Filipino Sociologist and Mentor: Professor Ricardo M. Zarco (1930-2011)
This page: Ricardo Zarco, circa 1960s, as a young instructor at the UP Diliman campus.

Previous page: Professor Emeritus Ricardo M. Zarco, circa 2000s, outside his classroom at the third floor of Palma Hall overlooking the UP Diliman campus, with the UP Carillon in the background.
Professor Ricardo M. Zarco mentored generations of undergraduate and graduate students of sociology at the University of the Philippines, Diliman. First recruited as a young instructor in 1956, he ventured into a life of academic service and became recognized for his expertise in the sociology of deviant behavior until his retirement in 1995. Two years after retirement, in 1997, the UP Board of Regents conferred him the status of Professor Emeritus.

In 1952, the year that Department of Sociology and Social Welfare was formed and separated from the Department of Anthropology, young Ricardo finished his undergraduate degree in AB Psychology from the University. Shortly after, he took up masteral studies in Sociology at the newly reorganized department where he would also be recruited as one of its graduate assistants. He completed his MA degree in Sociology from the department in 1959 capping it off with the master’s thesis, “A Sociological Study of Illegal Narcotic Activity in the Philippines” (1959), while teaching as instructor in undergraduate classes.

Zarco’s undergraduate training in psychology foreshadowed much of his intellectual inclination toward observation, experimental and the deductive empirical research favored by academics in the Philippines in the middle of the 20th century Philippines. The period of his undergraduate, masteral and post-masteral studies in the 1950s and 1960s, structural-functionalism as theoretical orientation and of empiricism as epistemological approach significantly influenced sociology and the social sciences in the Philippines (see Bautista

An earlier version of this article, “Remembering Filipino Sociologist and Mentor: Professor Ricardo M. Zarco (1930-2011),” was published at Social Science Diliman (December 2011) 7:2, 107-112.

Filomin Candaliza-Gutierrez is Associate Professor at the Department of Sociology, University of the Philippine, Diliman. A former student, thesis advisee and co-author of Professor Zarco, she currently teaches sociology of deviant behavior and conducts researches in the area. Email: fc.gutierrez09@gmail.com
1994). Thus, Zarco can be considered as coming from what is viewed today as the “traditional” or “old school” quarters of the academe. Allied closely with social welfare, the trajectory of the social research community he then belonged to was geared toward understanding and “helping solve” the social problems of the country.

In 1960 he embarked on his Ph.D. studies in Sociology at the University of Chicago at a period when American sociology, particularly Chicago School sociology, started to diversify with competing approaches between the more structural-functionalist orientation such as social disorganization theory applied to urban social problems, crime and delinquency as and, on the other hand, its later symbolic interactionist approaches such as participant observation, and ethnographic interviewing and qualitative fieldwork. However, short of two years into the journey, “Ric’s chronic homesickness” and reaction to the harsh Chicago weather cut short his direct exposure to American and Chicago sociology although its influence on his research and teaching would later be felt.

Upon his return, the University carried out another disciplinal reorganization when, in 1961, its Board of Regents further declared the Department of Sociology and the Institute of Social Work separate and independent departments. Finally settled in the country, Zarco embarked on a life-long journey as scholar and expert not only in the sociology of deviant behavior but also in sociological research methods. For years, he taught graduate and undergraduate courses on social psychology, social statistics, and quantitative research methods. More prominently, he taught sociology of deviant behavior, the area most associated with him, as there were hardly other professors in the University who took on the course. His class discussions focused on empirical findings related to topics such as crime and delinquency, incarceration, and punishment, substance abuse and drug addiction. He conducted researches on these topics independently and in collaboration with his students in their academic theses and dissertations or in research projects, many of which resulted in joint publications.

Zarco published, among others, on the history of narcotics in the Philippines, women and substance abuse, juvenile delinquency,
student organizations as conflict gangs, “sexual victimization”, and the death penalty in the Philippines. He also served as research consultant to government and non-government organizations such as the World Health Organization, the Narcotics Foundation of the Philippines, the Philippine National Police, and the Department of Social Welfare and Development to help assess social problems and identify solutions to concerns such as narcotics and drug addiction, crime and delinquency, and “sexual victimization” and convict community reintegration.

A major lifework, for which Zarco is known for in the 1970s, focused on narcotics and drug addiction in the Philippines, which stemmed from his earlier historical work on opium addiction during the Philippine Spanish colonial period. The Narcotics Foundation of the Philippines tapped him as consultant-researcher from 1971 to 1980 for which he published two key monographs in Drug Abuse in the Philippines (1975), which consist of two major reports, “Drugs in School, 1974: A Five Philippine City Study,” and “Project Serendipity: A Case Study of 20 Client-Inmates of a Rehabilitation Center.”

In the 1990s, another lifework would preoccupy Prof. Zarco: conflicts of student organizations, specifically fraternity violence that addressed the issue that long plagued the UP Diliman community until the present. The violence that led to injuries, fatalities and incarceration of UP students, a body of research drew enormous attention from the UP Diliman community and the public but rarely attracted the systematic research that social science could offer. In this fraternity research, Zarco deploys numerous analytical approaches, and one such approach echoed, the Chicago School ecological perspective that highlights spatial and temporal aspects of crime and delinquency. He illustrated that violent incidents gravitate around centers and periods of heightened student presence and activity in the campus. An earlier version of the study “Student Organizations as Conflict Gangs,” came out in the Philippine Sociological Review in 1995, the year of his retirement, while a later, a more updated version (2000) remained as an unpublished monograph. The latest version was highly sought after by various researchers and media professionals interested in the issue, and was often physically accessed by photocopy at the UP Diliman Sociology Department
office. These later works show Prof. Zarco moving onto qualitative research methods, which draw from the later batch of Chicago School sociologists. His combination of statistical records of violent episodes with reviews of historical records, interviews of UP alumni in their 70s and 80s and cases studies, or what he called, “anecdotal evidences” reflects his practice of various research methods.

His empirical work can be regarded as reflective of the positivist tradition’s emphasis on the search for patterns and associations within social phenemenain view of predicting future outcomes. For example, he pointed out how rape is a predatory assault where offenders overpower their victims not just through their stronger physical strength but also by virtue of their social superiority expressed through their socioeconomic ascendancy, authority (as fathers, older kinsmen, or employers), and control or familiarity of the territory (see Candaliza and Zarco 1995). He also showed the patterning of inter-fraternity violence among UP students as following a five-year cycle, which should help University officials avoid the mistake of letting their guard down when the reaction to the violent episodes appears to have died down, or recognized associated with the aftermath of the violence but may not prevent future violence (Zarco and Shoemaker 2000).

In both teaching and research, he tended to skim through grand and, as he would qualify—Western, social scientific theories that explain social phenomena and would rather emphasize the importance of empirically-grounded investigation of social problems in the context of Philippine culture. Former students remember his class lectures as a combination of the professor’s mastery of narrative storytelling and concrete sociological insights. In critiquing existing objective approaches to the measurement of Philippine ‘social distance’ he proposed the measurement of Filipino kinship and relationships—the immediate closeness and trust accorded to family members and relatives—as a distinct category in evaluating the risks in criminality in a research collaboration with Candaliza (1995). With Federico Magdalena (1970), he further refined the concept of ‘socioeconomic status’ among Filipinos by including in the evaluation ‘by reputation’ of the socioeconomic capability households of community members.
(neighbors) for a more culturally-sensitive measurement of Philippine social class.

Government and nongovernment sectors such as the World Health Organization, the Narcotics Foundation of the Philippines, the Philippine National Police, and the Department of Social Welfare and Development tapped Prof. Zarco as consultant to help assess social problems and identify solutions to concerns such as narcotics and drug addiction, crime and delinquency, and sexual victimization and convict community reintegration. He also conducted research on the environmental impact of mining and tourism for the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, on the Light Rail Transit (LRT) System for the Department of Transportation and Communication and disaster risk management with the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology in the 1980s. These engagements demonstrate the wide range and somewhat “eccentric” directions of Zarco’s scientific research interests. For example, he took up the previously suggested but quaint idea, at least for a sociologist, that volcanic eruptions and earthquakes can be anticipated as people can observe and turn to an alternative warning systems relying on the community’s observation of “premonitory animal behavior,” or strange behavior of farm and domestic animals days prior to an earthquake or volcanic eruption, and mitigate disaster effects (see Zarco 1985; and Zarco, Nicolas, Aguja, Daag and Ringor, 1992).

His particular brand of empiricism adopted a ‘naturalist’ view of the social world, which emphasized verified records and quantitative databases but also grounded fieldwork, historical accounts, ethnographic interviews and in situ observations. In the 1970s and 1980s empirical positivism and structuralism in the Philippines underwent critical scrutiny by intellectual paradigms ranging from phenomenology and interpretivism, Marxism, feminism and participatory research, and poststructuralism and postmodernism (see, for example, Abad and Eviota 1982; David 1984; and Bautista 1994). New ways of “doing sociology” offered alternatives to conducting research and even altered academic curriculums. By the 1990s, undergraduate and graduate course offerings on the sociological research method
course at UP Diliman, for example, were no longer confined to the statistics-oriented quantitative method but required that counterparts in qualitative research methods be taught to students as well. Amidst these developments and the blurring effects of interdisciplinarity to disciplinal self-orientation of sociology, Prof. Zarco became a sort of a comparative post, a pillar representing the “foundations” that many believe to be open to dynamic innovations, still relevant and worth revisiting, or even reviving, in sociology and social science research today.

Born in Manila on February 11, 1930 to Pablo Velarde Zarco and Marciana Morales Zarco, Ricardo grew up along with his four older siblings Alberto, Flora, Romeo and Pura in Manila. Interest in the academic and teaching profession ran in the family: his mother was a former school teacher, and his father, a school principal and teacher before he became the chief of the Mechanical Department of the Manila Railroad Company (Zarco, no date). Ricardo’s childhood was interrupted by the difficult years of the Second World War where he and his family were among the civilians trapped in the battle between US and Japanese forces in Manila. His interview about surviving the war was among those featured in Remembering the Battle of Manila, an award-winning documentary on World War II (Basara/NHK 2007).

In the 1950s, he married Estrella Hofileña, a mathematics professor in UP Diliman. The couple had three sons: Ricardo Jr., now a medical doctor; Mark, a professor at the College of Engineering, UP Diliman; and Timothy, an assistant professor at the College of Business Administration, also at UP Diliman.

Oriented to sports and the outdoors, Prof. Zarco avidly pursued cycling, mountain climbing, camping, hunting, and shooting. An expert marksman, he coached the UP Rifle and Pistol Team for decades. The demise of his wife Estrella Hofileña and his failing health in the late 2000s, prevented him from continuing his academic activities as Professor Emeritus. Surrounded by his loving children, family and relatives, he passed away on the 22nd of January 2011.
Selected Researches and Publications


References


Zarco, Romeo, M. No Date. Stories: The Zarcos. (Unpublished Manuscripts).