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Collaboration and Resistance

Catalino Hermosilla and the Japanese Occupation of Ormoc, Leyte (1942–1945)

This article presents local history in Leyte, Philippines, during the Japanese occupation, examining in particular the nature of collaborationism by Ormoc Mayor Catalino Hermosilla. In the context of local political feuds, this study shows how Hermosilla's collaboration with the Japanese enabled him not so much to advance Japanese goals but to strengthen his political power base. However, contrary to the view that the Japanese occupation did not alter social dynamics, this study shows that, although Ormoc's oligarchy remained conspicuous after the war, an important change had occurred as seen in the waning of Hermosilla's clout in municipal politics.

KEYWORDS: LOCAL HISTORY · OLIGARCHY · MUNICIPAL POLITICS · FACTIONALISM · SECOND WORLD WAR

Local histories in the Philippines have focused on experiences during the Japanese occupation outside Manila, with many concentrating on guerrilla activities against the Japanese in rural areas. There have also been efforts to examine the cultural and social aspects of the occupation. Already in 1949, Tomas Pedrola (1949) completed an MA thesis on education in Panay Island during this period. In 1951 Elmer Lear (1951) wrote a PhD dissertation on the Japanese occupation of Leyte, after which Lear (1952, 1961, 1968, 1978a, 1978b, 1979a, 1979b, 1981) published a series of journal articles and a book on the Japanese occupation of this island. Meanwhile, Alfred McCoy (1980) published his work on the Japanese occupation of Iloilo province on Panay Island, in which he demonstrated how the Perlata-Zulueta and Confessor-Caram factions were divided less by ideological differences than by a factional struggle for local supremacy. He found that these factions had their roots in prewar Ilonggo politics. In such a context, the dynamics of factional politics—not abstract issues such as loyalty to American democracy or belief in the aims of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere—moved many of the personalities and events of the period. McCoy’s analytical hypothesis merits consideration. It stands out among other works on the Japanese occupation in Philippine rural areas.

McCoy (ibid., 195) admits that his hypothesis on factionalism during the Japanese occupation period as revolving around the collaborators or the persons who got involved in the anti-Japanese guerrilla groups must be examined thoroughly in the other rural areas of the Philippines. Moreover, McCoy’s work reveals that utilizing a simple dichotomy in the analysis of the Japanese occupation period—between collaboration and resistance—should be reexamined because the political stance and conduct of most Filipinos, more so the rural dwellers, could hardly be limited to either of two categories. The mere fact that most of the rural areas were under the control of anti-Japanese guerrilla groups should make us open to exploring an array of responses. For one, local municipal officials as well as local residents seemed to have adopted a wait-and-see attitude at the start of the Japanese occupation before they decided to either collaborate or resist. Even after they had made their decision, their attitude toward the Japanese was still vague as some had to take both sides to survive the harsh environment of the time. Considering this reality, McCoy’s view has strikingly gone beyond other works on the Japanese occupation as it not only addresses the

issues of the Japanese occupation in a local setting but also presents a new perspective in Philippine historiography concerning the continuance of the Filipino oligarchy during this period. Moreover, it reveals that the impact of warfare during this period could not be significant enough to change social dynamics. His view is contrary to those of David Steinberg (1967) and Harry Benda (1958) that stress the social changes that could be observed after the occupation period.

Influenced by McCoy’s view, in the Fifth National Conference on Local History held in Iligan City, the Philippines, in 1984, six papers related to the Japanese occupation in Mindanao and the Visayas were presented. Of these papers it is worth noting that Ricardo Jorge Caluen’s (1984) study of the “collaborators” in Iligan City indicates the continuance of the local oligarchy in municipal politics after the war. In the 1990s more studies on the Japanese occupation in the local setting were made. Josefina Hofileña (1990) submitted her MA thesis on the Japanese occupation in Negros Island, and Rosario Cortes (1990) published her work on the local history of the province of Pangasinan, which included a discussion of the Japanese occupation. Midori Kawashima (1999) also analyzed local politics in Muslim Mindanao during this period. Although these three works discussed the Japanese occupation in the local setting, their discussions of local politics and political strife or factionalism tended to be superficial and did not delve into the bloody political feuds that were said to have transpired frequently during wartime.

This article focuses on the local historiography of Leyte-Samar. Thanks to the efforts of a local historian in this part of the Philippines, Rolando Borrinaga (2003, 2008; cf. Artigas 2006), the local history of Leyte-Samar has now come to the fore and been given due recognition. However, local experiences in this region during the Japanese occupation may still be considered blurry. Recently I published an article on the issue of food supply in Leyte during the Japanese occupation (Ara 2008) and the collaboration issue of local elites in Leyte (Ara 2011). However, most descriptions of the period that have appeared in several nonacademic books and pamphlets still do not go beyond the most familiar historical moments, such as the historical landing of Douglas McArthur in Leyte in October 1944 as well as the anti-Japanese guerrilla resistance movement in the region. Furthermore, not much attention has been given to this harsh yet crucial moment in Philippine history, characterized by bloody political feuds in municipal politics and guerrilla groups (Lear 1952, 204).

Reflecting on the points raised by McCoy (1980), I examine in this article the situation in Ormoc, a municipality in the province of Leyte, during the Japanese occupation as a case in point, focusing in particular on the role played by the Japanese-sponsored mayor, Catalino G. Hermosilla, in the town's municipal politics. The main primary sources used here are the historical records of the People's Court Papers, particularly the reports of the Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) of the US Army that investigated cases of collaboration, and several Japanese war documents.¹ It must be noted that the outcome of the CIC investigation of Hermosilla's case may not be an absolute statement regarding his collaboration activities. This article hopes to help fill the gap found in the very few attempts that have been made so far on the subject of local politics in Ormoc as well as in other towns in Leyte in the period of the Japanese occupation (Ara 2011). The analysis of local politics focusing on the collaboration initiated by Hermosilla presented here, it is hoped, will shed light on the obscured facts of collaborationism that have been taboo among the local citizenry until now. In the process, the reader may realize the characteristics of municipal politics involving political feuds and factionalism, which may be at the base of the local oligarchy's continuance and political arrangement after the war.

Geographical Setting and a Glimpse of Ormoc's History

One of the major towns of Leyte, Ormoc is a port town that faces Ormoc Bay in the Camotes Sea (fig. 1). Prior to the war, it was the largest city in terms of land area in Leyte and the second largest in the Eastern Visayas after Calbayog in Samar. Ormoc is bounded in the northwest by the towns of Villaba and Capoocan; in the west by Palompon; in the southwest by Merida; in the northeast by Jaro, Pastrana, and Dagami; and in the south by the town of Albuera (Commission of the Census 1941, 5). High mountain ranges separate Ormoc from the eastern portion of Leyte. Numerous rivers and streams traverse Ormoc. Among them are the Bao River in the north; the Pagsangahan River in the west; the Bagong-bong and the Panilahan Rivers in the south; and the Anilao and Malbasag Rivers that border the eastern and western flanks of Ormoc City proper. Ormoc eventually became a first-class city after the war. The 1939 census recorded it as having a population of 77,349 persons. The people of Ormoc are called Ormocanons. The linguistic map of Leyte divides the whole island into two parts, Waray on the east and Cebuano on the west. Ormoc, being on the west, has a predominantly Cebuano-speaking population known as *Kana*, as Cebuano speakers in Leyte



Fig. 1. Map of Leyte showing the location of Ormoc City

are often called. As such, it is said that the people relate more to neighboring towns and to Cebu than to eastern Leyte (Historical Data Papers 1946).²

Ormoc was a well-established village at the beginning of the sixteenth century. A group of families was said to have lived in a small settlement called Ogmuk, an old Visayan term for lowland or depressed plain. Ogmuk was also the name of a spring located between the present barangays of Donghol and Mahayag. The name Ormoc, a variant of Ogmuk, came into use during the Spanish period when people from neighboring towns and islands migrated to settle in its fertile plains (Tantuico 1964, 60–61). In July 1595 Fr. Pedro Chirino and other Jesuit missionaries arrived in Leyte. In May 1597 Frs. Alonso Rodriguez and Leonardo Scelsi founded the Ormoc mission. This date marked the conversion of the local population to Christianity. During the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries the town suffered frequent invasions by Muslim (Moro) raiders from the south. With the expulsion of the Jesuits from the Philippines ordered in 1768, the Augustinians took over the mission in Leyte. On 26 February 1834, Ormoc was separated from the mother town of Palompon and created into a distinct municipality, with Sofronio Cabiling appointed captain of the *gobierno municipal* (municipal government), (Ormoc City Government 2005). The following month saw the formal inauguration of the Ormoc Catholic Parish, with Fr. Bibiano Luciano as the first curate. Leyte became involved in the Philippine revolution against Spain several months after its outbreak in August 1896. The Revolutionary Government represented by Gen. Vicente Lukban took possession of the island.

Shortly after the Americans defeated the Spaniards and later the Filipinos, a civil government was established in Leyte on 22 April 1901. However, an Ormocanon by the name of Faustino Ablen organized the Pulahanes movement, a resistance group, which was eventually defeated by American forces around 1907. With the establishment of the American-controlled civil government at the turn of the century, Ormoc's town executives assumed the title of municipal president, with Dr. Fernando Calderon as the first person to hold this post. It was an appointive position, subsequently becoming elective. In 1932 Atty. Victorio Laurente became the last elected municipal president. Even after the inauguration of the Commonwealth government in November 1935, he still assumed the mayorship with the title of *alcalde municipal* (municipal mayor). Laurente was politically challenged by Catalino Hermosilla in the local elections of December 1940 (*The Tribune* 1940, 11).

Agricultural products were abundant in Ormoc, grown on estates owned by big landowners (*hacenderos*), including the Larrazabal, Hermosilla, and Tan families, who were characteristically dominant in the town's local politics. The 1939 statistics shows that the gross area of cultivated land in Ormoc was the largest in the province, reaching 23,837.86 hectares, exceeding that of Tacloban by 3,965.45 hectares (Commission of the Census 1940, 972). The rice crop in Ormoc totaled 78,758 cavans (1 cavan = 44 kilograms in the 1940s). In addition, sugarcane was also one of its most important crops starting in the American colonial period, and was also considerably large as it supplied Ormoc's sugar central mill, which in 1938 had a quota of 117,288 long tons. In 1938 the area grown with sugarcane in all of Leyte was 2,472.64 hectares, producing an output of 123,494.9 kilograms of sugar (*ibid.*, 994). In Ormoc the area planted with sugarcane reached 1,233.25 hectares—large enough to exceed the area allocated to any other crop in the other towns (*ibid.*; Barrera 1954, 38). Several muscovado mills were also found in Ormoc as well as in the island of Biliran. Given the wealth generated from agriculture, Ormoc had a number of hacenderos and merchants as well as professionals, such as teachers, doctors, and lawyers.

The Japanese Invasion of Ormoc

Japanese war documents reveal that the Japanese Army's invasion of Leyte in May 1942 was carried out based on the strategy of the 14th Army called "The Second Phase Operations Plan in Visayas and Mindanao." The Nagano Detachment, which consisted of the 62nd Infantry Regiment, 21st Engineer Regiment, and 3rd Battalion in 51st Artillery Infantry, was assigned to occupy and garrison the island. The landing point of the Nagano Detachment was Capoocan, located on the northern part of Leyte Island. This detachment was reinforced by the Matsunaga Infantry Battalion (Matsunaga Unit), consisting of two companies with a total of less than 1,000 soldiers, which was later stationed in Tacloban, a force taken over by the Omori Unit (also known as the 36th Independent Infantry Garrison Battalion) in October 1943 (NIDS 1966, 544; Ooka 1974, 34). However, the lack of records of the Japanese forces renders unclear the exact date of the Japanese occupation of Ormoc. Nevertheless, as the forces advanced in May 1942 and occupied Tacloban and Ormoc simultaneously, it may not be wrong to assume that the Japanese (presumably one platoon force led by a Captain Abe) started its occupation of Ormoc immediately after the Nagano detachment forces advanced into Tacloban (Aurillo 1983, 136).

Concurrent with the Japanese occupation of Leyte, the Japanese authorities in Manila were preoccupied with the battle in Corregidor as well as the establishment of its military administration. Moreover, Japanese military authorities did not find Leyte of any strategic importance. Its geographical nature, scarce raw materials, and insufficient local products could not contribute to the establishment of the self-sufficient system desired by Japanese forces. The Japanese authorities might have belittled the strategic importance of Leyte; nevertheless they sent some forces to occupy the island as a strategy of conquering areas in the Visayas and Mindanao.

From the very outset of the Japanese occupation of Leyte, they had to deal with the problem of peace and order because most parts of the province were under guerrilla control. There emerged many kinds of anti-Japanese guerrilla groups composed of former members of the U.S. Army Forces in the Far East (USAFFE) or groups of bandits taking advantage of the chaotic situation to plunder and sack small barrios (Salazar 1942; Hartendorp 1967, 387).³ The Matsunaga Unit stationed on the island in the early stage of the occupation was a small unit, and the total number of Japanese soldiers in Leyte was relatively lower than those in other occupied provinces of the Philippines, but they managed to put Ormoc under Japanese military control until the end of the Japanese occupation period.

In all, the Japanese occupation of Ormoc lasted from May 1942 to October 1944, or less than two years and six months. Its experience of the period paralleled that of the provincial capital, Tacloban, which was totally controlled and occupied by Japanese forces. Unlike the other municipalities in the island that came under the control of anti-Japanese guerrilla groups, Tacloban and Ormoc did not fall into the hands of guerrillas during the occupation period, in spite of frequent attacks that took place on the outskirts of these two towns. Given the necessity of establishing a self-sufficient system in Leyte, the Japanese considered Ormoc to be one of the most important towns in terms of procuring foodstuffs.

When the Japanese invaded Ormoc, Catalino Hermosilla, who had won the election in December 1940, was serving as the town's chief executive. Mayor Hermosilla, together with his family, initially hid in the mountains near Barrio Dolores located more than 15 kilometers north of Ormoc proper. Based on the historical dossier utilized in this study, especially the CIC reports on Hermosilla's collaboration, the mayor possibly transferred the municipal administration to the barrio so it could continue to function

despite the Japanese invasion. While in hiding, Hermosilla was said to have contacted the guerrillas to counterattack the Japanese forces in Ormoc. Hence, it took more than five months or so for the Japanese to take complete control of the town. One could imagine how far worse the peace and order situation was at the beginning of the Japanese occupation in all of Leyte. Realizing the strength of the Japanese forces in Ormoc, Hermosilla decided to return to Ormoc proper to collaborate with the Japanese sometime in October 1942.

Mayor Hermosilla's Relations with the Guerrillas

Initially Ormoc was frequently disturbed by the guerrilla groups led by Blas Miranda (Chung 1989, 15; Aurillo 1983, 142),⁴ who succeeded in establishing his control over the four west coast municipalities of Ormoc, Palompon, Merida, and Albuera prior to the arrival of the Japanese in Leyte in May 1942. In Ormoc, however, the Japanese were able to fully implement their occupation policy with minimal influence from guerrilla groups by stationing platoon-sized army forces. Meanwhile, by October 1942, Miranda had unified several guerrilla groups in the area into one force, the so-called Western Leyte Guerrilla Warfare Forces (WLGWF). He tried to expand his military control over other parts of Leyte, which often led to conflict with other guerrilla leaders, especially Ruperto Kangleon, whose men were based in southern Leyte (Chung 1989, 31–32).

Sources note that Miranda and Kangleon were not on good terms. Their differences might have stemmed from their conflicting personalities or their attitude toward the Japanese such as Miranda's inconsistent response to the Japanese, which was said to have enraged Kangleon. These differences eventually led to the bloody outcome of their feud in August 1943 (Chaput 1977, 14–15; Tantuico 1964, 218–21; Aurillo 1983, 146–47). The Japanese did not intervene in the feud between these two guerrilla leaders, but focused on the military strategy to fight the guerrillas in order to maintain full control of the town. Amid this factionalism between guerrilla groups, Mayor Hermosilla was given a free hand to administer municipal politics.

The platoon led by Lieutenant Hirayama and that led by Captain Abe were assigned to garrison the town from May to October 1942 and from October 1942 to October 1943, respectively. Perhaps these two platoon forces belonged to Colonel Omori's 36th Independent Infantry Garrison Battalion stationed in Samar and Leyte. Upon the arrival of Hirayama's platoon

around October 1942, most of the townsfolk remained in the town, accepted Japanese control, and collaborated with the Japanese (NIDS 1943b), but a few evacuated to the mountains and joined guerrilla groups against the Japanese. The Japanese occupation combined with fierce guerrilla attacks by Miranda's group resulted in severe food shortages in Ormoc. This situation forced Hermosilla to contact the guerrillas in the mountains to meet the town's food needs.

After the war Emeliana Catingob, then municipal secretary to Mayor Hermosilla, testified to the CIC that the mayor had felt the need to contact the guerrillas for this purpose. According to Catingob, Hermosilla wrote secretly to the guerrillas, and in return received messages from the mountains through Villoria and Vicente Tomada, who were said to be Miranda's men. These men repeatedly brought rice from Lao, a barrio located a few kilometers west from Ormoc proper, to Hermosilla, who paid guerrilla notes (the so-called emergency notes) for this precious commodity. These transactions were done in agreement with the guerrilla leader known only as Noya, presumably one of Miranda's men. Catingob (1945) also testified that Hermosilla made contact not only with Miranda but also with Kangleon, in order to ensure enough food supply for the town.

Initially Mayor Hermosilla contacted the guerrillas without the Japanese authorities in Ormoc knowing about it. He did not inform the Japanese of guerrillas penetrating the town, but whenever he could he would send messages to the guerrillas to leave town for their own safety. In one such instance, after the guerrilla son of "Teting" Brazil, who was said to be one of Miranda's men, spent two nights in the town, Mayor Hermosilla requested him to leave so the Japanese would not spot him. On another occasion Lt. Bonifacio Mendoza from the guerrillas came to confer with the mayor, based on an agreement between Miranda and Hermosilla. While Mendoza was talking to the mayor, two Japanese undercover agents came to visit the mayor. Mendoza went out the back door and hid on the porch of the municipal building. At noon of the same day, Mendoza was told to leave town, as the authorities knew about his presence. But he did not, resulting in his capture that evening; he was killed by Lieutenant Hirayama's men. Mayor Hermosilla later told Catingob that he was not responsible for the arrest and death of Mendoza, since his guerrilla contacts should have been kept concealed by all means in accordance with the agreement. It was presumed that Hermosilla would conceal any guerrilla activity in the town (ibid.).

Although he was in touch with Miranda, Mayor Hermosilla had to cope with the bad peace and order situation in the town brought about by frequent disturbances caused by Miranda's men. One of the means Hermosilla devised to solve the problem was the creation of the Home Guard. Actually, even before the Home Guard was organized in Ormoc, the local police forces, led by Lt. Francisco Maglasang, had been assigned by the mayor to maintain peace and order in the town. This local police force was an important adjunct to the Japanese garrison (Lear 1951, 53). After Lieutenant Abe's platoon forces arrived in Ormoc in October 1942, Hermosilla organized the Volunteer Guard or the Home Guard, although it cannot be ascertained when exactly it happened. Some historical documents on Hermosilla's collaboration activities in the People's Court mentioned that he voluntarily organized the Home Guard in October 1942 after he returned to Ormoc proper with his family from the mountains where they had previously evacuated. It also revealed that the Home Guard was organized after Hermosilla realized the strength of the Japanese forces and strategically decided to collaborate with them while still keeping a secret association with Miranda to counterattack the Japanese forces. Pelagio Codilla (1945), a former municipal councilor of Ormoc, testified that Mayor Hermosilla was the one who organized it to impress the Japanese of his willingness to cooperate.

Characteristically Hermosilla's attitude toward Miranda's groups was fluctuating and inconsistent. Although he decided to break his contact with the guerrilla group around October 1942 (Miranda 1945), he still seemed to continue making contact with them. On the surface he cut off his relationship with the guerrillas because of his personal problem with a prominent family in Ormoc. Vicente Tomada, a liaison officer of Miranda's guerrilla group who was making contact with Hermosilla, testified that the mayor was forced to break up his contact with the guerrilla group because the prominent Tan family, members of whom were also collaborating with the Japanese, reported the mayor to Lieutenant Hirayama as collaborating with the guerrillas. Because of this report, Lieutenant Hirayama arrested Hermosilla and Tomada, and the former was put under surveillance of the town's *Kempeitai* (Japanese Military Police). Tomada (1945) also claimed that, from that time on, Hermosilla had no contact with the guerrillas and started organizing the Home Guard in favor of the Japanese occupation of Ormoc. Although Tomada testified as such, the political feud surrounding him, as discussed later, revealed that Hermosilla still kept his guerrilla contacts with

Miranda's group. The postwar testimony of Mayor Hermosilla's relatives, Felipe Larrazabal (1945), attested to the continuation of his guerrilla contacts with Miranda's group. Larrazabal stated to the CIC investigator that letters addressed to Miranda written and signed by Mayor Hermosilla were found when, in December 1943, the Japanese raided Miranda's headquarters at Mahilaom, located some 7 kilometers east of Ormoc proper.

Because of the report made by the Tans, Hermosilla was immediately arrested and held for investigation by the Japanese. During the investigation, a telephone call was put through by Captain Abe, the previous Japanese commander of Ormoc, who was in Tacloban at the time. Abe, who stayed in Ormoc for six months from May to October 1942 and had good relations with the Hermosilla family, interceded for Hermosilla, asking the commander of Ormoc to set him free. Abe returned to Ormoc two days later to make a statement that Hermosilla was giving information to the guerrillas with his consent and knowledge. Larrazabal (1945) insisted that Hermosilla was giving technical information to the guerrilla groups as part of the Japanese pacification campaign so that guerrillas would surrender to the Japanese. Jose Yrastorza (1945), Hermosilla's brother-in-law, testified after the war that Abe implemented a very tolerant policy toward the guerrilla groups, who were fed and not maltreated even if they had been captured. Moreover, after extracting a promise from the guerrillas that they would not return to the mountains, the Japanese would release them. Abe did not interfere with any executive matters handled by Mayor Hermosilla, and more so acknowledged the contact of the mayor with the guerrilla group of Miranda.

Because the Japanese commander gave him political autonomy, Hermosilla evidently consolidated his political power until the time of his resignation from office, which took place before January 1944. His hold on power was made possible ostensibly by being cooperative with the Japanese, even as he was making contact with Miranda's groups for his pacification propaganda, apparently in order to liquidate or kill his political enemies in the town, if postwar testimonies are to be believed. The Home Guard became one of Hermosilla's means to achieve his political ambition.

The Home Guard under Mayor Hermosilla

The Japanese authorities in Leyte encouraged the Japanese-sponsored officials to organize the Home Guard. As revealed in war documents, after the reinforcement of the Japanese troops in Leyte in October 1943,

the authorities of the 20th Infantry Regiment of the 16th Division of the Japanese Army claimed it was necessary to organize the Home Guard. According to the regiment's war document titled "The Mission of the Home Guard [*Jikeidan*]," dated December 1943:

The Home Guard shall be organized in each barrio under the leadership of the *teniente del barrio* in accordance with the administrative order of the provincial governor. The members of the Home Guard armed with bamboo spear [*Takeyari*] shall consist of personnel recruited from each District and Neighborhood Association, or DANAS.⁵ The members of the Home Guard shall aim at defending barrios from the attack and invasion of guerrilla groups (including the groups of bandits or burglars disturbing the peace and order), and of arresting the suspected members of guerrilla groups . . . all able-bodied men of age between 15 and 60 years in the town should be enlisted as members of the Home Guard; all members should participate in the night patrol, regardless of the jobs of the residents. (NIDS 1943a)

In December 1943, the regiment praised the efforts of the Home Guard in Ormoc, reporting that "There can be now observed in Ormoc that more than three thousand residents who evacuated to the mountains in the previous year had returned to the town. The town mayor of Ormoc trusts our imperial troops and voluntarily organizes the *Jikeidan* to cooperate with us" (ibid.). It seemed that peace and order in Ormoc could be maintained by organizing this Home Guard, at the same time that the Japanese-sponsored constabulary existed in the town. However, although Mayor Hermosilla made contacts with guerrilla groups, the town's real peace and order situation had not been good enough because the Miranda-led groups frequently attacked the town until the first half of 1943. Writing to the provincial governor in December 1942, Mayor Hermosilla lamented the deficiency of guns and ammunitions, saying

Findings made by this office disclose the fact that the deserters are now beginning to waver. In this connection I would suggest that prompt and vigorous effective action be taken at once in order to put an end once and for all to the troubled condition of this municipality. The Ormoc public is pinning its hope and faith in the government and

I believe that we should not disappoint the public. We have ninety members of the Home Guard forces in the población. Ten of these have guns. I would request your good office to secure for all of them guns for their use. The Home Guards of Ormoc at present have demonstrated a quality of service seldom seen anywhere. The Japanese Imperial Forces of Ormoc can attest to their services. If properly armed the Home Guards can help much in the work of control and pacification. (Hermosilla 1942)

In February 1943, still reporting the lack of guns and ammunition, he wrote again to Governor Torres asking for the Japanese troops assigned in Ormoc to be augmented:

I am resorting to you for the last time to ask you to plead to the Japanese High Command in Leyte to assign more soldiers to Ormoc as early as possible so that things here may change. I have been doing all my best in order to keep the people from joining the mountain forces who [sic] seem to be having the upper hand in this municipality. The Home Guards are in duty sometimes 24 hours a day. My own son was shot at three times already but fortunately escaped injury. He is a member of the Home Guard organization of this municipality. There are many more young men who are willing to join the corps but due to lack of guns I have put their application pending until the receipt of gun [sic] for their use. We have now one hundred and eight Home Guards with twenty guns only. We need more guns for them if we may [sic] to be of real use to the town. (Hermosilla 1943)

These events raise some questions: Why did Mayor Hermosilla strongly adhere to the Home Guard? Did he really want to protect the people from guerrilla attacks? Did he have other motives? Collaborating with the enemy of the US, whom Filipinos could have resisted, Hermosilla seemed to have been in the same circumstance as other collaborating municipal mayors in other parts of the country. Apparently his chosen political stance was nothing but to protect his vested interests while ostensibly being cooperative with the Japanese. Perhaps in organizing the Home Guard he could have attained some success in maintaining order. Nonetheless, his real intention was not only to use this organization to maintain order but allegedly also to make it

into some kind of “private army” to attain his political ambition and further expand his political influence in the town.

Political Feuds and Atrocities in Ormoc

Lt. Natalino B. Bacalso, an officer of the special counsel of the Philippine Army’s Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) investigated the case of Hermosilla for alleged treason in 1945. He concluded in his report that Hermosilla attempted to use the Home Guard as a racket machine to kill or liquidate his political enemies in the town. The affidavits executed by Ormoc citizens Rafael Omega (a former treasurer), Severo Bañez (also a former treasurer), Pelagio Codilla (a former first councilor), Victor Peñalosa (chief of police), Enrique Omega (one of Miranda’s men), Natividad Datoon (wife of Fortunato Abellana), and Francisco Maglasang (one of Miranda’s men) claimed that Hermosilla’s political conspiracy brought about the bloody outcome of the Japanese occupation in their town (R. Omega 1945b; Bacalso 1945). Hermosilla’s collaboration activities were definitely related to local political feuds.

Catalino Hermosilla, a widower since March 1929, married Irene Larrazabal, a lady from a local hacendero family, in February 1930 (M. Hermosilla 2006). He was a mestizo and traced his family lineage to a Spanish immigrant to the island, the Yrastorza family, which became one of the most prominent in the town. He was born on 30 April 1898 in Ormoc. He became a public school teacher of the Ormoc Institute in 1916; director of the same institution (1917–1927); principal teacher of the intermediate department until 1929, while holding the highest position of Supremo of the Legionarios del Trabajo (1926–1929); and principal teacher of the Ormoc Institute of both the high school and intermediate departments. He became municipal councilor (1930–1933); municipal vice-president (1922–1929); municipal vice-mayor of Mayor Victorio Laurente (1934–1937); manager of Club Filipino de Cebu (1938–1940); and finally he defeated incumbent Mario Codilla to become municipal mayor from December 1940 to December 1943 (*The Reporter* 1972, 1).⁶

Treasurer Rafael Omega described another dimension of Hermosilla’s personality. In the interview conducted by the CIC Ormoc on 15 February 1945 and in his question-answer affidavit executed before Lieutenant Bacalso on 11 February 1945, Omega stated that Hermosilla was a very “changeable fellow” in terms of his character and political stances. The mayor had

been changing his religion—from Catholic to Protestant, and again from Protestant to Catholic. Despite fiercely blaming Spanish colonizers for their oppressive policy in the past, he still married a Spanish girl (referring to Irene Larrazabal). In the 1922 elections Hermosilla was a supporter and sympathizer of Carlos S. Tan, who ran for the post of representative, and Agapito Arradaza, who ran for the presidency (the title equivalent to governor during the American period) of Ormoc. In the 1925 elections, however, he publicly attacked Tan and Arradaza, even though the latter was Hermosilla's benefactor. In the 1928 elections, Hermosilla supported Bernardo Torres, who was running for a seat in the House of Representatives.⁷ But in the 1931 elections, he attacked Torres and sided with Manuel Martinez. In the 1934 elections, he supported Victorio Laurente's candidacy for mayor of Ormoc, but again in the 1937 elections he opposed Laurente. In the elections for representative in 1934 and 1938 Hermosilla supported the candidacy of Rep. Dominador M. Tan, but in 1941 he turned against and attacked Tan (R. Omega 1945a; Quetchenback 1977, 1–2).

Evidently Hermosilla was not only an educator but also an ambitious politician. In the municipal elections held in December 1940 he emerged mayor of Ormoc after defeating several political enemies (*The Tribune* 1940, 11), among whom, according to the report of Lieutenant Bacalso, were Atty. Cayetano Mañago, Fortunato Abellana, Pedro Alejo, Procopio Gaquit, and someone from the Mejia family. Lieutenant Bacalso asserted in his report that they were Hermosilla's political enemies, saying "there is no room for doubt; Whole Ormocano [sic] knows that; and these men mentioned above had fought against Hermosilla's political career." Bacalso also claimed that Hermosilla had been thinking of a long-term plan to liquidate these political enemies even before the Japanese arrived in Ormoc (Bacalso 1945; R. Omega 1945a).

According to the affidavit of Rafael Omega (*ibid.*), the men of Miranda's guerrilla groups killed all these "enemies" of Hermosilla. In the beginning of the Japanese occupation of Leyte, the Hermosilla family stayed in their ranch in Dolores, Ormoc, which was said to be very near the headquarters of Miranda. Hermosilla tried to establish contact with the guerrilla groups to counterattack the Japanese. However, Rafael Omega declared that Hermosilla wanted to use Miranda's men to eliminate his political enemies. The affidavit of Enrique Omega (1945), a man of Miranda at the

time, also mentioned the killing of Hermosilla's political enemies. These two affidavits made the same assertion regarding the killings, but it was not clear when exactly Miranda killed them in the mountains. Enrique Omega, however, claimed to have witnessed the killing of Mañago—a statement that could be a potentially reliable source to establish the connection between Hermosilla and Miranda regarding the murder.

Enrique Omega's (1945) affidavit states that, of the several political enemies, only Atty. Mañago, whom Hermosilla disliked the most, was killed sometime in December 1943 or January 1944. To explain the killing, Omega reviewed the history of the political feud between Mañago and Hermosilla. He recalled that around December 1943, when there was a move to replace Hermosilla as mayor because he was suffering from hypertension and was absent from the office, former senator Jose Ma. Veloso (who was elected in the ninth district of Leyte in 1934 to the tenth Philippine legislature) hinted that Mañago might well fit the mayorship; Veloso favored Mañago as they were close friends, and Mañago supported the Veloso-Salazar faction in the national elections. Mañago, at the time, was in the mountains and would have refused the mayor's position even if it were offered to him. But after Veloso expressed his support for Mañago, as per Omega's (*ibid.*) affidavit, Hermosilla was bitterly resentful because he wanted to remain mayor of Ormoc. Eventually hypertension forced Hermosilla to step down from office sometime before the end of December 1943. Jose Codilla was appointed the new mayor, assuming office on 6 January 1944 (Lear 1951, 707). Omega claimed that Hermosilla's enmity against Mañago did not end until Miranda liquidated Mañago in the mountains, following receipt of a note presumably from Hermosilla asking Miranda to kill the political enemy. Lear's study shows that the Japanese authorities in Ormoc were quite skeptical of Hermosilla's loyalty to their regime, as Hermosilla kept on making contact with the guerrilla groups; hence, they wished to install Mañago as mayor. But it was said that a Mister Ito, a local merchant of a Japanese national who had strong connections with the Japanese garrison in Ormoc, advised them against the appointment of Mañago as mayor on the grounds that he lost the previous mayoralty elections in December 1940. In addition, Ito held that the Japanese regime must be supported by the bulk of the Filipino people (*ibid.*, 395). Veloso's suggestion could not materialize, and according to Omega Mañago was killed reportedly on the order of Hermosilla.

Another murder allegedly involving Herмосilla merits discussion based on the report of Lieutenant Bacalso to the CIC. Before organizing the Home Guard, the first political enemy Herмосilla was said to have targeted to kill was Fortunato Abellana. Bacalso insisted in his report that Eling Omega, who later became a member of the Home Guard, killed Abellana; Omega was so loyal to the Japanese that they took him in as a member of the Bureau of Constabulary (BC) or the Philippine Constabulary (PC). Natividad Datoon (1945), wife of Abellana, declared in a signed affidavit that Omega came to their house to arrest her husband, eventuating in his brutal killing. Omega struck her husband on the breast and shoulder with a sharp bolo, and dragged him to the Anilao River where he cut off the head of her husband.

After the killing of Abellana, the elimination of Pedro Alejo and Procopio Gaquit was also said to have been ordered by Herмосilla. Lieutenant Bacalso claimed that Herмосilla ordered one of his men, Juan Tirado, the local police chief, to kill Alejo and Gaquit. According to the question-answer affidavit executed by Sotero Bañez, who was an undercover agent of Miranda's guerrilla groups, the killings of Herмосilla's political enemies happened during the Japanese occupation "because of personal grudges only." Initially during the interview Bañez did not mention who killed them. However, Bacalso successfully extracted the information while carefully listening to Bañez's words, such as "He [Tirado] killed many civilians but I do not know whether the killing was made because Tirado, as a subordinate, had only to obey superior orders." Bacalso mentioned that, even prior to the war, Bañez was already a good friend of Herмосilla. He was the latter's strong supporter when he ran for mayor of Ormoc in 1940. Bañez tried to hide in order to protect Herмосilla, but according to Bacalso, even off the record, Bañez mentioned the name of Juan Tirado as allegedly killing Herмосilla's political enemies. Bacalso said that, even though he did not ask Bañez who killed them, the latter voluntarily mentioned Tirado's name; Bacalso (1945) affirmed Bañez's personal knowledge of events by asking, "Why must he make mention of this fact without being asked?"

Lieutenant Bacalso finally obtained a firm statement on Herмосilla's involvement in the killing. Sometime in January 1945, Bacalso tried to visit the house of Juan Tirado in Ormoc to ascertain the killing he allegedly committed. When Bacalso tried to interview Tirado, the latter demurred. After the war, Tirado was arrested by the Miranda group and badly beaten by Miranda's man, Lieutenant Cataag. Bacalso found that Tirado hardly moved

on his sickbed, so he left but decided to return to the house the following day. On 7 February 1945 Bacalso visited Tirado's house but he and his family were gone. When he asked the neighbors, nobody knew their whereabouts. Bacalso asked Tirado's daughter who was left behind in the barrio with her husband, but all she could say was that her father left silently in the middle of the night, and she herself did not know where they were bound. According to Bacalso's narration, Herмосilla spotted him prior to his second visit to Tirado's house. He insisted Herмосilla did something to Tirado so he could never tell the truth to anybody. Bacalso argued that, if Tirado was the chief of police during the occupation and Herмосilla as mayor was his boss, then only Herмосilla could order his subordinate to kill his political enemies.

We now turn to another case of atrocity that Herмосilla and the Japanese occupying forces allegedly committed. In the first stage of the occupation of Leyte, there was a very influential religious cult group in Ormoc called Bongoton, which was said to be a group of faith healers (Constantino 1974, 282–83; Arens 1977, 74–79).⁸ Their activities could be traced back to Faustino Ablen who led the Dios-Dios movement, which was said to have fought the colonial rule of both Spain and the US (Borrinaga 2007, 14–15; Borrinaga 2008, 60–73; Tantuico 1964, 190–92). One prominent religious figure, Mariano Laurel, popularly known by his nickname Bongoton, was the group's leader at the time of the occupation. In early 1942, Laurel was jailed by Ormoc's municipal police for practicing medicine without a license and imprisoned for about a month. Upon his release, he moved to San Vicente, Palompon, and set up his practice there. According to the CIC's interview with Celestino Ranoles, a member of the group, Ranoles believed that some kind of political envy impelled the officials of Palompon and Ormoc to outlaw Laurel's healing. The Palompon police arrested Laurel together with other followers, who were then transferred under the authority of the Ormoc police led by Juan Tirado. The CIC found during its investigation that Laurel's arrest was instigated by a telegram to Mayor Alfredo Parilla of Palompon that Herмосilla sent on 3 July 1942, requesting Laurel's apprehension. Herмосilla denounced Laurel and his followers as Pulahanes, who had become guerrillas, to Lieutenant Hirayama and eagerly requested the Japanese to execute them (Ranoles 1945). Why did Herмосilla insist on the execution of these arrested members of the group? The report of the investigation regarding the case of Parilla, the Japanese-sponsored municipal mayor of Palompon, showed that this group was not

political in nature but purely religious, performing marriage ceremonies, baptisms, and their own masses. The whole populace of western Leyte seemed to abhor the Bongoton, maybe because of their religious affiliation (Parilla [1949?]). As Ranoles testified, political envy might have impelled Hermosilla to arrest them in order to have them executed. Local historian Borrinaga (2009) found that, in the early twentieth century, Larrazabal, the Ormoc patriarch, had married a daughter of Faustino Ablen so that the Pulahanes, would not harass them. Although Hermosilla was related to the Larrazabals by affinity, he had a feeling of enmity against the Larrazabals and the Pulahanes according to Borrinaga (2009), but there could be other reasons for Hermosilla's order that Laurel be apprehended.

On 23 May 1945 the CIC 482nd Detachment interviewed Pedro Gonzalez, who had known Hermosilla for several years as his business partner. Gonzalez stated that on 3 July 1942 he went to Camp Downs in Ormoc to see the Japanese commanding officer, Lieutenant Hirayama, with regard to obtaining transportation to Tacloban. While waiting to see Hirayama, he overheard a conversation between Hermosilla and Hirayama over the disposition of two persons by the names of Mariano Laurel and Sofronio Cabiling,⁹ who had been arrested by the Japanese for "spreading anti-Japanese views." Gonzalez thought that Laurel and Cabiling belonged to the religious cult, Bongoton, which had gone to Ormoc to spread its anti-Japanese doctrine. Gonzalez stated that Hermosilla was strongly urging Hirayama to execute Laurel and Cabiling because they were attracting a large following and had become dangerous to the occupation government. During the interview the CIC learned that Cabiling had been a political enemy of Hermosilla whom he probably wanted to liquidate (Gonzalez 1945). According to the testimony of Ranoles, aside from Laurel and Cabiling, all the other arrested followers of Bongoton were released after the investigation conducted by the Ormoc police. Subsequently Laurel was beheaded, while Cabiling escaped. These testimonies suggest that the apprehension of Bongoton ordered by Hermosilla was political in nature, meant to target Cabiling, one of his political enemies. It was highly possible that the apprehension of Bongoton's followers was a mere pretext to accomplish Hermosilla's political objective of eliminating Cabiling.

As mentioned earlier, Hermosilla finally stepped down as mayor sometime in November or December 1943 due to hypertension. Rafael Omega claimed that Hermosilla did not want to leave the position of

municipal mayor. As municipal treasurer, Omega tried to deduct from Hermosilla's salary the equivalent of the days that he was absent due to illness. However, Hermosilla reportedly appealed to the Japanese authorities and finally stopped Omega from making the deduction, even threatening the latter with a slap on the face. However, by January 1944 Codilla had become mayor of Ormoc. Hermosilla thought Omega had been instrumental in his loss of the mayor's office. Hermosilla appealed to one Mister Nymi, then a liaison officer of the Japanese military authorities of Ormoc. Nymi called Mayor Codilla and Treasurer Omega to attend a meeting in Hermosilla's house on the evening of 17 January 1944. In that conference Nymi scolded Codilla and Omega for replacing Hermosilla as mayor. Nymi admitted that removing Hermosilla from the mayorship was not the wish of the Japanese authorities in Ormoc but that of Governor Torres (R. Omega 1945a). Meanwhile, Codilla, a former councilor of Ormoc, claimed another reason why Hermosilla was replaced. According to him, the politically influential Jose Veloso had strongly insisted that the new mayor should take the place of Hermosilla in order to solve the food shortage problem in the town by organizing a new district neighborhood association—a proposal that the Japanese authorities accepted (Codilla 1945). Because of Veloso's strong political influence in the province, even Hermosilla had no option but to abandon his mayorship. However, even after his resignation, Hermosilla was still dominant in the local politics of Ormoc. Pelagio Codilla declared in his affidavit that, aside from his consolidated political power, Hermosilla obtained plenty of economic gains in the sugar business and in acquiring enormous land parcels in the town. We now turn to the economic aspect of Hermosilla's collaboration with the Japanese.

Collaborationism and Hermosilla's Unexplained Wealth

Economically speaking, Mayor Hermosilla seemed very successful during the wartime period, during which he accumulated vast amounts of property. Former treasurer Rafael Omega (1945a) claimed in his affidavit executed after the war that, considering Ormoc's scant financial situation, it was very strange that Hermosilla gained so much profit from his being municipal mayor. According to Omega, as of July 1942, during the first stage of the Japanese occupation of Ormoc, its municipal treasury had only a very little amount of money: about a thousand pesos in emergency notes, some mutilated old treasury notes, some mutilated coins that amounted to no

more than ten pesos, and some Japanese military notes. The treasury's total cash at the time Omega became treasurer barely reached P5,000. Ormoc's annual income from 1 July 1942 to 31 December 1942 did not even reach P15,000. The income for 1943 did not reach P20,000 and for 1944 from the year's start until 30 September the income was a little more than P20,000. Omega added that when he left office as municipal treasurer there were about P35,000 in Japanese military notes, all of which were said to have been burned by the Japanese because they did not allow the municipal officials to take any of the government property in the municipal building. Omega testified that Hermosilla's salary during the Japanese occupation was more than P40, which was paid in old Philippine currency notes. Omega (*ibid.*) claimed that since Mayor Hermosilla was merely an "average Filipino" in the province, it was strange that he could accumulate many pieces of property during that time, such as the purchase of a house and lot costing P4,000, even though his salary was P40 only. As mentioned earlier, Hermosilla used to be a municipal teacher, and Omega claimed that for fifteen years prior to the arrival of the Japanese Hermosilla could not even build a shack in Ormoc. Hermosilla went to Cebu and got employed in the Club Filipino with a salary of P60 a month. Omega strongly averred in his affidavit that Hermosilla started to get corrupted when he worked in the club, as indicated by the fact that, although he had been employed for less than two years only, he was able to build a house in Cebu costing more than P1,000 pesos. Since his election as Ormoc's mayor in December 1940, for a term lasting up to the beginning of the Japanese occupation in May 1942, Hermosilla was able to buy a house and lot costing P4,000. Mayor Hermosilla could have saved this large amount of money within several months since he was elected mayor, but Omega noted it was impossible for Hermosilla to have saved that much money unless something was underway. Not only was he able to buy a costly house and lot, but Hermosilla also bought an agricultural piece of land costing more than P500 and jewelries from Felix Sumaljag, a businessman in Cebu. Mayor Hermosilla was said to have planned the purchase of another piece of land situated in Cananga, located 15 kilometers north of Ormoc City proper (*ibid.*).

Omega advanced the claim that Hermosilla's accumulation of property could have been carried out during the procurement of foodstuffs conducted by the Home Guard, which became the mayor's private army. As mentioned earlier, Hermosilla reportedly made use of this organization to liquidate

or kill his political enemies in the town even as he was maintaining some contact with Miranda's guerrilla groups. Moreover, he appropriated for his own use the Home Guard's activities, which were linked to the community activities of the DANAS. In actuality, Hermosilla was not only a municipal mayor at the time but also the commander-in-chief of the Home Guard. As such he managed to borrow a motor launch owned by the Japanese for the purpose of patrolling the waters of Ormoc Bay. These patrols were jointly managed by his nephew, Francisco Hermosilla, the warden of the Home Guard, and his son Romeo Hermosilla, who was the assistant warden. Under their administration, several sailors and merchants from Cebu and Bohol were brought to Ormoc. Their cargoes were either confiscated by Mayor Hermosilla through the Japanese military officer, Sergeant Shinkai (who presumably was attached to the Abe Detachment Forces in Ormoc), or sold by the owners of the sailboats at a price dictated by Hermosilla and Shinkai. Omega claimed that parts of the cargoes that he, his nephew, and his son confiscated were brought to his house for his own consumption, but some were also sold because he was running a store in his house. The rest was brought to the municipal building for sale to the public. Omega believed the profits Hermosilla gained from the proceeds of the sale went to his personal pocket because Omega could not find any statement of account of the sale and it was never turned over to the municipal treasury (*ibid.*).

Pelagio Codilla (1945), a former councilor of Ormoc when Hermosilla was mayor, claimed that the latter took advantage of Lieutenant Abe's appeasement policy toward suspected guerrillas or people evacuating to the mountains, especially the provision of foodstuffs to surrendered guerrillas. When the civilians decided to come down to the center of Ormoc during the pacification campaign, Hermosilla used the municipal truck to ferry the civilians from the mountains to the town, together with all their foodstuffs such as corn and rice. Hermosilla extracted from them 20 percent of their palay or rice or any foodstuff loaded on the truck. These food items were stored in the municipal building. Codilla claimed that more than 1,000 cavans of rice were stored in the warehouse of the municipal building. Because of the very serious food deficiency in Ormoc, Codilla requested Mayor Hermosilla to sell the rice through the neighborhood association. However, the mayor replied that he would not touch a grain of rice in the municipal building unless and until there really was an acute shortage of food.

Codilla added that Herмосilla profited tremendously from sugar. Sometime in 1943, Ormoc faced a sugar shortage, although big hacenderos had owned large sugar plantations even before the war. The mayor called a meeting of all prominent residents to discuss the sugar shortage in the town. It was agreed that all residents of Ormoc had to mill muscovado sugar, produced from sugarcane that could be harvested anywhere. Herмосilla appointed Agapito Pongos as manager for the harvest of sugarcanes and their milling. Labor was compulsory. Codilla claimed that they had to arrest civilians to get them to work because they were afraid to go out in the open, lest guerrilla groups fire at them. When they had already produced sugar, Herмосilla announced that its price must not be less than P20 per picul. Codilla (ibid.) reportedly protested, saying

The price was too high and the poor could not afford to buy such sugar . . . during peacetime, the hacenderos had to buy seeds for sugar cane, had to plow, had to clean the farm, had to buy fertilizers and yet sugar cost only P4.50 a picul. Now, all we had to do was to cut the sugarcane from anybody's farm on which we had not spent a cent, why must sugar cost twenty pesos a picul?

Even in the town of Ormoc, the basic policy of food distribution should have been in accordance with the rules and regulations of the DANAS. However, it was observed that Herмосilla utilized the activities of this group for his own ends. According to Codilla's testimony, the sugar that Herмосilla obtained was sold in his store as well as in the store run by his nephew, Francisco, at a high price. Codilla said there were rumors in town that went this way: "We buy the sugar from Mayorhood, instead of from the Neighborhood." He added that there were also tags such as "Kingkohood" and "Nesinghood," which probably meant the name of the store ran respectively by Francisco "Kingko" Herмосilla and Herмосilla's brother-in-law (name unknown). Codilla claimed that Agapito Pongos was the one who milled the sugar, while Romeo Herмосilla, chief warden of the Home Guard, ensured the arrest of civilians to obtain labor in the cutting and milling of sugar canes (ibid.).

Codilla further cited in his affidavit that Herмосilla enforced the DANAS's rules and regulations improperly so he could extend special treatment to the town's Chinese merchants from whom presumably he

obtained much personal gain. Sometime in 1942 Codilla was the acting DANAS district president because Constancio Perez, the group's president in Ormoc, was sick. According to its rules and regulations, all able-bodied men aged 16 to 60 years old within the jurisdiction of the neighborhood association were required to take part in Home Guard activities at night against what they called bandits and also to ensure the inhabitants' safety. After a couple of months while Codilla was acting president, there were meetings in the municipal hall called by Mayor Herмосilla in which district presidents and leaders were present. During one such meeting the mayor told them that the system of guarding the district by all able-bodied men must be compulsory, irrespective of whether they were rich or poor. Some attendees in the meeting complained that some rich Chinese did not guard at night. After the meeting, Codilla went to the mayor's office to discuss further the problem with the rich Chinese, to which Herмосilla responded by instructing him to conduct night inspections so he would have a basis to formulate a report on the violators of this order.

One evening Codilla inspected the DANAS headquarters at 1:00 AM and found four Filipinos serving as guards there. He got their names and discovered that they were taking the place of some rich Chinese. On the following morning Codilla's subordinate reported that one of the Chinese for whom a Filipino guard substituted was Walter Johnson. Codilla requested Johnson to report to the mayor's office to explain his side, but he did not appear at the office. Herмосilla told Codilla that the investigation of the incident should be closed on the ground that Johnson was sick and was being treated by a doctor. Codilla could not help but visit the place of Johnson to ask him what it was all about, and was surprised to hear Johnson say, "What is the matter with the Mayor? The Chinese Club is giving Mayor three hundred pesos every month, why make us guard?" (ibid.)

What was the connection between Herмосilla and Johnson? The latter's name was a giveaway: he was not a Filipino but an American national residing in Ormoc. However, the CIC report mentioned that he was an elderly Chinese-Filipino. Considering the contents of Codilla's affidavit that Johnson also should have taken part in the activities of the Home Guard in accordance with the rules and regulations, it was possible he already had Philippine citizenship at that time. He was said to run Ormoc's Chinese Club as its president. Codilla also stated that Johnson was the one who milled the rice confiscated and stored by Herмосilla in the municipal building.

Johnson stated in an affidavit in February 1945 that the Chinese Club gave Hermosilla P30 a month, a figure later raised to P50. Johnson gave the amount for a year from September 1942 to September of the following year. Hermosilla allegedly told Johnson that the money was used in the management of the Home Guard. The CIC report stated that the Home Guard was financially assisted by the Chinese Club. It is unclear whether Hermosilla used this money for the Home Guard or for his personal use. Johnson (1945) did not testify to the CIC investigator about his relationship with Hermosilla, but his reply to Codilla revealed his close connection with the mayor on financial matters. Codilla's affidavit revealed that Johnson could have bribed Hermosilla so that he would not be assigned to take part in the night patrol.

During his term as mayor, Hermosilla allowed several opportunistic businessmen to engage in their business in favor of the Japanese and have close contact with Japanese military officials. One of them was known only as Revilla. Codilla emotionally accused Revilla of conducting illegal business and of committing atrocities against civilians. According to his affidavit, Revilla used to be the manager of the sugar central in Barrio Ypil in Ormoc. From the very start of the Japanese occupation, Revilla had gone to the headquarters of the Japanese commander of Ormoc. After he went out with the Japanese to patrol the town, Revilla always instigated the arrest of suspicious men or suspected guerrillas. Every time they returned to Ormoc from a patrolling activity, they always brought with them a large bunch of captured civilians, who were brutally thrown to jail and most of whom were executed the following day. The Japanese commander gave Revilla a special truck every time he patrolled with the Japanese soldiers. When they returned to the headquarters, Revilla would be the first to alight, and he then grabbed the civilians roughly and pushed them to the jail.¹⁰

Ormoc in the War's Aftermath

The historical landing of the American forces on the shores of Palo, Leyte, took place in October 1944. The Philippine Commonwealth government resumed its operations in Tacloban under the leadership of Pres. Sergio Osmeña, together with officials of the US Army. The 16th Division of the Japanese Army stationed on Leyte's eastern coast retreated to the central mountainous area. In November 1944 the 1st Division of the Japanese Army arrived in Ormoc from Manchuria as a reinforcement unit. The 26th Division of the Japanese Army also arrived in Ormoc to reinforce the western

part of Leyte Island. In December 1944, when American forces bombed Ormoc, the Japanese evacuated the town and hid in the mountains.

The Japanese military personnel still made contact with Hermosilla to seek assistance and food supply. A friend of the Hermosilla family, Conching Sevilla (1945) gave the postwar testimony that after the bombing of Ormoc she lived in the evacuation center located in Barrio Mahilaom, together with Catalino Hermosilla and his family. She said Japanese soldiers often came through Mahilaom on their way to the mountains and other barrios. On one occasion a wounded Japanese naval captain went to the house to talk to Hermosilla, requesting that he be directed to Barrio Dolores to avoid the road that was under artillery fire by American forces at the time. When the officer started to leave and had walked a short distance from the house, Hermosilla went to the place where some pieces of carabao meat were hanging on a drying line, took a few pieces, and ran after the captain to give him the meat.

Hermosilla also played a crucial role in the barrio every time Japanese officers and soldiers came to his house to ask for his help, particularly in matters regarding provisions. It is unclear whether his conduct toward the Japanese was voluntary or forced. Some testimonies stated that the former mayor's conduct was not political but intended to protect the residents in the barrio during the time when the American forces attacked Ormoc. Through his actions, the Japanese did not commit abuses against the local residents—a view that indicated the continuing political dominance of Hermosilla even after he had stepped down as mayor.

By January 1945 the American forces had liberated most parts of Ormoc. In May 1945, with the US Army's approval, Potenciano Larrabal was appointed Ormoc's mayor, replacing Jose Codilla. Meanwhile, Hermosilla was searched by the CIC but escaped arrest until late August 1945 when he was finally apprehended and put in a civilian internment camp in Tacloban for several months under the charge of collaboration with the Japanese (Lear 1979b, 160). As stressed by Lieutenant Bacalso, a CIC investigator, in spite of his efforts to find the facts no Ormoc resident was willing to testify against Hermosilla. Bacalso was surprised at how strong and influential this political figure in Ormoc was. On the contrary, Ormoc's local residents testified on Hermosilla's behalf, recalling "his benevolence" in saving their lives to the detriment of his own safety. After the investigation was completed, Hermosilla was officially cleared of all charges and released from custody (M. Hermosilla 2006).¹¹

After the war, locally prominent families like the Tans, Larrazabals, and Codillas, who were at different times in conflict with and supportive of Hermosilla during the war period, took over Hermosilla's political dominance. The Tan family—a member of whom was a prominent local politician, Dominador Tan, who also collaborated with the Japanese in Manila as director of the official state party, the KALIBAPI—was at odds with Hermosilla during that time. Blas Miranda (1945) testified during the CIC investigation that in early 1942 the Tans denounced Hermosilla to the Japanese commander because of his contact with Miranda's groups in the mountains. Even Hermosilla's relatives, the Larrazabal family, criticized Hermosilla's political conduct. According to Potenciano Larrazabal (1945), who was the first councilor under Hermosilla's administration and who was appointed mayor after the war, he escaped to the mountains when the Japanese arrived in Ormoc, but his father, who remained in the town, was later captured by Japanese soldiers. The Larrazabals had a strong abhorrence of the Japanese because they pillaged their estate, took sugar and rice stocks, and slaughtered farm animals. Potenciano instructed his tenants to plant crops only enough to meet their families' immediate requirements, because the Japanese would certainly confiscate whatever surpluses they could get. Mayor Hermosilla urged Potenciano to come down to the town and join the municipal government in exchange for the release of his father, but Potenciano refused. Since then, the Larrazabals became very angry at Hermosilla because of his political stance as a collaborator (P. Larrazabal 1945; Lear 1951, 394).

Meanwhile, Dominador Tan controlled local politics in Ormoc as well as in the whole of Leyte as indicated by his election as member of the House of Representatives in affiliation with the Veloso-Salazar faction. Through his political clout, Ormoc became a city through Republic Act 179, which was approved on 21 June 1947. Pres. Manuel Roxas proclaimed Ormoc a city in September of the same year. (By then, Catalino Hermosilla was no longer a figure on the local political landscape as he had died on 23 March 1946.) For about fifteen years after the withdrawal of Japanese forces until 1959, all the mayors of Ormoc were appointed. During such period, Iñaki Larrazabal Sr., as well as Marcelo Bandalan and Esteban Conejos Sr., all of whom were said to be in the camp of the Tans and Larrazabals, ascended to the office of the mayor. The Larrazabals had been quite dominant in Ormoc's local politics since Potenciano was appointed mayor during the rehabilitation period in 1945. In the elections of 1967, Iñaki Larrazabal Sr. was elected

and remained as mayor until 1984. The Codillas also remained dominant in Ormoc's politics, monopolizing major posts in the municipal government. Mayor Eufrocino Codilla Sr., for example, won the mayoralty elections for three consecutive terms from 1992 to 2001. This "political dynasty" seems to continue, as Eric Codilla is now the city's incumbent mayor (Ormoc City Government 2005).

Considering this political situation, it can be said that a power shift in the municipal politics of Ormoc emerged after the war. The Hermosillas' political dominance was diminished, with no member of the family being elected mayor since the end of the war. Although Catalino Hermosilla was quite popular among Ormocanons even after the war, the collaboration issue he had to face likely caused his political setback in municipal politics. The consolidation of his political power through his collaboration with the Japanese, which involved political feuds, killings, and anomalies, enraged the anti-Japanese guerrilla groups as well as other local oligarchs. In other words, his political conduct as a means to accomplish his goal of being a "public king" in the town invited much resentment from among other local elite families as well as guerrilla groups. One of Catalino Hermosilla's nephews, Francisco "Kingko" Hermosilla, an executive member of the Home Guard, was said to have accumulated unexplained wealth. After the war, the men of Miranda's guerrilla groups arrested him, and he was executed by shotgun after a summary court hearing in the Miranda headquarters found him guilty (J. Hermosilla 2006).

These feelings of resentment among Ormoc's local oligarchs toward Catalino Hermosilla prevented members of the Hermosilla family from taking part in municipal politics after the war. It can be argued that Catalino Hermosilla's political conduct during the Japanese occupation was only for his political ambition and the protection of his vested interests in municipal politics. As a liaison between the Japanese and the anti-Japanese guerrillas, he was not really a collaborator with the Japanese but a typical figure taking advantage of the circumstances to expand his power base, relieve himself of political enemies, and accumulate property. Meanwhile, the collaboration issue raised against him has faded from the memory of Ormocanons, and along with it the complex and bloody political feuds and factionalism. The collaboration issue was virtually absolved in March 1972 when Catalino Hermosilla was honored as a local "hero" by the Ormoc City Council, which also named a new circumferential road in Ormoc after him, now called the Catalino G. Hermosilla Sr. Drive (fig. 2) (*The Reporter* 1972, 1).

New Diversion Road Named After Ormocano

ORMOC CITY, Mar. 14 (RNS) — The Municipal Board has adopted an ordinance naming the north diversion road connecting Cantubo and Canalo districts as "Catalino G. Hermosilla, Sr. Drive" in honor of the great educator, debater, public servant, arbiter, leader and statesman who spent the best years of his life in the service of his fellow-men, constituents, his community and, above all, his country next to God.

The ordinance was jointly sponsored by Councilors Tobal Mendola and Nito Marquez on the heels of a joint petition of some 131 city residents who alleged that "Cata", as he was very prominently known, has etched an exemplary record of public service, most notably in the fields of education and politics in war and peace, scaling the ranks from humble public school teacher, the first principal-teacher of Ormoc Institute (formerly Western Leyte Academy founded by Mr. Warner Barnes and Mrs. Feliza Zamora-Mejia) in 1916, then director of the same institution (1917-1927), principal-teacher of the intermediate department up to 1929 while



Late Mayor CATALINO G.
HERMOSILLA
"to the man who served"

Fig. 2. Front-page news on *The Reporter* 1972. Catalino Hermosilla is described in the opening paragraph as "the great educator, debater, public servant, arbiter, leader and statesman who spent the best years of his life in the service of his fellow-men, constituents, his community and, above all, his country next to God."

Conclusion

In the final analysis, we must conclude that McCoy's hypothesis about local politics during the Japanese occupation may not be fully applicable to Ormoc. Although its local oligarchy, which could be traced back to the Spanish and American colonial periods and most of whom were politically conservative, did not undergo great political change even after the war, the hypothesis could not explain the decline of the Hermosillas in the municipal politics of Ormoc. We have to consider that the politics

of the local oligarchy could be characteristically complicated even in a small town like Ormoc during the wartime. The Japanese occupation of Ormoc exerted political influence on local elites and officials. Steinberg (1967, 167) has written that, "Since the war, venality, bribery, fraud, and corruption, usually described euphemistically as 'anomalies' have made the power of office more a private preserve than a public trust." This statement aptly describes Catalino Hermosilla who appropriated the wartime politics to suit his own purposes. Nevertheless, in the postwar period Hermosilla's political dominance diminished. Although the local oligarchy as a whole remained despite the changing historical circumstances, and to this extent McCoy's hypothesis on the continuance of the oligarchy in local politics during the Japanese occupation is applicable, it does not account for the complexity and dynamism of political factionalism as revealed by Ormoc's history during this period. In Ormoc Steinberg's statement concerning social change at the town level rings true when we focus on Catalino Hermosilla and his wartime activities.

Abbreviations used

CIC	Counter Intelligence Corps
DANAS	District and Neighborhood Association
EO	Executive Order
PCAU	Philippine Civil Affairs Unit
PCP	People's Court Papers, Special Collections Section, University of the Philippines Library, Diliman, Quezon City
NIDS	National Institute of Defense Studies
USAFFE	United States Army Forces in the Far East

Notes

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- 1 Most Japanese war documents used in the study are found in the library of the National Institute of Defense Studies (NIDS) in Tokyo, Japan.
- 2 The town history of Ormoc is found in microfilm number 34 of the Historical Data Papers (1946) for the Province of Leyte deposited in the Philippine National Library, Manila, Philippines. However, very few descriptions can be found regarding Ormoc, aside from five barrios included in the compilation, namely, Cabulihan, Catayum, Hibuanon, Maticaa, and Mas-in.

- 3 In Dec. 1942 the Japanese-sponsored acting governor of Leyte, Pastor Salazar, wrote a report to the Philippine Executive Commission in Manila regarding the ubiquitous guerrillas, pointing out the groups led by Captain Erfe (USAFFE) in Burauen and La Paz; Sgt. Alejandro Balderian (USAFFE) in Dagami; Antonio Cinco and Nieves Fernandez in Tanauan, Tolosa, and Dagami; Sgt. Filemon Pabilona (USAFFE) in Alang-Alang; Sgt. Felix Pamanian, Pio Ortiz, and Sergeant Kierulf (USAFFE) in Capooan, Carigara, and Barugo; Sgt. Gregorio Miralles (deserter) in Jaro; Antonio Jerez (bandit) in Naval; Lt. Blas Miranda (USAFFE) in Ormoc and Albuera; Lieutenant Nuque and Lieutenant Francisco (USAFFE) in Malitbog; Laudet (bandit) in Villaba; Pedro Gallego (former municipal mayor) and Catalino Landia (chief of police) in Abuyog. Hartendorp (1967, 387) reported that most of the unsundered USAFFE in Leyte at the time numbered around 1,500; under the command of Colonel Conell, they refused to accept the surrender order from General Sharp in Mindanao.
- 4 Chung (1989) mentioned that Blas Miranda was a second lieutenant, an engineering officer, in the Leyte Provincial Regiment, who did not surrender; he organized a guerrilla group in western Leyte, with a command post perched on top of the mountain overlooking Ormoc, which he called "Campo Langit" (Camp Heaven). Meanwhile, according to Aurillo (1983), before the war, Ruperto K. Kangleon was for three years commanding officer of the 9th Military District comprising the provinces of Leyte and Samar. On 26 Aug. 1941, three months before the Pacific war broke out, general mobilization made him shift to Cebu to be in command of the 81st Philippine Army Division. He was then sent to Mindanao where he fought the Japanese in Davao. He surrendered on 29 May 1942; he soon came out of the concentration camp and returned to his home barrio of San Roque in the southwestern town of Macrohon on 26 Dec. of the same year.
- 5 The District and Neighborhood Association (DANAS) was patterned after the local community organization in Japan at the time, the so-called Tonarigumi. The DANAS was organized in the occupied Philippines in accordance with Executive Order (EO) 77 issued in Sept. 1942. In general, the main purpose of the organization was chiefly to distribute rice and other commodities. However, it can be said that the real intention of the organization was to encourage residents to report to the authorities the presence of suspicious persons and help the constabulary in effecting their arrest. It was eventually incorporated into the framework of the KALIBAPI (Kapisanan sa Paglilingkod sa Bagong Pilipinas), which was inaugurated in Dec. 1942 as the only official political party. According to EO 77, neighborhood associations would be organized on the basis of around ten families each, and district associations on the basis of around ten neighborhood associations. Both associations were under the direction and control of the provincial governor as well as the city and municipal mayors concerned (De Viana 2003, 10).
- 6 Mario Y. Hermosilla provided me a clipping of this article from *The Reporter* for which, along with his moral support, I am most grateful.
- 7 Actually in 1928 Torres was elected to the Leyte Assembly, a post he held until 1931. Sen. Jose Veloso, from San Isidro, Leyte, was one of Torres's protectors (Quetchenback 1977, 1–3).
- 8 Renato Constantino (1974) mentions the presence of a fanatical religious group, the Pulahanes, who fought American forces in Leyte, led by Faustino Ablen, an illiterate peasant who, like Negros's Papa Isio, assumed the title of pope. The Bongoton group can be traced to the Pulahanes movement. Arens (1977) is more detailed and informative than Constantino.
- 9 It is not sure if Sofronio Cabiling was the immediate relative or son of one Sofronio Cabiling, who was the head of municipality of Ormoc in the late nineteenth century.

- 10 Even after the war, Revilla could not be arrested by the CIC as a suspected collaborator. He still managed his business with the Philippine Civil Affairs Unit (PCAU) during the rehabilitation period of Leyte. The PCAU office was providing him with various kinds of rehabilitation goods like textile and foodstuffs, which should have been sold to the residents of Ormoc's Barrio Deposito. However, Codilla stated that Revilla did not sell these to the residents of the said barrio but instead sold them elsewhere for a much bigger profit. In other words, he was profiteering. Codilla (1945) mentioned some examples: the PCAU's price for candies was at most 25 centavos each, while Revilla's store sold them for 30 centavos; flour was 18 centavos a kilo, but Revilla sold it for 60 centavos a ganta, which was around 30 centavos per kilo.
- 11 Mario Y. Hermosilla is a grandchild of Catalino Hermosilla.

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