

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

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Philippine Studies vol. 34, no. 4 (1986) 507–517

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Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

Notes and Comments

The Cigarreras of Manila

MA. LUISA T. CAMAGAY

Tobacco was brought to the Philippines from Mexico by the early Spanish missionaries. Its suitability to Philippine soil and climate plus the newly discovered pleasure of cigar smoking encouraged the natives to cultivate the plant. The cultivation of tobacco became a state monopoly in 1782 during the administration of Governor General Jose Basco y Vargas. As a state monopoly, the government strictly supervised the planting, harvesting and manufacture of tobacco. Women were employed in the government-run tobacco factories, which made the government the biggest employer of female workers and for the Filipina marked her entry into the factory system.

WOMEN WORKERS

The employment of women in tobacco factories prevailed not only in the Philippines but in Spain and Mexico as well for the Spaniards believed that women were more adept, more patient for this particular task, and less prone to commit frauds. The latter observation seems true because records in the Philippine National Archives indicate that smuggling involved the *cigarilleros*, and *fajinantes* rather than the *cigarreras*.¹ It was this inherent skill of women plus their supposedly innate honesty which made four out of five factories employ women exclusively. The factory in

1. The author consulted the bundles "Tabaco, Manila" found in the Philippine National Archives.

Arroceros became an exception to the practice as the government experimented on the hiring of men in the manufacture of *cigarillos*.

By the nineteenth century there were four factories in Manila and one in Cavite.² In Manila, two of these factories were on the south bank of the Pasig, in Arroceros, while the other two were located on the north bank in Meisig and in Malabon. The Fabrica de Arroceros had 1,000-1,500 workers; the Fabrica de Fortin in Arroceros, 8,000; the Fabrica de Meisig, 6,000 and the Fabrica de Cavite, 2,000.³

The Fabrica de Puros of Binondo had the following personnel in 1832:⁴ a *capatas inspector*, a *cabo de cuadrilla*, *fajinantes*, *celadoras*, *porteras*, *bastaqueras*, *cabecillas de mesa*, *cigarreras* and *cortadoras*. This factory had six *talleres* or workshops and the number of working tables varied for each workshop. Sometimes there would be forty-two working tables and at other times fifty or fifty-four. Based on the total number of *cigarreras*, there would be thirteen *cigarreras* per working table. The following tasks were assigned to the different members of the group:

1. selecting the best tobacco leaf to be used as outside covering of the cigar,
2. beating the tobacco leaf with a stone to make it more pliable,
3. moistening the tobacco leaf and filling it with smaller tobacco leaves,
4. rolling the tobacco leaf in the form of a cigar, and pasting both ends.

These cigars were then brought to another section of the factory where they were cut into uniform sizes by the *cortadoras*, and finally pressed, counted and packed by the *niveladores*, the *recontadoras* and the *encajonadoras* respectively.

Supervision of the work at each table was done by a *cabecilla*, while supervision of sections was done by the *maestra celadoras*, or *maestras* for short. These *maestras* were classified as *maestra primera*, *maestra segunda* and *maestra tercera*, depending upon their "experience or expertise."

2. Edilberto de Jesus, "Manila's First Factories," *Philippine Historical Review*, 1 (1971): 100.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Archivo Nacional de Indias, Sevilla. Plano de la Fabrica de Puros de Manila. Resumen de los empleados en la Fabrica de Puros. See table.

The cigarreras worked seated on the floor in front of low tables. One foreign visitor commented on the strong smell of tobacco and the noise created by the regular pounding of tobacco leaves — conditions which the cigarreras themselves had to contend with. What impressed visitors of the factories most was the order and discipline which reigned over the place. A French visitor commented:

I was surprised by the order and decency which reigned over the multitude of women and young girls; they certainly did not belong to the lowest rung of society and usually worked by families.⁵

A Russian visitor to the cigar factory in Binondo likewise made the following observation:

All were silent and none said a word but their eyes functioned very effectively and their hands even more so.⁶

The deftness of the cigarreras in rolling cigars was the object of the following remark of a Frenchman:

I noticed the celerity with which the women rolled each cigar and pasted both ends. However their work was not considered done until after both ends of the cigar were cut following a given model and afterwards strictly inspected by the *maestra* of the section. Then only was the cigar allowed to be part of a pack of 32; a thousand packs made up one chest and 500, a half chest.⁷

It is pertinent to point out here that the cigarreras were used to foreign visitors. A visit to a tobacco factory always figured in the itinerary of a foreign visitor of Manila. The cigarreras themselves seem to have enjoyed such visits as hinted in this observation of that foreign visitor:

Probably they noticed from our grimaces that the pounding was unpleasant to an unaccustomed ear so they banged away with all their might. Most of them could hardly restrain their laughter as the noise grew louder. For them it was unexpected distraction, a peculiar coquetry.⁸

These visits certainly served to break the monotony of the work.

Work for the cigarreras started at six in the morning and continued up to eleven and again from two in the afternoon until six

5. Laplace. *Voyage du Monde sur la "Favorite,"* 1833, tome 1, p. 413.

6. *Travel Accounts of the Islands (1832-1856)* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1974), p. 190.

7. Laplace, *Voyage du Monde*, p. 412.

8. *Travel Accounts of the Islands*, p. 141.

in the evening. A body search of all employees was made twice a day – at noon, before the cigarreras went home for lunch, and at the end of the day. The cigarreras worked from Monday thru Saturday.

In general, the work force was composed of women in their twenties and thirties, but adolescent girls as young as twelve years old were also employed. Often these adolescent girls had mothers or sisters who were cigarreras themselves, and most likely, they would have fathers and brothers who were cigarilleros. Thus at a very early age, the young members of the family were already helping their parents instead of becoming an economic burden. The mother and her daughter usually belonged to the same work group.

We have some idea how much a maestra received, but not a cigarrera. The figures below document the salary of a maestra at various occasions:

1868

Maestra Primera	–	384	escudos	anuales
Maestra Segunda	–	288	”	”
Maestra Tercera	–	192	’	’

1871

Maestra Primera	–	960	pesetas	anuales
Maestra Segunda	–	720	”	”
Maestra Tercera	–	480	”	”

1875

Maestra Primera	–	192	pesos	anuales
Maestra Segunda	–	144	’	’
Maestra Tercera	–	96	’	”

Mention is made that the cigarreras were well paid by the government. According to Robert MacMicking in 1850, the cigarrera earned six to ten dollars a month which was sufficient ‘to provide them with all their comforts and to leave a large balance for their expenses in dress, etc.’⁹ A French visitor made a similar observation when he said:

9. Robert MacMicking, *Recollection of Manila and the Philippines* Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1967) p. 183.

These workers are paid rather well and don't exude an air of misery despite the hard work they do, so unlike the workers of big factories in Europe.¹⁰

Women who sought employment as cigarreras came from as far north as Balanga, Bataan and as far south as Capiz. The bulk of the factory workers, however, came from the different suburbs of Manila. The cigarreras working in the tobacco factory of Malabon came from the nearby towns of Bulacan like Obando, Polo and Meycauyan. It was a practice among the cigarreras to board with families whose homes were close to the factory where they were working. Boarding houses must have done a brisk business not only with students who came to Manila to study but with cigarreras as well.

FACTORY DISCIPLINE

Discipline was instilled among the employees of the tobacco factories. Penalties for theft and other forms of deception ranged from fines, dismissal, the application of up to fifty blows, incarceration or any combination thereof.¹¹ A cigarrera caught stealing tobacco was given fifty lashes and was permanently disqualified from seeking employment in all tobacco factories.¹² There is an interesting report suspending some maestras for having been caught playing *panguingui* (a card game) while on the job. We have a good deal of information regarding disciplinary measures imposed on the celadoras but very little on the cigarreras. Was this because the system of command responsibility operated in the factories? Even turning out poor quality cigars was punishable. Maestras Silvestra Apostol and Bibiana Pascual were each suspended for five days and the cabecillas of tables 14 and 1 were fined ₱.50 for turning out poor quality cigars.¹³

Reasons for suspending and terminating maestras varied. Among the grounds for such actions were the following:

1. Suspended for abuse of liberty.

10. Benoist de Grandiere, *Souvenirs de Campagne; les ports de L. Extreme Oriente* (Paris: La Chevalier, 1869), p. 230.

11. Edilberto de Jesus, *The Tobacco Monopoly in the Philippines* (Quezon City: Ateneo Press, 1980), p. 41.

12. *Instrucciones Generales de la Renta de Tabaco*, (Sampaloc, 1829), p. 88.

13. Philippine National Archives hereafter referred to as PNA. Tabaco, Manila, 1876-77.

2. Suspended due to criminal charges.
3. Suspended for abuses committed in the exercise of her duties.
4. Dismissed for intentionally misgrading tobacco leaves.
5. Suspended for inefficiency and laziness.
6. Expelled from the factory because of insubordination.
7. Dismissed from the factory because of abandonment of his obligations.
8. Suspended for absenteeism and bad antecedents.¹⁴

There were cases when expulsion from one tobacco factory meant permanent disqualification from seeking employment in other tobacco factories.

Complaints of cigarreras against maestras are documented. The cigarreras complained more against the abuses and excesses committed by the maestras than any unfair labor practice of management. Individually or as a group, the cigarreras denounced the extortion activities of some maestras or accused them (the maestras) of oral defamation and even physical assault. The cigarreras had every right to complain for the maestras were admonished to treat with due respect the employees and to refrain from maltreating them by words or by deeds. The maestras were likewise encouraged to set an example of gentleness and good manners.¹⁵

The case of Teresa Arenas is illustrative of an abusive maestra.¹⁶ The maestras were the ones who performed the body search of all *operarias*. It was while performing this particular task that Teresa Arenas got into trouble. She was accused by two *operarias* – Maria del Carmen and Roberta de la Cruz – of malice in performing the routine body search. The two accused the maestra of having violently touched their private parts. Testimonies of fellow *celadoras* who witnessed the incident corroborated the accusation of the two cigarreras. When questioned by authorities, Teresa Arenas said that touching the private parts of the two *operarias* was part of the body search intended to prevent the smuggling of tobacco, and that all the testimonies against her were false and calumnious. Prior to this incident which took place in 1812, Teresa Arenas had been the object of a complaint by Getrudis Esperadion in 1803, by Jacinta Juliano (a fellow *celadora*) in 1805, and by Manuela de

14. PNA, Tabaco, Manila, 1869-79.

15. *Instrucciones Generales de la Renta de Tabaco*, p. 88.

16. PNA, Tabaco, Manila, 1815. The dossier of Teresa Arenas is found in this bundle.

la Cruz and Maria Jacinta (cabecillas) in 1807. The case ended with the dismissal of this troublesome maestra.

Outside the factory premises, the cigarreras had to contend with abuses committed by *cuadrilleros*. The report of the Inspector of the Fabrica de Princesa to the governor-general in 1856 reads:

The many abuses committed by the soldiers against the female workers of the factory (if the abuses can not be stopped) might cause the closing down of the factory as a result of manpower shortage. These workers are mostly the poor and needy people of the towns of Obando, Polo and Meycauayan and the remote towns of Bulacan who seek employment in the establishment, starting either as *bastaqueras* or sorters of tobacco until they learn how to make cigars. They live miserably in the nearby *poblaciones* and go to their homes only during *fiestas* or after having been paid their wages. However a group of soldiers would get together at night and search their homes under the pretext of looking for *tulisanes* and then would mercilessly maltreat them.

On the night of March 20 of this year [1856] at 12 midnight, a *maestra* by the name of Maria Tac came to me weeping to denounce the abuses of these soldiers. While she and her son and two other companions were sleeping, the door was forced open and four or five armed men broke into it and searched the house and their belongings for smuggled items. Not having found more than a peso and some *cuartos* which they took, they left uttering profanities, showing no respect for the *maestra*. The following day I went to see the *gobernadorcillo* of the mestizos to present the attached report. Without knowing what decision was taken in this regard, all I assure you is that the money taken was not returned and the abuses continue being committed.

On the night of the 14th of this month [May] between 9 and 10 in the evening, some soldiers led by their lieutenant, while on patrol in barrio Dampalit, met female cigarette workers residing in other towns and forced the workers to follow them to fields and forest. They (the cigarette workers) were only allowed to go after much begging on their part and after bribing the soldiers.

With this kind of behavior it is certain that very soon the workshops of this factory shall run out of employees.

This is why I bring all these to your knowledge so that the Central Government can adopt measures to curb such abuses which may adversely affect the factory established in that area. . .¹⁷

17. PNA, Tabaco, Manila, 1856.

The governor-general responded with an order to the alcaldes of the provinces of Tondo and Bulacan to adopt measures to curb the abuses of the cuadrilleros.

Many sought employment in the tobacco factories. Letters of application for the position of celadora are found in the bundles of "Tabaco, Manila" at the Philippine National Archives. A son-in-law requests a position of celadora for his mother-in-law and a woman who introduces herself as a wife of an *escribiente* applies as a celadora. A retiring cigarrera requests that she be replaced by her daughter.

Whenever vacancies occurred, three names were submitted to the Inspector de Fabrica to choose from. This procedure was followed when there was a vacancy for maestra tercera in the tobacco factory in Cavite.

In order to fill up the position of *maestra tercera* presently vacant due to the death of Victorina Custodio, I have the honor to submit as first priority the name of Carmen Mejillano, *cortadora* with six years of service, second priority Ignacia Mendoza and third priority Tomasa Gonzales both *cabecillas*. If your honor is after efficient service I implore you to appoint the first because of her good ratings and years of service. She would be capable of discharging the duties of a *maestra*.¹⁸

From the above statement, we gather that a *cortadora* and a *cabecilla* might aspire if qualified for the next higher position of *maestra tercera*. The documents are silent as to whether a cigarrera could rise to the position of a *cabecilla*. What was clear was that those who held supervisory responsibilities like *cabecillas* and *maestras* were above the mass of *cigarreras*. A *maestra tercera* worked her way up to the position of *maestra primera*.

A celadora was accorded forty days maternity or sick leave. In practice however, management tended to approve thirty days leave. Ynes de los Santos' frequent application for leave called her to the attention of management to the point of meriting a dossier.¹⁹ Her dossier contains letters of application for maternity and sick leaves with accompanying medical certificates. Ynes de los Santos gave birth almost every two years — 1869, 1871, 1873 and 1876. Each time she gave birth she requested a leave of sixty

18. PNA, Tabaco, Manila, 1877.

19. PNA, Tabaco, Manila, 1869-79. The dossier of Ynes de los Santos is found in this bundle.

days but management approved a leave of only thirty days. When stricken with an illness described as "calenturas intermitentes" (intermittent fever), Ynes de los Santos again requested a leave of forty-five days but was only granted thirty days. She caught the attention of management not only for her almost annual request for leave but also her misdemeanors and her propensity for moving from one factory to another. Ynes de los Santos was caught playing panguingui on the job and meted a punishment of six days suspension. A year after this incident we see her applying for the position of maestra tercera at the Fabrica de Puros in Cavite. Ten days later she was taken in. In 1868 she worked in the Fabrica de Binondo, in 1871 she was employed in the Fabrica de Fortin and then finally in 1879 in the Fabrica de Puros in Cavite. Dossiers of celadoras are few. The rarity of such dossiers give us the impression that the more a person figured in the records of management, the more chances of meriting a dossier.

CONCLUSION

If we take an inventory of the occupations of women during the nineteenth century, we can identify them as *labanderas*, *costureras*, *tinderas*, *criadas*, *bordadoras*, etc. These occupations are extensions of the usual household chores a Filipina undertook. Employed as a cigarrera, the Filipina for the first time became part of a factory system. She had a definite place of work, observed regular working hours, was subject to supervision and disciplinary measures and accorded sick and maternity leaves. The employment of women in the tobacco factories was the beginning of an age when a Filipina could work outside the home and engage in an activity which was not an offshoot of her home chores.

Resumen de los Empleados en la Fabrica de Puros (1832)

Capataces Inspectores	3	
Cabo de Cuadrilla	1	
Paginantés	12	16 hombres
Celadoras las Maestras de Talleres	6	
Celadoras 2as Maestras de Talleres	6	
Celadoras las Maestras de Corte	3	
Celadoras 2as Maestras de Corte	3	
Celadoras 1as Auxilias de Recibo	1	
Celadoras 2as Auxilias de Recibo	1	
Celadoras Portera	1	
Celadoras Bastagueras	7	
Cabecillas de Mesas	304	
Cigarreras	3,648	
Cortadoras	456	4,436 mujeres
Total	4,452	

Talleres

Capatas Inspector Don Fermin de Ocampo

<i># de los Talleres</i>	<i># de Mesas</i>	<i># de Operarias</i>	<i>Maestras Celadoras</i>
1	42	546	Maria Antonia Casimira Adriano
2	50	650	Josefa Ines Manuela Vargas
3	50	650	Josefa Navarro Gertrudes Petrona
4	54	702	Silveria Almaria Andrea Alvaro
5	54	702	Maria Dolores Juana Martines
6	54	702	Justina Ramirez Eleuteria Morante
<hr/> 6	<hr/> 304	<hr/> 3952	

CORTE

Capatas Inspector Don Facundo de Seiva

<i>de los Secciones</i>	<i>de Cortado</i>	<i>Maestras Celadoras</i>
1 a		
2 a	1 a	Maria Leonardo 1a
1 a	138	Leocadia Lazaro 2a
2 a		
1 a		
2 a	2 a	Joaquina de la Paz 1a
1 a	156	Tomasa Felizarda 2a
2 a		
1 a		
2 a	3 a	Ynes Barceras 1a
1 a	162	Francisca Carballo 2a
2a		
<hr/>		<hr/>
12	3	456
		6

Capatas Pagador Don Mariano Socorro

Maestras Celadoras Auxiliares

Melchora Pineda 1a
Leoncia de la Llana 2a