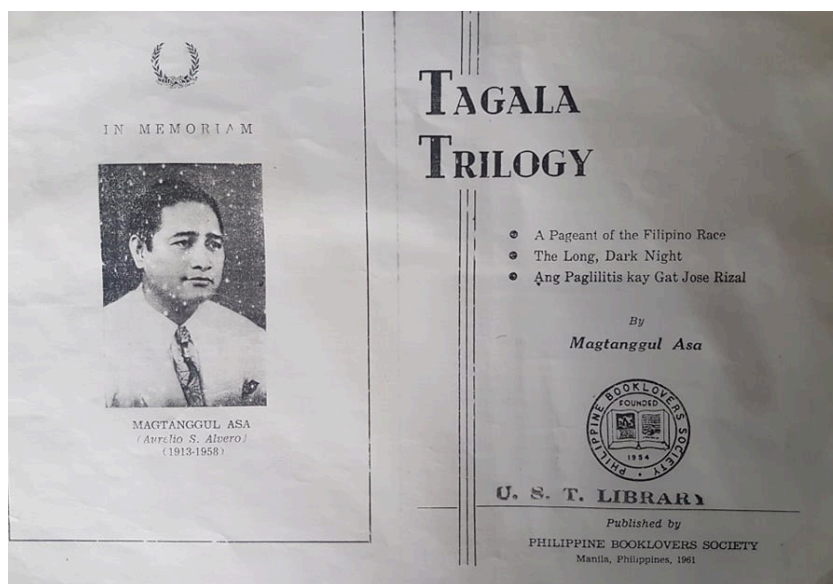
Even while in detention and answering the treason charges, Alvero kept himself busy. He continued to write works such as the *Basic for Unity* (1947), *Alamat ng Muntinlupa* (1947), and *Nunquam Cur Sed Semper Ubi* (But Why Never Always Where, 1948). He also wrote a book entitled *Moon Shadows on the Water* that was reprinted in 1950 and wrote one publication entitled *A Matter of Nomenclature: Tagala* (1945) that was unique because it was published inside the New Bilibid Prison. Another publication written by Alvero while in prison was a book of patriotic poems entitled *Only the Bannerful*. The book contained short patriotic poems about the history and struggle of the Filipinos. It also contained an expression of Alvero's disappointment and grief. In his writings he wrote under the name, Magtanggul Asa.

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<sup>46</sup> Antonio de las Alas. Diary. Diary <https://philippinediaryproject.wordpress.com/tag/aurelio-alvero/> [Accessed July 9, 2019]

On April 26, 1950, he married his second wife, Lucila Bugarin Atacador, a teacher at the University of Santo Tomas. They had two children, Rosa Gandahari and Aurelio Magtanggul. He christened his wife with a Tagalog name, Silahis. One of his final publications, "For the Essence of Rizal's Faith" was printed in 1956.

The imprisonment and the humiliation had an adverse effect on Alvero's health. He suffered from heart problems and died of an apparent heart attack on March 15, 1958 at the Chinese General Hospital.



A posthumous publication entitled *Tagala Trilogy* in honor of Aurelio Alvero. Containing his articles. The book was published by the Philippine Booklovers Society in 1961 (Photograph courtesy of Niccolo Hilario)

## CONCLUSION

There was no doubt that Aurelio Alvero was an exceptional person. As a student, his forte lay in the field of poetry, writing, and oration. He was man of letters and a rising star in Philippine literature. In today's environment, Aurelio Alvero would have been a giant in the liberal arts. He continued to write even after his student days. For a time he was recognized for his talent and skill and his name graced the pages of the student paper of the University of Santo Tomas and other periodicals and publications outside of the academe.

As Alvero matured into manhood, he developed his views about the Philippines. He saw that his motherland was corrupted by its Spanish and American colonizers. Compared to his counterpart and fellow poet Benigno

Ramos, he had no hatred for the elites that cooperated with the Americans. Alvero shared the vision that one day the Philippines would be free and this was his reason for admiring and supporting Manuel L. Quezon who was striving for Philippine independence. Quezon was also advocating for a national language for the Philippines. These endeavors appealed to Alvero who was raised in a nationalistic environment, an environment cultivated and influenced by Alvero's mother, Rosa Sevilla-Alvero whose eyes were opened to Filipino nationalism by Marcelo H. del Pilar, the greatest of the Filipino propagandists. She was also involved in the Filipino-American War as a writer working with Antonio Luna. With the coming of the American period, Alvero's mother was again in the forefront of Philippine society, establishing the first secular school for women. She was a liberator of her countrymen especially of women in a male-dominated society.

So, too was her son, Aurelio Alvero who sought to liberate Philippine society firstly from the pernicious effects of colonialism that has damaged the Filipino language. Secondly, he desired the freedom of his native land. Thirdly, and also equally important, Alvero desired the restoration of the Malay region before the coming of the Western colonizers, which was a motivation for becoming a founding member of the Young Philippines Party. That party, under Vinzons' leadership, sought to restore the Malay region through the creation of a Malay union that was shattered and divided by Spanish, Dutch, and British colonizers who made the present-day Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. Alvero's joining of the Young Philippines Party that was essentially a party composed of young professionals fresh out of college shows that Alvero and his group were presenting themselves as an alternative to the established political elites represented by the Nacionalista Party.

Unlike Benigno Ramos, Alvero did not thread the path of hating the Filipino political elites, some of whom advocated the continuation of having the Philippines as a protectorate of the United States. Alvero was adamant against making the Philippines a subordinate of the United States. He saw the folly of having the Philippines a deputy of the Americans. In his mind, all nations should start on their own, no matter how insignificant the efforts. Great nations, even the United States, started that way.

Alvero's model for the Philippines was Japan, a small Asian country that rose to become a superpower—one that was made possible by the determination of its people. The Filipinos, in Alvero's, mind should follow the figure of the Japanese. It kept out colonialism when it shut itself from the world for 200 years, and after it was forced open by the Americans, it strove to modernize itself at



all costs— building a strong army, navy, and society backed by a modern constitution. When it was strong enough, it abrogated all the unequal treaties imposed by foreign powers by closing down the treaty ports, where Japanese laws did not apply but only those of the foreigners were allowed to be enforced. Japan then established its own empire, expanding out of its own homeland. Alvero believed that the Philippines too, can attain greatness, but this can only be achieved with the determination of the people and not by becoming subservient to another power.

As for Japan's invasion of the Philippines, in Alvero's view, the coming of the Japanese into the Philippines was beneficial. It was a chance to propagate and popularize the Filipino language and culture, which Alvero advocated. The Japanese, upon occupying the Philippines, instituted a program promoting Filipino, as well as Nihongo, and began removing vestiges of American imperialism in the islands. It was not clear whether Alvero adhered to the Japanese because he believed in their campaign of dominating Asia. However, it was clear that Alvero began his collaboration with the Japanese because of economic reasons. When Japanese troops occupied Manila, Alvero lost his teaching jobs when the Sampaloc campus of the University of Santo Tomas was turned into an internment camp for Allied nationals. Most likely his own school was closed. At that time he was already married and it would be a shame to depend on his mother. Alvero joined the Kapisanan ng Paglilingkod sa Bagong Pilipinas (KALIBAPI) and served in its propaganda department. There he would be able to pursue his advocacy of promoting the Filipino language.

To augment his income as a propagandist of the KALIBAPI, Alvero engaged in trading with the Japanese. This became possible after he developed contacts in the occupation government. Alvero sold tools and materials that helped the Japanese attain their war objectives. By trading with the Japanese, Alvero benefitted economically and he lived a comfortable life during the Japanese occupation while many Filipinos practically had nothing to eat.

However, late in the war, Alvero was involved in military collaboration with the Japanese when he joined groups that took up arms against the United States. These groups were the MAKAPILI and the organizations that he founded, the Bisig Bakal ng Tagala and the People's Own Guerrilla. Even as he left the MAKAPILI and distanced himself from the group, Alvero's organizations were anti-American armed groups. As for his role in the MAKAPILI, such role was minimal because he disagreed with the actions of its leader, Benigno Ramos,



On the other hand, while Alvero vowed that he and his force would not be used by any foreign power and would be used to defend the Filipinos from the atrocities of the MAKAPILI and the hostile action from any nation, there is no information that Alvero and his Bisig Bakal ng mga Tagala stopped the depredations of the MAKAPILI or the Japanese military during the battle for Manila. The only thing they did was to urge the Filipinos to resist the American forces who were coming to retake the city. In a bid to impede the Americans who were coming from south of the Manila, Alvero and his armed group burned part of Pasay.

About his view regarding the leadership of the Philippine Republic, Alvero differed with Ramos on their opinions of Laurel. Alvero adopted the position of President Laurel to oppose the Americans if they caused harm to the Philippines, which was why he sent a letter to Laurel congratulating him for his declaration of a state of war between the Philippines and the United States. Alvero would later defend Laurel as standing up for the Filipinos and that he was not a puppet of the Japanese as the Americans would later allege in the Peoples' Court trials after the war. However, to Benigno Ramos, Laurel was hypocritical in his collaboration with Japan. He saw him as still loyal to the Philippine Commonwealth. Ramos was waiting for a chance to replace Laurel in a coup d'état. This could only happen if the Japanese high command approved of it. The Japanese military kept a tight rein on Ramos and his GANAPISTA and MAKAPILI followers and prevented them from doing something drastic.

For his actions in collaborating with the Japanese in the political, economic, and military aspects, Alvero was made to account for his actions in the war. Under Philippine law, collaborating with the enemy is treason. Though the administration of President Manuel Roxas declared an amnesty for political and economic collaboration, Alvero was not exempted from being made accountable for military collaboration with the Japanese. He was convicted by the Peoples' Court in 1945. The decision of the court was sustained by the Supreme Court in 1950 when Alvero tried to appeal his sentence.

Alvero considered his trial before the Peoples' Court as a repeat of the experience of Filipino heroes like Rizal and Bonifacio who were both tried for crimes. He considered his own experience as a privilege to emulate these two heroes. However, the trial and his subsequent imprisonment was a terrible humiliation for a man like Alvero who was admired and honored for his contribution to Philippine literature and culture. He was tried and convicted as a traitor to his country he loved and whose culture he tried to uphold. Alvero's conviction as a traitor was also a great humiliation of his family. His family was

known for its nationalism and took part in the struggle for freedom, but one of its sons was convicted for treason. But analyzing Alvero's wartime role, it is clear that he was no Japanophile—a person who embraced the Japanese cause in its Asian war—but one who tried to uphold Filipino culture and opposed Western imperialism. He was actually a nationalist who wished to see his country rise up and break the chains of foreign imperialism. Alvero wanted to see the Philippines become a great nation.

However, his actions during the war earned him the notoriety of being branded and stigmatized as a traitor to his own country. This is the likely reason why Alvero's name and even his photographs can be scarcely found in the libraries and even in the internet. His name is practically forgotten in Philippine literature nor is his name remembered as a politician as he was unsuccessful in his bids for public office. Even the party which he helped form, the Young Philippines Party and its advocacies could be hardly remembered. Alvero died as a frustrated young man at forty-four.

Though derided by people of his time as a traitor and largely forgotten by today's generation, reading Alvero's works—such as his speeches and poetry and looking at his actions—they all manifest a desire to break free from colonial bonds. He considered any country, whether Japan or the United States as an enemy to his motherland. These sentiments as well as his writings speak of nationalism. Unfortunately, his only error was that he sided with the Japanese invaders because he believed that it was a way to forward and achieve his goals for the nations. This adherence was interpreted as treason and it appears that the best treatment for people condemned as traitors despite their brilliance was to bury them in the dustbin of history.

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