

Mi Ultimo Adios to the "Beloved Warrior"

A personal obituary by the translator and co-author of Kasama Joma's works

By Rainer Werning *

No later than the early 1970s, "Amado Guerrero" (Beloved Warrior) had become the epitome of a revolutionary awakening in the Philippines for progressive and leftist social activists in this Southeast Asian island nation. As it would turn out years later, this was the nom de guerre of José Maria Sison - "Ka (Comrade) Joma" for short by his friends - who died of heart failure in exile in The Netherlands on December 16, 2022 at the age of 83. On December 27, the body of a man whose name had had an electrifying effect for many for more than half a century and had become a trademark for leftists and revolutionaries worldwide was cremated in Utrecht. Commemorative events and tributes for the deceased will continue to be held in many places both inside and outside the Philippines in the coming days. One thing is already certain: José Maria Sison, alias Amado Guerrero, will remain a prominent figure long after his death and an inspiration to all those who remain unwaveringly committed to democracy, self-determination, justice and genuine socialism.

For a person like Sison aka Guerrero coming from a wealthy family with Chinese roots, the first step that he had to take toward political commitment meant first and foremost one thing - class betrayal. A conscious decision that others of similar origins and background took before and after him. For anyone who is even partly familiar with the history of the Philippines it is easy to understand how rampant poverty, oppression and exploitation in a climate of state violence and combined with an elastic judicial system that acts solely in the interests of the rulers, would lead any sensitive and prudent mind to take a clear position, the choice being between some kind of "arrangement" with the prevailing conditions or continuous struggle to force the latter to "dance" in the Marxian sense.

Sison chose the second option. Naturally gifted and endowed with abundant wit and intelligence, he stood out from his classmates and fellow students and succeeded in assuming leadership positions early on in life. His role as founder of the *Kabataang Makabayan (Nationalist or Patriotic Youth)* in the fall of 1964 deserves special mention. As a member of the *Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP)* he increasingly clashed with its top cadres, whom he accused of treason and revisionism. Consequently, the party was re-established on December 26, 1968, this time on a Maoist basis and with Sison as its founding chairman. This *Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP)*, together with its guerrilla organization, the *New People's Army (NPA)*, which was formed three months later, has since waged one of the world's longest-running liberation struggles. All other communist parties in the Southeast Asia region have disappeared from the political scene.

In the early 1970s, Amado Guerrero penned the book *Philippine Society and Revolution (PSR for short)*, the Philippine version of the "Mao Bible" during the Cultural Revolution in the People's Republic of China. This work, which was translated into several languages (including German by the author of this obituary in 1973), politicized and radicalized an entire generation, its analyses providing them with the ammunition they needed to confront the ruling regime. The latter struck back hard: the dictator of the day, Ferdinand E. Marcos, father of the current president, imposed martial law on the island nation in September

1972. One of the main reasons for this was, according to Marcos, to put an end to "communist subversion". But it was precisely during the martial law era, which lasted de jure until early 1981, that the NPA became the world's "fastest-growing guerrilla movement," according to U.S. intelligence reports.

Meanwhile, Sison aka Amado Guerrero, had long since been declared public enemy number one by his country's rulers and later even branded a "designated global terrorist" abroad (USA and EU). It was a stigmatization that lasted until his death because of his indomitable spirit - despite almost nine years of imprisonment in the Philippines (1977 to the spring of 1986) and despite all the years he spent in exile in the Netherlands after 1987, where he only enjoyed tolerated status as an asylum seeker in Utrecht. From there he operated alongside Julieta de Lima, his wife and long-time partner in life and combat, as chief consultant to the *National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP)*. The NDFP, an underground political alliance that has been in existence since spring 1973 and includes more than a dozen other organizations in addition to the CPP/NPA, officially conducted peace negotiations with the governments of the day in Manila until 2017.

In these negotiations, as well as in meetings of the *International League of Peoples' Struggle (ILPS)*, in which Sison also served as chairman, "Ka Joma" proved to be both a prudent and eloquent debater and strategist. He could be tough as nails when it came to certain political-ideological positions. At the same time, he was and remained until his last breath a person with a great sense of humour. He would often recall with amusement the dream that he cherished as a boy of becoming a bishop one day. "Thank God" his final decision was in favour of the CPP and not the *Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP)*. The latter would have been only too happy to see him in its ranks.

While earthbound representatives of the reactionary Marcos regime, in the shape of spokespersons of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police, expressed their hopes that Sison's death would provide a "final chance for peace", the CPP's Central Committee, in a statement on December 26, the 54th anniversary of the Party's founding, proclaimed its commitment to uphold the legacy of "Ka Joma" in every respect and to "intensify tactical offensives against the enemy."

Wherever "Ka Joma" may dwell now, may he still enjoy one thing: succulent mangoes in abundance from his beloved homeland rather than the tulips he had to make do with for the past 35 years in exile in the Netherlands.

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* Cologne, Germany, on January 1, 2023 – Dr. Rainer Werning translated Amado Guerrero's "PSR" into German, which was first published in May 1973 under the title "*Philippinische Gesellschaft und Revolution*", and co-authored the following books with José Maria Sison: "*The Philippine Revolution. An Inside View*" (*Die philippinische Revolution: Eine Innenansicht* * 1993) and "*A Life in Resistance*" (*Ein Leben im Widerstand* * 2019) – both published in German by Verlag Neuer Weg, Essen. #