

philippine studies

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

Culture and Consciousness in a Philippine City

Alfred W. McCoy

Philippine Studies vol. 30, no. 2 (1982) 157–203

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>
Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

Culture and Consciousness in a Philippine City

ALFRED W. McCOY

INTRODUCTION

Over the past quarter century, Western social scientists have generally described the "Asian city" in negative terms — overpopulated, underdeveloped, "parasitic," and alien. These unfavorable descriptions are, in part, the product of an almost continuous debate over the cultural character of the Asian city. Writing in 1954, Robert Redfield and Milton Singer defined much of the terminology for this debate in an influential essay titled "The Cultural Role of the Cities." They argued that urbanization — regardless of time and place — usually evolved through two phases characterized by distinctive cultural patterns. In the primary phase, "a precivilized folk society is transformed into a peasant society and correlated urban center." During this phase, cities such as Peking play an "orthogenetic" role by transforming the "Little Tradition" culture of the peasants into a "Great Tradition" whose "moral, legal, aesthetic and other cultural norms" become the basis of an indigenous moral order. As the primary city is invaded by an alien culture and the old orthodoxy collapses, a secondary pattern of urbanization emerges in which the city plays a "heterogenetic role" by striving to integrate conflicting cultural influences in the midst of "personal and cultural disorganization." The "common cultural consciousness" that once bound city and country together fades, and is replaced by impersonal commercial ties. Among the various secondary phase cities, Redfield and Singer found the Asian the most problematic:

The author is indebted to Dr. Doreen G. Fernandez of the Ateneo de Manila University for her assistance in collecting zarzuela texts and sharing insights into the history of the Iloilo zarzuela. The author alone, however, is responsible for any errors of fact or interpretation.

Modern "colonial" cities (e.g. Jakarta, Manila, Saigon, Bangkok, Singapore, Calcutta) raise the interesting question whether they can revert from the "heterogenetic" to the "orthogenetic" role. For the past one hundred or more years they have developed as outposts of imperial civilizations, but as the countries in which they are located achieve political independence, will the cities change their cultural roles and contribute more to the civilization indigenous to their areas? Many obstacles lie in the path of such a course While many of these colonial cities have been centers of nationalism and movements for revival of local cultures, they are not likely to live down their heterogenetic past.¹

Almost two decades later, T.G. McGee applied the Redfield-Singer thesis to Kuala Lumpur and reached similarly pessimistic conclusions about the problems of "creating an orthogenetic role for a city with a colonial heritage." Instead of examining the "cultural consciousness" of the city itself, McGee sought evidence of an orthogenetic transformation in patterns of mixed-race residence and employment. But the traditional patterns of Malay-Chinese antagonism persisted and Kuala Lumpur had remained, he found, very much a "heterogenetic city."²

In contrast, geographer Rhoads Murphey has hypothesized that the alien diversity of the colonial port city had a strongly positive cultural impact upon South and Southeast Asia. In books and articles published over this past quarter century, Murphey has argued that the colonial port cities were "transplants of the new commercial-industrial order which had arisen in Europe since the decline of the Middle Ages." The Asian port cities were a "yeasty mixture which . . . drew to them and remolded a new group of Asians, committed to and involved in the process of modernization."³ The great exception, Murphey argues, was China. The treaty port cities along the China coast failed in their attempt to penetrate and transform the economy of the country's vast interior. Similarly, there was, Murphey feels, a sharp contrast between the positive or constructive cultural impact of colonial urbanization in South-Southeast Asia and the negative in China. While

1. Robert Redfield and Milton B. Singer, "The Cultural Role of the Cities," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 3 (October 1954): 60-62.

2. T.G. McGee, *The Urbanization Process in the Third World* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1971), pp. 121-47.

3. Rhoads Murphey, "Traditionalism and Colonialism: Changing Urban Roles in Asia," *Journal of Asian Studies* 29 (November 1969): 82-84.

South and Southeast Asian cities "created nationalism and nationalist consciousness almost *de novo*," China's port cities induced a "psychological shock of deep significance" and aroused a strong anti-foreign nationalist reaction.⁴

But Murphey has not been without his critics. Reviewing his most comprehensive monograph on this subject, China specialist Louis Sigel dismissed the work: "With few exceptions, the political development of Asia fails to justify the concentration of historical and social science attention on the Westernized urban intellectual elite in the attempt to understand modern Asian societies."⁵

Obscured by the intensity of debate, the literature on Asian urbanization shares some fundamental assumptions that underlie most, if not all, of these superficially conflicting viewpoints. Most importantly, there is an implicit reliance on the use of the paired opposites, or dichotomies, of classical German sociology — traditional versus modern, Great Tradition versus Little Tradition, heterogenetic versus orthogenetic, and Asian versus Western. Indeed, the first and most influential of those who applied this mode of analysis to the Asian city was Max Weber. Arguing that a genuine urban community must "display a relative predominance of trade-commercial relations," Weber stated that such cities were only found in the Occident and not in the Orient: "Finally measured by this rule, with possible exceptions, the cities of Asia were not urban communities even though they all had markets."⁶ Throughout subsequent decades, there has been some heated debate over the appropriate application of such dichotomies, but little if any dissent from their use as the foundation for analysis. In the recent Sigel-Murphey exchange, for example, both used the Asia-West dichotomy — a shared assumption so fundamental that it makes their bitter debate seem more a disputation between co-religionists than a putative struggle over first principles.

4. Rhoads Murphey, "The Treaty Ports and China's Modernization," in Mark Elvin and G. William Skinner, eds., *The Chinese City Between Two Worlds* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 31-33.

5. Louis T. Sigel, "Urbanization, Modernization, and Identity in Asia: A Historical Perspective," *Modern China* 4 (October 1978): 461-89.

6. Max Weber, *The City* (New York: The Free Press, 1958), p. 80.

Such theoretical questions have remained paramount in the study of the Asian city because the empirical evidence — historical, ethnographic, and sociological — is still so limited. In comparison with parallel studies of Europe, America or even Latin America, the Asian urban field is still very much in its infancy. The theoretical debates are so furious and constructs so elaborate, in part, because there is not sufficient data for resolution or refinement. As is common in so much of the social science literature on the Third World, studies of Asian urbanization have the shape of an inverted pyramid — a great weight of theory resting on a narrow empirical base.

The recent proliferation of historical and cultural studies on the Philippines is, however, beginning to create a fund of data sufficient for re-examination of some of these assumptions about the culture and consciousness of the Asian city. In particular, Doreen Fernandez' study of the *zarzuela* theater of prewar Iloilo City provides us with an apt point of entry.⁷ While focused on the dramatic history of the *zarzuela* in a specific urban environment, the Fernandez study raises other questions beyond its stated cultural concerns. In his examination of the Redfield thesis, discussed above, T. G. McGee focused on locational and ethnic problems that seem, in retrospect, far removed from the question of urban culture originally posed by Redfield. Instead, it might be more profitable to narrow our focus to the field of popular culture. Although the popular theater has remained until late the province of literary criticism, the study of the interaction between the theater and the mass can serve as a viable avenue of approach to the larger problem of urban culture as defined by Redfield. As an adaptation of a Western dramatic form by a partly Westernized intellectual elite, the *zarzuela*'s history represents a potentially revealing case of the Asian/Western or heterogenetic/orthogenetic dichotomies posed by Redfield and his successors.

THE ZARZUELA

During the first three decades of this century, vernacular theater in Iloilo City, the archipelago's second city, went through a com-

7. The definitive work on the Ilongo *zarzuela* which should be consulted by anyone interested in either its social context or dramatic aspects is, Doreen G. Fernandez, *The Iloilo Zarzuela: 1903-1930* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1978).

plete life cycle: a decade of rapid, if not explosive, development; a few years of brilliant florescence; and, finally, a sudden demise. Although drama and variety shows enjoyed some success, the mainstay of the Iloilo stage was the vernacular zarzuela, a Spanish-derived musical form combining light songs with usually serious plots. Despite its considerable popular success, the zarzuela survived less than three decades. During the relatively brief period from 1903 to 1930, seven major Iloilo dramatists wrote the seventy or so productions that constitute virtually the entire corpus of the region's vernacular zarzuela.

While the Iloilo zarzuela was not without literary merit, any analysis that deals with it purely in terms of meter, music or stagecraft would be, as Fernandez repeatedly reminds us, missing the point. The zarzuela's initial inspiration was a frustrated nationalism; its highest aspiration was the moral transformation of a colonized proletariat; its sustenance was an urban entrepot dependent upon a monocrop export economy; and the impetus for its decline was the emergence of a militant working class grown beyond its conservative moral maxims. Distinguished from the bulk of the city's workers most often by their erudition and only occasionally by notably higher incomes, Iloilo's vernacular zarzuelistas were motivated by a sense of social responsibility; they tried to use the stage as a didactic forum for the uplift of the urban mass. For three decades these writers were consistent advocates of individual moral rectitude and mutual self-help as the keys to the improvement of working class conditions and the liberation of the Philippines. With a population of only 70,000, Iloilo City could not sustain a major professional theater. In any case, her dramatists did not confine themselves to purely literary activities. Aside from deriving a basic income from journalism or petty commerce, most writers were active as candidates for municipal office, leaders of religious or mutual aid societies whose main constituency was the urban proletariat, and propagandists for Philippine independence.

Its activist authors and didactic format make the Iloilo zarzuela particularly appropriate for a social as well as literary analysis. Although the dramatists were members of the city's middle economic stratum, the zarzuela's main audience was the urban working class and its fate, to a large extent, reflected the conditions and

consciousness of the urban mass. The number and success of its productions bears some correlation to the cycle and structure of the region's sugar economy since the size and prosperity of the potential zarzuela audience generally varied with the amount of sugar passing through the city's waterfront warehouses. More particularly, the drama's entertainment value was frequently overwhelmed by its didactic element and moral vision, and therefore required the tolerance, if not active interest, of an audience drawn largely from the city's working class. The zarzuela's "Golden Age" coincided not only with a period of increased sugar exports, but with the felt needs of the working class for a social critique and prescription for reform. Although nationalists, Iloilo's dramatists were also, with one notable exception, political conservatives and their advocacy of change was consequently restrained. Working class consciousness eventually grew beyond the zarzuela's political limitations, and the Iloilo stage lost its vitality, becoming fossilized as a monument to a brilliant period in the region's cultural history.

THE SETTING

The Western Visayas region has undergone three major economic transformations in the last two hundred years and each has had major consequences for the development of Iloilo City.⁸ The first major change occurred in the late 18th Century when the Western Visayas began a transition from a largely subsistence economy to commercialized handicraft textile production. Next, in the decade following the opening of Iloilo's port to direct foreign trade in 1855, the handicraft textile industry failed in the face of competition from English manufactures, and plantation sugar production became the region's major export. Finally, large outside investments during World War I provided the capital for the construction of modern centrifugal sugar mills and effectively industrialized that sector of the region's sugar industry.

By 1898 the fertile coastal plain of Negros Island, which faces Iloilo City across a narrow strait, had been transformed from forest into several hundred large sugar plantations generally uni-

8. For a description of the development of the sugar export economy in the Western Visayas see, Alfred W. McCoy, "Ilo-ilo: Factional Conflict in a Colonial Economy, Iloilo Province, Philippines, 1937-1955" (Phd. dissertation, Yale University, 1977).

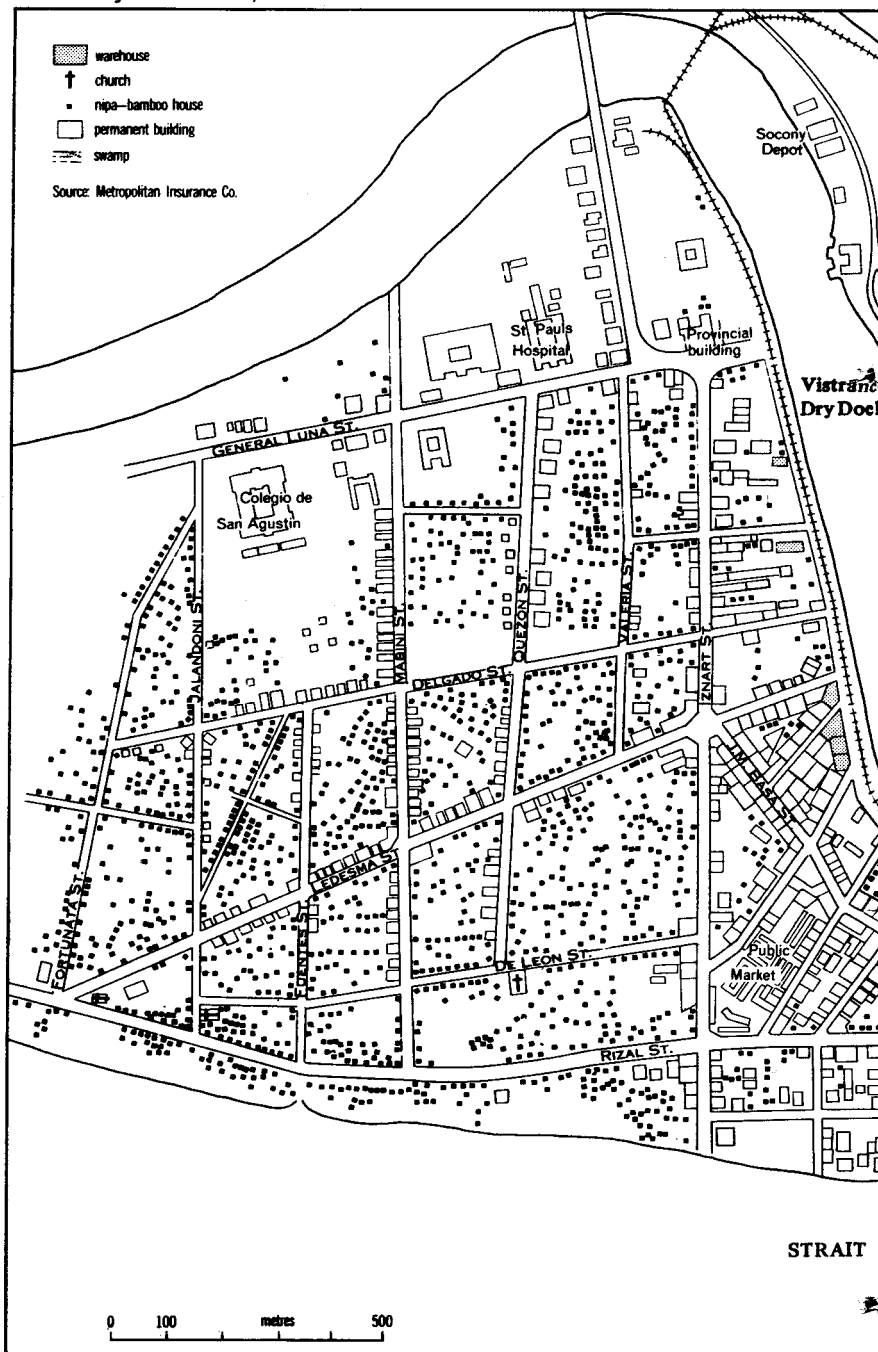
form in their structures. Each had its own small mill, workers' compound, and loading dock to ship its harvest of milled sugar to Iloilo's waterfront. During World War I, however, local and foreign financeers invested sufficient capital to replace some 820 individually owned sugar mills of one to twelve horse power with seventeen central factories linked to the plantations with a network of rails. By increasing the efficiency of the milling process in step with producers in Java, Hawaii, and Cuba, the modern mills saved the region's plantation economy from extinction. But in so doing they initiated a series of social and economic changes with major consequences for Iloilo City, its working class, and its zarzuela.

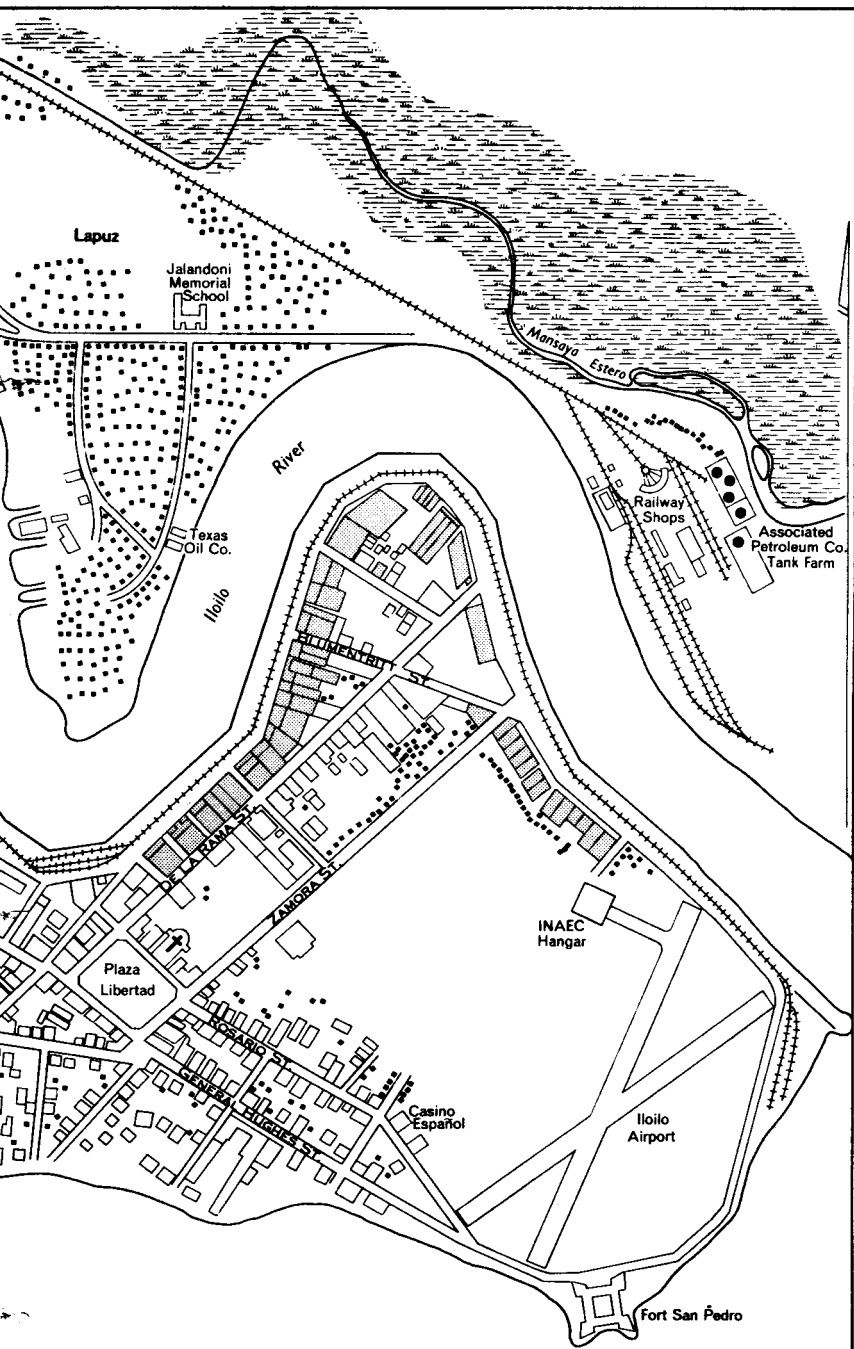
Most significantly, the centralization of milling sites facilitated the construction of ten modern docking facilities along the Negros coastline, allowing direct sugar exports from the mills and eventually rendering Iloilo City's warehouses redundant. When the mills were first constructed, exporters initially found it cheaper to abandon their small sailcraft and ship to the Iloilo waterfront via a single tug-and-lighter stevedoring corporation. This change amplified the scale of work gang organization on the waterfront, and depressed both wages and working conditions for the city's stevedores. Eventually, exporters discovered it more economical still to ship to foreign markets direct from the Negros docks thereby bypassing Iloilo's warehouses altogether. Increasingly deprived of a share of the region's sugar handling, Iloilo City began an economic decline in the late 1920s from which it has never recovered.

LITERARY ANTECEDENTS

By the end of the nineteenth century Iloilo City had developed into a major center of Spanish colonial culture. Spanish had become the commercial and cultural medium of a community comprised of English and Swiss sugar factors; Spanish officials and merchants; Chinese traders; and Visayan Filipinos, largely wealthy planters, bureaucrats, and clerks. Spanish literacy among the indigenous population was encouraged by the development of a Spanish-medium, public education system after 1863 and the establishment of a local press. The Spanish-medium system, however, incorporated only a fraction of the region's population, and supplemented the informal system of private, lower class tutors that

Iloilo City Land Use, 1934





developed widespread vernacular literacy among peasants and working class by the late nineteenth century. The first Spanish newspaper in Iloilo was established in 1880, and Spanish remained the primary language of journalism until WWII. In 1931, for example, English *daily* newspaper circulation was only 2,030, Visayan language *weekly* 12,180, and Spanish *daily* 14,696 – a remarkably high readership for an urban population of only 100,000, and far higher proportionally than the colony's other major cities.⁹

It was then, Spanish drama, not the vernacular, which established a theater in Iloilo City during the late nineteenth century. The first Spanish zarzuela was performed in Iloilo sometime in the 1880s. For the next forty years touring Spanish companies made regular visits, usually playing to large and enthusiastic audiences of both Spaniards and Filipinos.¹⁰ A local theatrical society, La Sociedad Lirico-Dramatica, was founded in September 1895 and began to take an active role in the presentation of Spanish zarzuela with the support of wealthy foreign and Filipino merchants. While the society's board remained the province of the wealthiest foreign merchants, Ilongo actors gradually came to dominate its productions, thereby gaining an education in acting and stagecraft. There were only a few Filipino actors among the largely expatriate cast of its 1904 production, but its 1915 presentation of "Un Crimen Misterioso" was almost exclusively Filipino and included a number of prominent Ilongo journalists and writers – vernacular zarzuela author Jose Nava, his brother Mariano, journalist Lucio Fernandez, and vernacular zarzuela actress Concepcion Zolayvar.¹¹ Despite the rapid growth of Iloilo's theater in the late nineteenth century, original drama made little progress whether in Spanish or the vernacular. Severely restrained by strict Spanish censorship regulations, Ilongo authors were discouraged from writing and only one original drama of any seriousness was produced before the end of Spanish colonial rule in 1898.¹²

9. Andres R. Camasura, *Cebu-Visayas Directory* (Manila, 1932), pp. 14, 51.

10. Daisy Hontiveros-Avellana, "Philippine Drama: A Social Protest," in Antonio G. Manuud, ed., *Brown Heritage: Essays on Philippine Cultural Tradition and Literature* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1967), pp. 669-70; *El Eco de Panay* (Iloilo), 18 October 1890, p. 4; Fernandez, *Iloilo Zarzuela*, pp. 33-39.

11. *El Nuevo Herald* (Iloilo), 4 Sept. 1905, p. 2; 28 Oct. 1904, p. 3; 25 Sept. 1915, p. 5; *Eco de Panay*, 24 May 1893, p. 2.

12. *El Porvenir de Bisayas* (Iloilo), 9 Sept. 1896, p. 4; *Eco de Panay*, 1 June 1893, p. 2; Cornelio Hilado, *Ang Babai nga Hauran* (Manila: Guadalupe Asilo Huerfanos, 1889).

While the region's emerging literati were influenced by modern Spanish theater during the late nineteenth century, the region's peasantry and workers continued to enjoy the oldest colonial dramatic form, the *komedya* or *moro-moro*. Usually performed during annual town fiestas, most *komedya* were colorful spectacles set in a timeless Europe, and featured fantastic battles between Muslim and Christian monarchs. Despite an obvious emphasis on romance and martial arts, the *komedya* were nonetheless didactic vehicles disseminating a propaganda supportive of the Spanish colonial church and state.¹³ A correspondent for an Iloilo newspaper, *El Eco de Panay*, described an 1893 production of a typical Visayan *moro-moro* in one of the region's rural towns. This one involved prolonged battles between a Christian prince, protected by a magic amulet of chicken feathers, and a Muslim king of the southern Philippines. During the final scenes, the Christians are wakened by a chorus of angels as the Muslims are about to attack, and in the dramatic sword play the Muslims are cut down one by one as the "excited" viewers shouted "one dead . . . two dead . . . three dead. . ."¹⁴ Although Iloilo's zarzuelistas later attacked the *komedya* for its lack of verisimilitude, its religious didacticism probably influenced the secular didacticism of the zarzuela itself.

ZARZUELA'S EARLY DEVELOPMENT

The Iloilo zarzuela first appeared during a remarkably active period in the cultural and political history of Iloilo and the Philippines. From 1896 to 1902 revolutionary armies led by members of the Filipino elite fought both Spanish and American colonial regimes — defeating the Spaniards by 1898, but defeated in turn by the Americans. Some months before the last major guerilla armies had surrendered in 1902, however, most of the wealthiest Filipinos had already decided to collaborate with the new colonizers in exchange for promises of a greatly liberalized colonial administration. The American regime in turn removed most censorship regulations, and allowed the formation of political parties, labor

13. Doreen G. Fernandez, "From Ritual to Realism: A Brief Historical Survey of Philippine Theater," *Philippine Studies* 28, no. 4 (1980): 393-402.

14. Encarnacion J. Gonzaga, "Bisayan Literature (From Pre-Spanish Times to 1917)" (University of the Philippines, M.A. Thesis, 1917), p. 73; *Eco de Panay*, 20 May 1893, p. 3; Fernandez, *Iloilo Zarzuela*, pp. 20-28.

unions, and non-Catholic religious organizations for the first time. Resigned to preparing themselves for independence without recourse to armed revolution, elite Filipino nationalists used the more liberal climate to pursue their goal through political and social reforms. In Iloilo the first years of United States colonial rule saw the organization of a wide range of reform movements: the anti-Catholic *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* (IFI), the region's first labor unions, workers' mutual aid societies, several Filipino-owned political newspapers, cooperative commercial societies, the Iloilo Feminist League, and two elite political parties.

Iloilo's first vernacular drama and zarzuelas were produced in 1903, and they reflected the contemporary atmosphere of social reform. Judging from theatrical articles in Iloilo's Spanish language press, the elite had consciously rejected the moro-moro for its lack of moral or didactic capabilities and encouraged the new vernacular drama and zarzuela, still modelled on nineteenth century Spanish productions, because of their potential for a positive moral effect on the mass.¹⁵ The reviewer of the first of the new vernacular productions staged in Iloilo in January 1903, "Ang Gugma Sang Maluib" by Angel Magahum, praised it as a popular antidote to the moro-moro:

Until now, unfortunately, one has not seen anything but moro-moros in Visayan productions here, which, if they amuse the vulgar mass, are a bad waste of time for those who want us to progress. It is good, therefore, that Mr. Magahum let us see a true drama in Visayan last night which will fatally wound the "moro-moro," and that the author is called to be one of the reformers of our theater.¹⁶

Iloilo's first vernacular zarzuela production in April 1903 consisted of three plays by the man who came to be known as the "prince of the zarzuela," Valente Cristobal. Although the press notice of this first play commented only briefly that Cristobal's "Ang Capitan" showed a "moral depth," later reviewers had occasion to discuss his obvious and self-conscious didacticism.¹⁷ Writing in the vernacular newspaper *Kadapig Sg Banwa* in 1908, a reviewer praised this element of Cristobal's most popular zarzuela, "Nating": "This operetta is a work which can teach and correct

15. *El Tiempo* (Iloilo), 8. Nov. 1901, p. 4; Fernandez, *Iloilo Zarzuela*, pp. 48-50.

16. *El Tiempo*, 12 Jan. 1903, p. 3.

17. *El Tiempo*, 27 Apr. 1903, p. 2.

the bad character and excesses of government officials, intellectuals and the rich who through their money, power and intellect oppress the poor; it is a work which can teach unmarried women to be proper young ladies. . . ."¹⁸ Cristobal was self-consciously didactic, and a University of the Philippines graduate student who interviewed him wrote this precis of his "characteristics" in 1917:

As shown in almost all his works Cristobal is . . . a lover of everything that is Philippines and above all a famous moral teacher. He himself has said that everytime he takes up a pen to write down his thoughts he always has this object in his mind — to teach a lesson.¹⁹

As the most professional and prolific of the zarzuela writers, Cristobal's life and career bear some examination. His parents were both natives of the Binondo district of Manila, but he was born in Polo, Bulacan in 1875. According to a notarial document in the Philippine National Archives, his parents had moved to Iloilo City sometime before 1887 where his father was employed as a barber with a category number six income tax certification, a classification at the middle range of colonial categories.²⁰ Since the family lacked money his primary education was erratic. And so, at age twelve, Cristobal accepted the offer of a family friend to accompany him to Manila to attend the Colegio San Juan de Letran. Instead of financing his education, the sponsor forced Cristobal to serve in his house for two years before the young man could escape. Upon return to Iloilo Cristobal worked at a variety of trades to help his family — a painter, a horseshoer, a tailor, a carpenter, a stonecutter and later an employee at the House of Hoskyn and Company. Despite his lack of formal education, Cristobal did learn to read and write in Spanish as well as Visayan, and most of the stage directions in his vernacular librettos were written in Spanish. In 1898, while employed as a clerk at Hoskyn's department store, Cristobal married Micaela Hormigos, daughter of an Iloilo waterfront fish vendor and small farmer, and moved into her family's house on Legaspi St. near the city waterfront. Several years later Cristobal shifted his residence to the Hoskyn's ware-

18. *Kadapig Sg Banwa*, (Iloilo) 7 July 1908, p. 2.

19. Gonzaga, "Bisayan Literature," p. 106.

20. Venta con Pacto de Retroventa de una casa, por Timoteo Cristobal y Gregoria Perez, 31 August 1887, Protocolo 1600 (YLOILO), Philippine National Archives (PNA); interview, Salvador Sagan, Manila, 5 July, 1976.

house where his second child was born. By 1906 he had made enough money from his zarzuelas to put up a modest bamboo and wood home on Calle Fuentes. Cristobal produced his first zarzuela in 1903 and during the next three decades wrote thirty-two known works of which twenty-six were zarzuelas. While almost all were critical and popular successes, most only played one or two nights consecutively in the city. Although he, like most zarzuelistas, also toured the rural towns with considerable success, Cristobal was generally unable to support his family from his work as a dramatist. He provided his household with additional income from a few bullock carts which did hauling work about the city, and worked as a judge in the local cockpits on Sundays.²¹

Cristobal's wealth of personal experience as a laborer and his continuing contact with the urban economy gave him a sensitivity to the conditions and aspirations of the city's working class which is reflected in plays. Rather than peopling his stages with the mythical kings of the *moro-moro* or the wealthy planter's daughters as in the earliest vernacular dramas, Cristobal drew his characters from the lower class of city life. The hero of "Salvador" (1912) is the son of a small Iloilo cattle trader who works as a laborer in a Negros sugar plantation. Tomas in "Mainawaon" (The Merciful: 1922) is a former stevedore turned rig driver. The two main characters in "Ang Mga Viciohan" (The Vices: 1903) are servants in the home of an employee in a waterfront commercial house, and Gregorio in "Calipay Sang Panday" (Happiness of a Carpenter: 1906) is a master carpenter. The few wealthy men who do appear on his stages are most often pompous or corrupt.

Cristobal was evidently not content to merely observe the city and advocate reform through his plays. He was, as much as his fortune and status would allow, a relatively active social and political leader in Iloilo. Cristobal served two terms as a municipal councilor (1907-1912), and received the second highest number of votes among the nine elected councilors in 1909.²² Following a disastrous fire in one of the city's largest working class districts in 1907, he served on a committee to aid the victims comprising the provincial governor, the municipal mayor, and leading Iloilo poli-

21. Fernandez, *Iloilo Zarzuela*, pp. 52-59.

22. *Kadapig Sg Banwa*, 9 Jan. 1907, p. 2; *Nuevo Heraldo*, 9 Nov. 1909, p. 3.

tical figures.²³ The strong anti-friar sentiment manifest in several of Cristobal's earlier zarzuelas was matched by the support he gave the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI), a nationalist schism established shortly after the revolution. In 1908 he presented a benefit performance of "Nating" and "Calipay Sang Panday," his strongest anti-friar piece, at a benefit for this church.²⁴ And in 1913, in addition to presenting another zarzuela benefit for the IFI, Cristobal was elected to the IFI church board. Also elected were Ciriaca Izar, a singer who often appeared in his plays, and Felix Malhabour, whose Teatro Malhabour was inaugurated with the benefit performances of "Nating" and later was the stage for a large number of his productions.²⁵ While the IFI was largely a nationalist religious organization in Manila and northern Luzon, in Iloilo it conducted an urban ministry to the poorer neighborhoods and was generally identified with the city's working class.

Cristobal's ideological concerns and didactic bent are reflected in many of his plays, even the most comical or romantic. They generally manifest themselves in the form of anti-friar or anti-Catholic sentiments; they call for Philippine independence and scathingly attack all forms of personal vice, particularly those of the working class such as drink, gambling, and laziness. Finally, they create role models, again almost always workers, to inspire industry, honesty, and other personal virtues. On occasion, however, Cristobal rises to an exposition of peasant and worker grievances against the social system.

Cristobal's second and earliest extant production, "Ang Capitán," is a light romance set in the early days of the Philippine revolution. A young woman, Magdalena, is courted by two men — a Chinese who bribes the mother with gifts each time he visits and a captain in the revolutionary army who has impressed Magdalena's father. Refusing to wait for her parents' decision, Magdalena elopes with the captain, and the play ends as she returns home to be forgiven by her parents. The zarzuela's brevity and simple plot make it appear at times something of a didactic vehicle spiced with domestic humor. First performed in March 1903 when some revo-

23. *Kadapig Sg Banwa*, 7 Sept. 1907, p. 1.

24. *Kadapig Sg Banwa*, 18 Aug. 1908, p. 1.

25. *Kadapig Sg Banwa*, 18 Aug. 1908, p. 1; *Makinaugalingon* (Iloilo), 5 June 1913, p. 2.

lutionary armies were still in the field and the local nationalist struggle against the Roman Catholic Church was at its most intense, the play makes several strong nationalist and anti-Catholic statements, indicating that Magdalena's marriage choice is symbolic of the decision facing the Filipinos as a nation.

The nationalist tone is set in the opening scene when the Captain enters and sings: ". . .our desire is. . .Independence for the nation. The Filipino Nation, a land full of riches !!!VIVA!!!" With the captain identified at the outset as a nationalist figure, the conflict between the father Tomas and the mother Serapia over their daughter's marriage choice takes on larger implications. Although Tomas is a wealthy landowner who desires the marriage between his daughter and the captain largely for the prestige it will bring him, he does express strong nationalist sentiments and is critical of the Spanish friars. An argument between Tomas and Serapia over their daughter's marriage partner in one of the play's early scenes soon turns into a debate over the contemporary friar controversy. Tomas declares that the friars "are lying to the whole Philippines" about their religion and concludes: "Hum. . .does Serapia intend that I still believe the friars' teachings? Since this revolution was made because of the mad and oppressive way they treated us, why should I continue to believe them?"

Another of Cristobal's early plays, "Ang mga Viciohan" (The Vices), first performed in May 1903, is light entertainment which mounts a rather thinly disguised attack on the dominant personal vices of the day. In the opening scenes of this day in the life of a commercial employee's household, we are told that the master is courting three women simultaneously, the cook is stealing from the household food allowance to gamble illegally in a den maintained by the local police chief, and the servant is a hopeless drunkard. By the end of the play the master's women friends have discovered his deceit and the servants are sent to jail for their dishonesty. The zarzuela closes with a rousing chorus: "Don't you be like them/Don't you imitate them/These men of vice/Whom you have been watching."

If "Ang mga Viciohan" is an explicit attack on vice, Cristobal's "Calipay Sang Panday" (The Happiness of a Carpenter), first staged three years later, offers a somewhat more subtle statement of the author's nationalist and social viewpoints. Although the zar-

zuela's action transpires within the space of a single Saturday in the household of master carpenter Gregorio, the plot line is quite thin and the play only coheres as two loosely joined ideological statements. The first half of the play consists largely of a series of nationalist monologues by the carpenter's wife Tecla. In the opening scenes, for example, she lectures her daughter, who is partially deaf, about her duties as a Filipina, and reminds her that: "Your brother José was killed by the Friars because he tried to liberate the Philippines from darkness. . . ." It should be noted that this appeal for independence was made at a time when the Federalista Party, which advocated U.S. statehood for the Philippines, was the strongest in the colony, just as the criticisms of the Spanish friars were made when the Catholic Church was mounting a strong counter-attack against the IFI.

The last half of the play is an exposition of correct workingmen's values through the character of the admirable master carpenter Gregorio. During the body of the play he has demonstrated his generosity by agreeing to accept a deaf mute, the nephew of a close friend, as his apprentice. Unlike many of the other characters, he is presented as a man of honor. The final scene is a carpenters' party at Gregorio's house on a Saturday night, attended by his crew, a medical doctor, and Roque, the wastrel son of a wealthy local politician. After the carpenters' chorus enters his house for the celebration, Gregorio stands to speak:

GREGORIO: All of you [carpenters] sit and listen to my speech. Today is Saturday; all of you are being paid for your work; so all of you are in good spirits, and your bodies feel strong since there is money in your pockets, no?

CHORUS: Yes, Boss.

GREGORIO: This, therefore, is a carpenter's happiness. Oh, you men of my crew, you and I may only be carpenters, but we are proud since we earn our money. (APPLAUSE).

BYSTANDER: Este muy bien.

GREGORIO: Those of you therefore who wish to live at peace with this world must work each day. You must fill your obligations and respect what is right. (APPLAUSE).

CHORUS: Let the Doctor speak.

DOCTOR: Brothers, I am very happy since all of you are living from your own efforts. The industrious man, therefore, has no hunger, no sadness, no thirst, and no resentments. Consequently, labor is the source of happiness. (APPLAUSE).

(MUSICA FINAL)

(REPEAT)

Even though we are poor
 We have our pride
 Because we have our work;
 Sweat is the source of our
 Food since we know what is right.

(REPEAT)

The hammer speaks:
 pok, pok, pok —
 Which means the sound of money falling.

And the saw answers:
 Quitsi, quitsi, quitsi,
 which means if the cut is straight
 Give me my money.

So we are happy carpenters since
 Tomorrow is a day of rest
 Since that is the right of those
 Who have made their money from honest labor.

(CURTAIN)

Cristobal's most famous zarzuela, "Nating" (1908), perhaps the most popular ever staged in Iloilo, was loved by Ilongo audiences for its songs, wit, and romance. But it is also remarkable as a contemporary social document. The story of a virtuous young woman torn between the man her parents have chosen and her beloved, the play contains a contrived middle section in which the heroine Nating is kidnapped and taken to the mountains by a group of bandits. Written just after the surrender of peasant rebel Papa Isio in the hills of nearby Negros and during the period of continuous raids by Otó's band of outlaws along the cordillera of western Panay, the play contains several moving monologues by members of the bandit group. After Nating is taken to their camp in the mountains, each bandit gives a speech about the sad circumstances that led him to the life of a mountain outlaw. One was captured by Muslim pirates but escaped from their ship and fled to an island forest far from home; another lost his family in a shipwreck; and a third, Ynigo, was a debt slave who fled a life of servitude:

YNIGO: Ha, the reason I am living in these mountains is the fault of a man who was then a rich and famous oppressor in our town, Captain [Mayor] Yngoy.

PEDRO: Oppressive rich men — there were certainly a lot of them in our town too.

JOAQUIN: How strange. Are there still rich men who can stomach oppressing the people?

YNIGO: Listen, so you will believe:

In those days since we were poor father borrowed ₱12.00 from Capt. Yngoy, one of his *compare*; two months later when father was not able to pay he was forced to become a servant in the house of Capt. Yngoy. That poor old man was never able to get free since Capt. Yngoy was a friend of the local mayor. After serving for seven years my poor old man died; and my mother was compelled to replace him as a servant.

JOAQUIN: Your mother agreed?

YNIGO: There was nothing else she could do, for if she did not agree Capt. Yngoy would have had her thrown in prison.

PEDRO: How about the courts?

YNIGO: What courts? There in those days the rich men were the courts. Oh, listen for there is more to my story. Mother became ill and died from grief at the injustice done to her. And when she died Capt. Yngoy called me to him and said to me: "Your mother has died and you must become my servant to pay your family's debt of ₱87." When I heard this my thoughts grew dark, I drew my bolo, and stabbed Capt. Yngoy.

JOAQUIN: Did he die?

YNIGO: I don't know since I fled immediately, and when I heard that six Guardia Civil troopers were looking for me, I fled to another district, and later I came to live in these mountains.

As his career developed Cristobal moved away from obvious didacticism with explicit statements on vice, social problems, and nationalism to the creation of more complex plots with positive role models for Iloilo's workers. His most realistic social document, "Si Salvador" (1913), is the story of a young man of good character who sets out to make his fortune in the sugar fields of Negros. The first act is set in Iloilo City at the home of Lucas, a small cattle buyer, who is a widower and lives with his daughter and son Salvador, a student. When Salvador's elder sister elopes to marry without parental approval, Lucas wounds his new son-in-law with a knife outside the church and is sentenced to twenty years in a Manila prison. After his sister flees to Cebu with her husband, Salvador is left alone and crosses the strait to Negros Island.

The second act opens at the plantation house of Don José where Salvador and some other workers are signing on as field hands and accepting loans which are carefully noted by Don José's daughter. As a social document, this act is a remarkably accurate portrayal of many of the problems of hacienda life. The initial loans are the first step into debt bondage, a basic planter tactic of securing labor; the plantation cook grafts from the food budget and serves the workers an inadequate diet; the workers' complaints about the food are made in a deferential, in fact, servile manner; whipping of workers is a common disciplinary practice; and the field laborers' songs of sweat and numbing toil contrast sharply with those of the Iloilo dock workers who chant merrily at the sight of ships in port and the prospect of drinking money at the end of the day.

While the incidental details of the plot and dialogue are valuable social documentation, the plot itself represents Cristobal's conservative prescription for the amelioration of working class conditions. Salvador is presented as a virtuous man, and all classes — workers, foremen, and Don José — perceive him as such. Noting that Salvador refuses to go into debt and works hard in the fields long after the lunch bell sounds, Don José promotes him to the post of *encargado*, or senior foreman. When a friend, who was whipped by Don José for a minor infraction, approaches Salvador and invites him to join a group which is going to rob the planter and rape his daughter in revenge, Salvador lures the rebellious workers into a trap, puts out a fire, and emerges the hero. Salvador marries the planter's daughter and inherits the hacienda nine years later when Don José dies. Returning to Iloilo on a vacation, Salvador meets his closest boyhood friend who is now a waterfront stevedore. Through him Salvador is reunited with his father, recently released from prison, and his sister, who has broken with her husband and returned to Iloilo. Salvador invites his family and friends to accompany him to Negros and live on the hacienda. The moral of the story for the working man is clear enough. Be honest, thrifty, and industrious; suffer the indignities your society inflicts upon you; and be of good character and you shall have your reward. While the hacienda's treatment of its workers is painted darkly, there are no hints that unionization or other forms of collective action might be an antidote. On the contrary, the whole

robbery incident indicates Cristobal's advocacy of social passivity and individual morality as a social prescription.

THE WORKING CLASS, 1903-1913

The period between the outbreak of the Philippine-American War in Iloilo in 1900 and the establishment of duty free entry of Philippine exports to the United States in 1913 was one of slack in the regional economy of the Western Visayas. Lacking a guaranteed market for sugar exports, plantation sugar production declined and the volume of cargo passing through the port of Iloilo was correspondingly low. While elite nationalists were actively experimenting with a variety of political and social reforms, it was not a particularly venturesome period for the urban working class. Wage-price ratios were tolerable; the size of the work force was reduced and jobs were scarce; and work crew structures in shipping and waterfront labor were still dominated by small, intimate crews of less than forty men under generally paternalistic foremen. The period appears, therefore, as something of a prolonged courtship. The elite nationalists tried to woo workers for the new associations with vernacular rhetoric and a novel organizational style. The wealthier of those involved in these initial efforts were usually former revolutionary officers who were seeking to amplify the strength of the independence movement by extending it into the working class.

During this period elite nationalists tried to establish two different types of workers' organizations: labor unions attracting members on the basis of work related issues such as wages and conditions; and mutual-aid societies, usually specific to a particular neighborhood, which provided insurance for widows and a guarantee of a decent burial from the contributions of the membership. The first labor union in Iloilo, the *Union Obrera*, was organized in 1903 by Julio P. Hernandez, a wealthy Iloilo sugar planter who had served as Secretary of War in the local revolutionary government. As a revolutionary leader Hernandez had used bolo-wielding peasants as cannon fodder against U.S. troops armed with repeating rifles. As a Spanish language newspaper columnist in 1908, he urged the imposition of draconian laws to prevent Negros plantation laborers from absconding on their debts to the planters. Not

surprisingly, the union was short lived and achieved little more than notices in the local press.²⁶

The earliest significant mutual aid society, *Mga Baybayanon* (The Shore Dwellers), was established in December 1905 by Rosendo Mejica. A former hacienda clerk of lower class origins, he had organized the Negros branch of the Union Obrera in 1903 and was now a vernacular newspaper publisher. Its secretary was Jimeno Damaso, Mejica's cousin who later became one of Iloilo's seven major zarzuelistas. Drawing its membership almost entirely from the coastal area of the Molo district, one of Iloilo's western suburbs, it provided the essential mutual aid benefits and financed construction of the district's first public elementary school. Significantly, one of the society's early meetings was celebrated with the presentation of a vernacular zarzuela written by a member and titled "Mga Baybayanon."²⁷

While the society had an occasional imitator, there was little continuous organizational activity among the urban working class before 1914. Despite the overall failure of the attempts to form stable mass unions, the vernacular press — initially owned and operated by the wealthier planters and merchants — continued to publish articles in Ilongo aimed at arousing working class consciousness, albeit along generally conservative political lines. Some of the critiques of working class conditions published by generally pseudonymous or anonymous authors were frank and accurate. These articles dealt comprehensively with working class problems and included exposés of particular problems, calls for cooperation between rich and poor, and, on occasions, advocacy of unionization.

In 1903 a worker ("*jornalero*") named Simplicio Claridad wrote in *El Tiempo*, a Spanish language newspaper founded in 1900 by a nationalist group of wealthy planters, opposing a new form of proposed taxation since it would place a heavy burden on the limited resources of the urban working class. In addition to defining himself as a member of a class of poor, the author demons-

26. 4 Mar. 1899, Commission de Guerra, sgd. Julio Hernandez, vol. 24, reel 642, Noble Documents, Philippine Insurgent Records, U.S. National Archives, (Doc. L3956): *Nuevo Herald*, 10 Dec. 1908, p. 2; *El Tiempo*, 7 Mar. 1903, p. 3; *Kadapig Sg Banwa*, 13 June 1907, p. 2.

27. *Pamatanon*, 2 Aug. 1906, p. 2; "Tilipigan Sang mga Anak. . . Sang Mga Baybayanon," (Molo: Mss. Mejica Collection, 1906).

trated a high level of rationality in calculating his income strategy. Or, as the paper's editor put it, he "shows his opposition in a practical, mathematical manner".²⁸

Since others have not been convinced of the injustice of the new tax it can be demonstrated mathematically.

An Iloilo City worker earns, outside of the waterfront, 2 *pesetas* a day; 30 *centavos* in some towns; and 1 *peso* a week in the great majority of towns.

Therefore, let's take the Iloilo City worker. A married man with four children consumes approximately 3 *gantas* of rice per day, one *ganta* per meal. Supposing a *ganta* costs 2 *reals*, then this man has to spend six *reals* on rice alone.

Where can this man get the money to pay for the house he rents, no matter how modest it may be; his clothes and that of his family; light; meat, etc.? And if another member of his family falls sick, or what is worse, he himself, how can this man make ends meet? . . .

If there is a shortage of tax income. . . it is necessary that this money come from somewhere else other than the pockets of the poor. . .

The rulers who propose this tax are not going to be happy this time, because they will encounter the unanimous opposition of those they rule. But they have nobody to blame but themselves — they who live in a different world and have no understanding of our unpromising situation.

To close, Señor Director, since I do not want to trouble you any further. But let me ask you, in the name of myself and my companions in misery, to intercede so that this tax will not become a reality.

In 1906-1908 the newspaper *Kadapig Sg Banwa*, the vernacular edition of *El Tiempo*, published a series of fictional dialogues on such topics as caciquism, local elections, and labor problems. One appearing in a December 1906 edition, "A Discussion Between Two Workers," was an accurate portrayal of working conditions in the export sector of the stevedoring trade, an area controlled by foreign commercial firms:²⁹

Oyong encourages Abog to load cargo on a ship anchored in the strait. But Abog answers that he would not work the docks even if they are paying three *pesetas* a day.

OYONG: So where are you going to work? Just stand around here?

ABOG: Those *cabos* [foremen] on the freighters are really cruel; and even if you make a peso a day, the sweat is almost squeezed out of you.

28. *El Tiempo*, 17 Jan. 1903, p. 2.

29. *Kadapig Sg Banwa*, 27 Dec. 1906, p. 1.

OYONG: Even so, the pay is high and you get free meals.

ABOG: What a fool this man is. How good is it if the food arrives when your ears are ringing with hunger and the men fight over it out of hunger, and there are no plates so they just pour the rice and vegetables into the mens' dirty hats, and if you don't have a hat just get used to eating your rice and vegetables off the dirty deck mat? And no matter how much you drink the sweat is wrung out of you by the *cabo* driving the work.

This same newspaper published a more polemical version of the same complaint in 1908, but this time concluded with a call for unionization:³⁰

MASOY: There is nothing you can do about it, Teoy, since that is the way most employers are — they regard the workers they employ as animals or slaves.

BANO: That's true since they do not realize that without workers this work would never get done. But its our fault too because sometimes we don't unite or do anything about it as long as we are included in the work; and even if they feed us like animals and insult us with bad words, we just keep quiet; even if they curse us and kick us, we just keep quiet as if we are tolerating their dominance over us; but if we stood up for our rights against the employers, they would change their bad personalities.

TEOY: Sure we can demand our rights, but if they think we are uppity they can fire us right away.

MASOY: True enough, since it has happened.

BANO: Well, what can we do to change the abusive character of the employers?

MASOY: We should stop competing with each other for work; avoid looking out for ourselves alone; we ought to unify with a single plan, just as the workers in Europe, America, and other countries do when they want to ask for an increase in wages that will meet their needs, and if it is not granted they unite and together leave work. The employers are forced to pay the workers the wages they want since their work will just rot if they don't.

TEOY: So what do the employers do?

MASOY: They request the workers to do things; they pay adequate salaries; they are kind and friendly; and they give good food.

BANO: If the workers in Europe can do that, why can't we do it here?

MASOY: We can do it here, but we need intelligent leadership; we can't

30. *Kadapig Sg Banwa*, 5 May 1908, p. 2.

just raise wage rates, we have to think if it will be effective for us to leave work.

While this critique and prescription for urban working class conditions would ultimately have radical implications for Iloilo society, their immediate application by the elite nationalists did not. Arguing for a national alliance of rich and poor for the development of the Philippines and the uplift of the working class, both the wealthiest political leaders and the vernacular correspondents accepted the idea that the leadership of the working class was both the right and responsibility of the elite. A patron of the *Mga Bay-bayanon* society, Esperidion Guanko, a wealthy sugar planter and future senator, often lectured workers on the writings of conservative ideologue Samuel Smiles. In 1906 he told a meeting of the society that:³¹

Without a doubt all of us from the most educated to those without any education, from the richest to those who are plainly poor, are striving and are happy that our nation, the beloved Philippines, will become equal to and share in the great honor and respect that other nations enjoy throughout the entire world.

Guanko also proposed a banking scheme, inspired by the work of Andrew Carnegie, whereby workers would deposit funds in an agricultural finance company to create savings for themselves and provide credit for the region's sugar planters.³² In an article published in *Kadapig Sg Banwa* in 1907, Guanko urged the poor to work for Philippine independence through individual moral rectitude — thrift, industry, education, and good character.³³

Similarly, Juan de Leon — a wealthy Iloilo lawyer, revolutionary leader, and one of the founders of *El Tiempo* — addressed an electoral rally in 1907 urging a corporatist harmony of rich and poor:³⁴

One thing we must avoid is division, distance, and separation between the rich and poor, since that will make us sink down and submerge under large empires. . .

31. *Makinaugalingon*, 3 May 1929, p. 1.

32. Esperidion Guanko, "Talamdan" (Iloilo: Makinaugalingon, n.d. [1906]), pp. i-iv, v.

33. *Kadapig Sg Banwa*, 16 May 1907, p. 1.

34. *Kadapig Sg Banwa*, 13 July 1907, p. 1.

Is there a rich man who can say he has no need for the poor, or poor that have no need not even for one rich man? The rich cannot dismiss the poor, and the poor particularly cannot dismiss the rich; and because of this intimate union our farmers harvest tens of thousands of *pasong* of rice, the mills grind sugar; in short, the rich and poor are getting on better, and they are making commerce improve which is the uplifting of the nation.

The implication of these and similar statements was clear enough; the improvement in working class conditions was to be achieved through individual uplift rather than conflict between labor and capital. The aims of any collective lower class movements were to be subordinate to questions of national development and independence.

WORKING CLASS MOVEMENTS, 1914-1922

Despite the efforts of the elite nationalists and a steady outpouring of propaganda in the press and theatre, Iloilo's urban workers showed only a marginal interest in lower class organizations prior to 1914. During the following decade, however, there was a marked intensification in working class mobilization. The city's first major strikes occurred on the waterfront in 1921 and 1925; a number of more active economic unions were established; and neighborhood based, mutual aid brotherhoods, similar in conception to the "Mga Baybayanon," spread through the city and region. In short, many of the ideas and organizational forms first developed from 1903 to 1913 were now implemented by a new leadership for an aroused working class compelled by economic circumstance.

The growth of working class unions and societies occurred in the context of a rapid increase in the region's sugar exports and major structural changes in the organization of production and transport within the sugar industry. Following the removal of all customs duties on Philippine exports to the United States in 1913, regional sugar production grew in response to an expanded market, and a sudden infusion of both foreign and domestic capital modernized the industry. The new centrifugal mills produced a rapid expansion of Iloilo's sugar exports from 1.7 million piculs in 1913 to 10.3 million in 1932. Moreover, they required changes in the organization of labor within the industry that encouraged

working class mobilization. The Negros cane fields were no longer a structurally uniform patchwork of plantations ruled by authoritarian planters like Cristobal's character Don José. The creation of mill towns in the heart of the individual districts established an organizational base for unionization beyond the control of the planters. Thirty year milling contracts between planters and mills engendered strong conflicts over the division of the harvest, and thereby produced a cleavage in the elite which could be exploited by a labor movement. The mills' industrial labor force was an ideal union target, while the growing labor surplus on the plantations (created by the industrialization of milling and related mechanization) eventually encouraged the unionization of rural workers in the face of declining wages.

The new mills also produced major structural alterations in stevedoring work on the Iloilo waterfront. The construction of modern docking facilities along the Negros coast meant that a single tug-and-lighter stevedoring firm quickly replaced the fleets of 30 to 50 ton *lorcha* sailcraft that had hauled the sugar from Negros to Iloilo City since the 1850s. When the steel-hulled lighter displaced the wooden *lorcha*, the small 20 to 40 man dock crews that had handled the unloading of the smaller sailcraft no longer dominated the stevedoring industry. A growing majority of the city's stevedores now worked lighters in the strait under the brutal conditions described by the workers' dialogues in the 1906 and 1908 editions of *Kadapig Sg Banwa*. As the demand for stevedoring labor increased in a close relation to sugar exports unmediated by any technological change, the city's population grew — from 52,472 in 1903 to 77,925 in 1918 in spurts of 2,000 to 3,000 at the start of each milling season, after five decades of decline or stagnation. Unprotected by workmen's compensation, social security, minimum wage, or adequate labor laws, the city's expanded work force flooded into the mutual aid societies for security in case of death or illness. In smaller numbers, they joined the labor unions for increased wages and improved working conditions.

While Julio Hernandez typified the landed nationalists who had dominated the city's early workers' organizations, leaders of the new unions and societies were generally distinguished from the workers only by their intellect or entrepreneurial skills. No longer

planters or lawyers, the new leaders were commercial clerks and petty traders, local leaders, and most frequently, journalists and dramatists. The flowering of both the vernacular and Spanish press in the early years of American rule had made journalism a viable profession for an emerging intelligentsia. In an age when subscriptions, not advertisements, paid for the press, popular journalism created the economic basis for independence from direct retaliation by planters or foreign commercial firms – an important factor in a city so dependent on a monocrop export. Moreover, constant contact with the texture of urban life encouraged awareness and empathy with lower class problems. And like Cristobal, the literati of this period were also active in municipal politics, mutual aid societies, and unions. Literary reputation from the stage or press columns gave a writer a following among the lower class and inspired confidence when he aspired to leadership. The role of the literati in the mobilization of the working class was not unique to Iloilo. Cebu City unions were generally led by newspaper editors in the 1920s; and the leaders of the *Congreso Obrero* in Manila during the 1920s included Francisco Varona, an Iloilo journalist, the poet Joaquin Balmori, and Crisanto Evangelista, printer. By the very nature of their work, journalists and printers were the first to come into contact with radical foreign ideas. In Manila, for example, printers – an almost accidental working class intelligentsia – were the first to form workers' guilds, industrial unions, and socialist unions.³⁵

The renewed vitality of Iloilo's urban economy sparked an increase in journalistic and literary activities. In 1913 Rosendo Mejica, the lower class vernacular writer and labor leader, founded the vernacular newspaper *Makinaugalingon* which devoted its pages to the encouragement of all forms of Ilongo literature, especially the zarzuela, and the organization of working class unions. The earlier vernacular newspapers such as *Kadapig Sg Banwa* (Rally to the Nation) which had catered to a working class readership had closed, and *Makinaugalingon's* exclusive use of the vernacular made it, as one worker wrote in the 1915 anniversary issue, the

35. Guillermo Capadocia, "The Philippine Labor Movement" (n.d.), pp. 2-31; Guillermo Capadocia, "The Outline of the Philippine Labor Movement" (n.d.), Personal File: Guillermo Capadocia, Military Intelligence Service, Intelligence Service Armed Forces of the Philippines (ISAFP).

newspaper of the poor.³⁶ For the next decade or so the paper published thoughtful letters from urban workers on their conditions, urged a conservative moralism, advocated unionization, and presented translations of works by authors as varied as Emile Zola and Samuel Smiles. There were also a number of new Spanish language newspapers founded during the period. Most significantly *Prensa Libre*, edited by José Ma. Nava, opened in 1922.

The period from 1915 to 1922 saw a revival of the vernacular zarzuela as well. The excitement aroused by the appearance of Cristobal's earliest plays had encouraged imitation, and from 1907 to 1912 Iloilo's leading zarzuelistas wrote the bulk of Iloilo's vernacular dramas and zarzuelas. Out of the seventy-one plays to which we can assign dates, thirty-six were written during this six year period. Cristobal (b. 1875) and Angel Magahum (b. 1867) were the only serious dramatists writing before 1908, but now a generally younger group of zarzuelistas emerged. Damaso (b. 1885) wrote his first play in 1908, Ingalla (b. 1888) in 1910, and Nava (b. 1891) in 1912. Along with Serapion Torre who began writing in 1915 and Miguela Montelibano in 1919, this was the circle which would henceforth dominate the vernacular stage until its demise.³⁷

Accepting reviews, notices, and advertisements of performances as an accurate index, it appears that most of these new works were not produced until after 1915. Once Cristobal's initially rapid rate of output slackened after 1908, the vernacular stage entered a quiet period. *Makinaugalingon*, for example, shows only one production in the latter half of 1913 and none for 1914. As the new authors began producing their plays, however, the numbers increase — five in 1915, eight in 1917, seven in 1922, and then a rapid decline.

This group of dramatists, together with members of the larger community of the urban intelligentsia, formed a large component of the leadership instrumental in this mobilization of the urban working class. As a group, the newer generation of leaders were poorer than the nationalist planters who led the earliest unions, but still considerably better off than the working class itself. While the intelligentsia was far more genuine in its concern for the ad-

36. *Makinaugalingon*, 1 May 1915, p. 1.

37. Gonzaga, "Bisayan Literature," 160-61; Fernandez, *Iloilo Zarzuela*, pp. 52-86.

vancement of the working class than the landed nationalists, they often demonstrated a more conservative ideological bent than the lower ranking union leaders who themselves were actually workers or poor traders. This middle economic position of the literati and other union or mutual aid society leaders can be best demonstrated by an examination of urban housing valuations in Iloilo during the 1920s. Given the variable nature of urban commerce and the lack of income tax records, residential property assessments are the most accurate available indication of personal income in pre-war Iloilo City. My computer sorting of housing valuations for prominent social and political leaders at all levels of urban society reveals three general strata. In the upper level (above ₱10,000), for example, Fernando Lopez, a planter and publisher of *El Tiempo* who later served three terms as vice president of the Philippine Republic, owned a house valued at ₱11,994.63 in 1931. In the middle stratum (₱500 to ₱10,000), zarzuelista Valentin Cristobal's Amparo St. residence was valued at ₱1,134.24 in 1924. At the bottom (below ₱500), one of the founders of the Iloilo branch of the Communist Party (CPP), Leon Mata, owned a ₱70.00 house. Similarly, waterfront foreman (cabo) Teofilo Castillo, who was active in the initial organization of a militant local union, the *Federacion Obrera de Filipinas*, owned a house worth ₱105.00. (See Table 1.)

In the context of these figures on housing, the didacticism and unionization efforts of the 1914-1927 period take on a quality of an inter-class dialogue between a chiding literati leadership towards the middle of the society and an impoverished working class who attended their plays, read their newspapers, listened to their moralisms, and joined their unions. While the intelligentsia's goals were social change, all of them, with the notable exception of José Nava, gave equal if not greater importance to the individual laborer's probity than to class solidarity as the key factor in creating change. Writing in *Makinaugalingon* in 1916, zarzuelista Miguela Montelibano, the illegitimate daughter of a Negros planter who lived in rented houses within the city slums, argued that the failure of plantation workers to repay their debts to the planters was responsible for the retardation of Philippine economic growth:³⁸

38. *Makinaugalingon*, 22 Feb. 1916, p. 2.

... to my way of thinking, with the exception of laziness (a despicable characteristic) the most disgraceful trait, and one which is now almost a disease among workers, is that of borrowing money from the sugar planters without paying it back. . . Oh, my brothers! This current characteristic of so many workers is spreading across the whole country like a treacherous disease and this serious illness, my friends, has no antidote and will get worse each year. . . According to my understanding the planters are losing more than just a small amount of money, and if that were now in their hands and was being used for the needs of their farms, it could without a doubt be used to increase the cane harvest and add to the honor of the Philippines . . . Since this [borrowing] is what they are doing, it seems as if I can say that even though their appearance and skins are Filipino their moral character is not, because the true Filipino is he who loves his land and does not hurt those who are helping it progress.

Although it is difficult to generalize about such a small and versatile group, it seems that the zarzuelistas — with the notable exception of José Nava, who was, in fact, better known for his journalism than drama — were more active in the conservative mutual aid societies and left formation of labor unions to the city's journalists. Significantly, the organization of the first major union since the Union Obrera of 1903 was largely the work of *Makinaugalingon*'s editor Rosendo Mejica. For several months prior to the first meeting of the Union Obrera de Iloilo in April 1914, Mejica lectured to the urban poor, reminding them that workers in England, America and Manila had unions but there were still none in the Western Visayas.³⁹ In keeping with the stern moralistic tone he adopted in addressing his readership, Mejica had a conservative vision of the union's tactics. In a January 1914 article, for example, he wrote a laudatory summary of Samuel Smiles' writings on English unions, hailing them as a model for Iloilo.⁴⁰ Described as a "monstrous meeting," the union's first gathering at the Teatro Malhabour was convened largely by journalists — Paulino Borra of *El Adalid*, Cornelio Fuentes of *El Tiempo*, and Mejica of *Makinaugalingon*. The only non-journalist active as an organizer was the famous revolutionary commander Quintin Salas.⁴¹ With a centralized executive and conservative elite nation-

39. *Makinaugalingon*, 19 Mar. 1914, p. 3; 28 Mar. 1914, p. 2; 16 Apr. 1914, p. 2.

40. *Makinaugalingon*, 17 Jan. 1914, p. 1.

41. *Nuevo Herald*, 2 May 1914, p. 5.

**TABLE 1: ASSESSED VALUATION OF PRIVATE RESIDENCE OF POLITICAL,
CULTURAL, AND WORKING CLASS LEADERS, ILOILO CITY, PHILIPPINES
1924-1931**

NAME	HOUSE VALUE	LAND VALUE	EMPLOYMENT/SOCIAL POSITION	HOUSE LOCATION (Street, District)	YR. 19 —
<i>UPPER STRATUM: (ABOVE ₱10,000)</i>					
Jose Lopez-Vito	40,037.10	24,270	Planter / Publisher	Bonifacio, Iloilo	'24
Timoteo Unson	30,085	7,035	Sugar Mill V. Pres.	Rizal, Iloilo	'26
Ruperto Montinola	23,390.85	23,250	Planter / Senator	Iznart, Iloilo	'24
Matias Ybiernas	16,790	6,156	Merchant / City Co. ¹	Gen Blanco, Iloilo	'24
Fernando Lopez	11,994.63	—	Planter / Publisher	Gen Luna, La Paz	'31
Fermin Caram, MD	6,928.36	3,504	Doctor / City Co.	Zerrudo, Iloilo	'24
<i>MIDDLE STRATUM: (₱500 to ₱10,000)</i>					
Nemesio Orlina	5,281	—	Dock Cabecilla	Lapuz No., La Paz	'24
Serafin de la Cruz	4,500	—	Merchant / City Co.	Mabini, Iloilo	'26
Jose Nava	3,730	—	Publisher / Zarzuela	Iznart Int., Iloilo	'24
Emiliano Oñas	2,725	—	Union Pres.	Fortunata, Iloilo	'24
Jimeno Damaso	2,540	—	Clerk / Zarzuela	Rizal, Iloilo	'24
Serapion Torre	2,140	—	Editor / Zarzuela	De Leon, Mandurriao	'27
Demetrio Pareja	1,500	—	Clerk / Treas. FOF ²	Lapuz Sur, La Paz	'24
Anselmo Panaguiton	1,415	—	Union Pres.	Arroyo, Iloilo	'24
Valentin Cristobal	1,134.24	—	Trader / Zarzuela	Amparo, Iloilo	'24
Lucio Fernandez	1,100	—	Editor / Union Leader	Blumentritt, Iloilo	'24
Angel Magahum	250	517	Journalist / Zarzuela	Antigua, Molo	'24

LOWER STRATUM: (BELOW ₱500)

Jose Ingalla	399	—	Clerk / Zarzuela	Delago, Iloilo	'24
Alfonso Palmejar	390	—	Clerk / Founder FOF	Lapuz No., La Paz	'24
Jose Espinosa	219.60	—	Dock Cabecilla / Union Pres.	Blumentritt, Iloilo	'24
Alipio Villar	159	—	Dock Cabecilla / Founder FOF	Ledesma Int., Iloilo	'24
Teodorico Dulla	130.24	—	Dock Cabecilla / Union Official	De Leon, Iloilo	'24
Teofilo Castillo	105	—	Dock Cabo / Founder FOF	Lapuz Sur, La Paz	'24
Alfredo Mata	85.70	—	Dock Cabo	Lapuz No., La Paz	'20
Leon Mata	70	—	Trader / Founder CPP ³	Lapuz No., La Paz	'24
Eduardo Capanas	66	—	Union Pres.	Rizal Est., Iloilo	'27
Mariano Mijares	50	—	Trader / Founder FOF	Mabini, Iloilo	'24

SOURCE: Property Assessments, Office of the City Assessor, Iloilo City.

1. CITY CO. is an abbreviation for City Councilor indicating prolonged service as elected or appointed member of the Iloilo City Council.
2. FOF is the Iloilo City Labor Union, Federacion Obrera de Filipinas.
3. CPP represents a labor union organized by the Iloilo branch of the Communist Party of the Philippines.

TABLE 2: BIODATA CONCERNING SEVEN MAJOR ILOILO ZARZUELA AUTHORS

NAME	LIFE	DATES ZAR- ZUELA ¹	NO. ²	OTHER OCCU- PATIONS	POLITICS	SOCIAL WORK	EDUCATION
Valentin Cristobal	1875-1945	1903-30	26	Commerce, Clerk	City Councilor (1907-1912)	Board IFI	Primary
Angel Magahum	1867-1945	1903-30	8	Journalist, Teacher	--	Mutual Aid Societies	Secondary
Jose Nava	1891-1954	1912-41	5	Journalist Editor	City Councilor (1919-22; 1927-28)	Union Pres.	Secondary
Jose Ingalla	1888-1944	1910-28	9	Bookeeper Journalist	--	Mutual Aid Societies	Secondary
Jimeno Damaso	1885-1936	1908-24	13	Govt. Clerk, Local Store	City Council Candidate, 1925	Mutual Aid Societies	Primary
Serapion Torre	1892-1942	1915-27	3	Journalist Editor	City Mayor (1922-28)	Mutual Aid Societies Unions	B.A.
Miguela Monteli- bano	1874-1969	1919-29	7	Housewife	--	--	Secondary

Source: Doreen G. Fernandez, *The Iloilo Zarzuela*, pp. 52-86, and Encarnacion J. Gonzaga, "Bisayan Literature."

1. DATES ZARZUELA means years author wrote zarzuela.

2. NO. means number of zarzuela written by author.

alist patrons, the union shared the same organizational weaknesses as the 1903 Union Obrera and quickly faded.

In November 1917, however, young zarzuelista and newspaper editor José Nava called a meeting of workers in a city cockpit. With his close *compadre* Vicente Ybiernas, son of upper stratum merchant and city councilor Matias Ybiernas, Nava subsequently organized a far more active union, also named the Union Obrera. In addition to a centralized executive headed by Ybiernas, the union established work place branches, or *gremios*, of fifty to one hundred men each, for seamen, shoemakers, tailors, ships officers, warehouse crew stevedores, casual stevedores, and mechanics.⁴² The union apparently had some radical overtones. Prior to its annual meeting in 1918, *Makinaugalingon* congratulated the members for its success but pleaded:⁴³

We also ask that this convention have the understanding to banish, push away, drive away with a stick, and scorn all means, measures, and machinations to use its members as instruments for the evil ends of other men just as Lenin and Trotsky are stirring up trouble in Russia because of German money and their desire to change the government.

Under the leadership of Ybiernas and Nava, the Union Obrera launched the city's first dock strike in November 1921. Responding to a marked decline in international sugar prices, the major sugar factoring firms that owned Iloilo's warehouses had announced a decrease in wages and dismissals of almost all the weighing crews — one of three stevedoring teams in each riverside warehouse.⁴⁴ Now that the centrifugal mills were filling standardized jute sacks with uniform amounts of sugar the weighing crews — necessary when each hacienda bagged its own sugar in handwoven, palm-leaf bags — were redundant and could be fired. After a two week strike, however, the Union Obrera was forced to accept terms which appear at best a compromise.⁴⁵ *Makinaugalingon* had no comment on the strike, but later ran editorials opposing the idea of strikes.⁴⁶

42. *Makinaugalingon*, 24 Sept. 1919, p. 2; 14 Nov. 1917, p. 2; 17 Nov. 1917, p. 2.

43. *Makinaugalingon*, 27 Nov. 1918, p. 1.

44. *Makinaugalingon*, 28 Nov. 1921, p. 2.

45. *Makinaugalingon*, 8 Dec. 1921, Add. pg.

46. *Makinaugalingon*, 15 July 1924, p. 1.

At the peak of its influence, the Union Obrera collapsed, largely as a result of political factionalism. Ybiernas had been elected municipal mayor of Iloilo as the union's official candidate in 1918. But as the 1922 elections approached, he claimed he had won the earlier election as an individual.⁴⁷ Nava broke with Ybiernas over the issue, and the union collapsed amid some bitter comments from the membership. Several months later Ybiernas received ₱20,000.00 in gifts at his wedding to the wealthy planter's daughter Estrella Mapa.⁴⁸

As the most important union leader to emerge from this period and one of the major figures in Philippine labor history, José Ma. Nava's career and background demand a closer study. Like the founder of the Philippine Socialist Party, Pedro Abad Santos of Central Luzon, but unlike his fellow zarzuelistas, Nava was born into a prosperous family and his union activities did not correspond with his class position. At the time of his birth in 1891, Jose Nava's family had been established as urban merchants for at least three generations and traced its origins to the Chinese *mestizo* community of Manila's Binondo commercial district. José's grandfather Simplicio Nava had migrated with his family from Manila to Iloilo in about 1860. There he soon established himself as a successful dealer in export sugar and local handicraft textiles, eventually building the family home on Aldeguez St. in the heart of the city's business district.⁴⁹ After Simplicio's death in 1883, the family was forced to cover his debts with the sale of a prime urban lot in Iloilo for ₱2,700 and the home of his mother, Regina Quejongo, in Binondo's Calle Asuncion. Both transactions indicate a family of means. Despite the debts, the family still had sufficient capital for its eldest son, Mariano, to inherit and expand the family's export business.⁵⁰ After marrying the daughter of another established merchant family who lived in the same street, Mariano built his own home only a few blocks away on Iznart St. It was

47. *Makinaugalingon*, 14 Aug. 1918, p. 3; 30 May 1922, p. 2.

48. *Makinaugalingon*, 12 Jan. 1923, p. 4.

49. Interview with Mariano Nava, Jr., brother of Jose Ma. Nava, Iloilo City, 20 April 1974; Alfredo Palmejar, FOF Treasurer and son-in-law of Jose Nava, Iloilo City, 9 Dec. 1973; Flavio Nava, son of Jose Nava and FOF General Inspector, Iloilo City, 19 Aug. 1974.

50. Don Mariano Nava, Poder a Don Severino Nava, 17 Oct. 1885, Protocolo 1593 (YLOILO), PNA; Doña Timotea Legaspi, Venta Real a Don Vicente Gay, 20 Feb. 1884, Protocolo 1589 (YLOILO), PNA.

there that José was born in August 1891 and spent the next twenty-six years until the house was destroyed by fire in 1917.⁵¹ The family's fortunes suffered a sharp reversal when Mariano and his wife were imprisoned for poisoning a 19 year old Spaniard in 1893, but the outbreak of the rebellion against Spain and Mariano's service as a revolutionary officer probably dissolved any stigma associated with the charge.⁵² For the remainder of his life, José's father was a distinguished member of the community – an official in the revolutionary veterans' association, treasurer of the annual Rizal Day celebrations, and an elected member of the Iloilo municipal council.⁵³

Although raised in a Spanish speaking household, José attended the English-medium American public schools as a boy. There, at age 16, he revealed his combative disposition by heading a student delegation which filed a court action against an American teacher who had made some racist remarks in class. In the same year, 1907, Nava first demonstrated his aptitude for the theater in the lead role as "Mr. Longhead, President of the Company" in the Iloilo High School's production of an English language comedy, "The Great Doughnut Corporation" by C.T. Denison.⁵⁴ After several years studying painting and sculpture in Manila, Nava returned to Iloilo where he became active in both Spanish and vernacular theater. He produced his first Ilongo zarzuela in 1912. Although he had written eight zarzuelas by 1917 and enjoyed at least one major critical success, Nava began to devote most of his energies to journalism, working as the editor of several of the city's leading English and Spanish dailies. And in 1922, with financial support from his father, he purchased the press equipment for the publication of his militant Spanish daily, *Prensa Libre*.⁵⁵ The newspaper, which achieved a circulation of 3,027 by 1931 (the second highest among the city's five Spanish dailies), together with

51. José Maria Nava, *Libro de Bautismos*, Vol. 11, 15 Aug. 1891, San Jose Parish Church, Iloilo City; *Makinaugalingon*, 18 April 1917, p. 2.

52. *Porvenir de Bisayas*, 21 Nov. 1893, p. 2; 15 Nov. 1894, p. 2.

53. *Makinaugalingon*, 10 May 1927, p. 1; 13 May 1927, p. 1; *El Adalid* (Iloilo), 19 June 1911, p. 5.

54. *Federacion Obrera de Filipinas: 20 Years of Struggle for Democracy* (Iloilo City: FOF, May 1949), pp. 23-24; *Liberator* (Iloilo City), 28 May 1949, p. 5; *El Tiempo*, 17 Dec. 1907, p. 3.

55. Mariano Nava, Jr., interview; *Makinaugalingon*, 18 April 1917, p. 2, 11 July 1922, p. 4.

a share of his father's business as a bookkeeper for the city's smaller Chinese merchants, remained the basis of his income until the mid 1930s and allowed him to father and support nine children.⁵⁶ Strongly influenced by his father's nationalism and radical European thought (Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables* reportedly made a strong impression on him at a young age), Nava practiced an advocacy style of journalism and relished public controversy.⁵⁷ While his aggressiveness made him popular with the working class, it was a distinct political liability and he lost three of the five municipal council elections he entered between 1919 and 1931.⁵⁸ After founding the Federacion Obrera de Filipinas (FOF) in 1928 and leading it through major strike actions in the early 1930s, Nava moved progressively leftward in his ideology and alliances.⁵⁹ In 1938 he was elected General Chairman of the communist-affiliated Collective Labor Movement. In 1946 he invited the former Secretary-General of the Communist Party, Guillermo Capadocia, to join the FOF, and later aided Iloilo's communist guerillas with arms and supplies during the Huk revolt of the early 1950s.⁶⁰ Indicted and sentenced to death for his role in the revolt, José Nava died in prison while awaiting execution in 1954.⁶¹

UNIONS AND MUTUAL AID SOCIETIES, 1922-1927

Aside from several seamen and mechanics' unions organized in the early 1920s by a conservative ship's officer, Anselmo Panaguiton, the next major Iloilo City union was not formed until 1925. Known as *Balhas Sang Mamumugon* (Sweat of the Poor), it combined a localized membership with a leadership similar in compo-

56. Camasura, *Cebu-Visayas Directory* p. 51.

57. Mariano Nava, Jr., interview; Federacion Obrera de Filipinas, *Ivory Book* (Iloilo City: FOF, 1941), pp. 17-18; *Prensa Libre* (Iloilo), 5 April 1926, p. 1; 20 July 1926, p. 1.

58. *Makinaugalingon*, 11 June 1919, p. 4; 2 June supp. pg.; 13 June 1922, p. 1; 19 May, p. 4, 12 June 1925, p. 4; 12 June 1928, p. 1; 6 May, p. 4, 15 June 1931, p. 4.

59. This leftward movement in his thinking is shown in the increasingly militant tone in his speeches and articles. See, *Prensa Libre*, 30 Dec. 1936, p. 1; *Mamumugon* (Manila), Nov. 1939, p. 4; José M. Nava, *Workers and Peasants Clamor for Justice* (Iloilo City: FOF, May 1951).

60. FOF, *Ivory Book*, pp. 38-39; Flavio Nava, interview.

61. *People v. Guillermo Capadocia*, Criminal Case No. 2878, CFI Iloilo, Decision, 5 April 1952, Judge Magno S. Gatmaitan; interview with Sigfredo Nava, son of José Ma. Nava, Iloilo City, 27 Nov. 1973.

sition to that of Nava's defunct Union Obrera. Its members were largely stevedores residing in the Blumentritt Street area. Organized by the waterfront foreman (*cabecilla*) José Espinosa, the union's advisor was Spanish language journalist Lucio Fernandez, a middle stratum Blumentritt resident, and its president, a vernacular newspaper editor Victorino Guadarrama.⁶² In August 1925 Balhas launched the strike against the Visayan Stevedore Transportation Co. (Vistranco), Iloilo's tug-and-lighter monopoly, demanding that all workers loading freighters in the strait be given a plate at mealtime instead of having their food dumped on the deck mats or in their hats. When the issue was first raised by *Kadapig Sg Banwa* in 1906, work in the strait had only involved a minority of the city's stevedores. After the construction of the centrifugal mills, however, Vistranco's lighter work grew and soon employed a majority of the city's stevedores. The Union Obrera under Nava and Ybiernas had won the workers the right to a plate, but when it dissolved the company had withdrawn the privilege.⁶³ The Balhas strike was relatively short lived since the Vistranco management recruited a Molo mutual aid society, *Mainawaon*, as strikebreakers, and fired the incumbent crews. The new workers formed a mutual aid society, *Tres Triangulos*, under the leadership of the company's management and Balhas soon faded.

While *Makinaugalingon* and the zarzuelistas, with the exception of José Nava, remained aloof from the more militant labor unions, they were intimately involved in the more conservative mutual aid societies as advisers, officers, benefactors, or propagandists. The mutual aid movement covered the archipelago and existed throughout the U.S. colonial period, but was the most intense during the years from 1919 to 1926. Responding to the 1919 rice crisis and the rapid growth of largely unregulated industrial employment, wage laborers throughout the Philippines organized mutual aid societies similar in conception to the Mga Baybayanon. At their peak from 1922 to 1926, these societies were also found in most of the region's municipalities. But there were marked differences in their structure in Negros Occidental and Iloilo. In Negros the most radical of them, *Kusog Sang Imol* (Strength of the Poor), initially comprised plantation laborers who united to retaliate against fore-

62. *Makinaugalingon*, 14 Nov. 1924, p. 4; 21 Nov. 1924, p. 4.

63. *Makinaugalingon*, 21 Aug. 1925, p. 1.

men who beat their workers. Nominally led by Felix Severino, a Bacolod journalist, Kusog was in fact controlled by a wealthy centrifugal mill owner, Gil Montilla, who had used it to secure his election as provincial governor of Negros in 1922. Already resentful of the mill owners and in any case jealous of their disciplinary prerogatives, the sugar planters organized a counter society, *Mainawaon* (The Compassionate), headed by another Bacolod journalist, Esteban Vasquez.

While the Negros membership was generally divided between two competing societies, each Iloilo City neighborhood had its own mutual aid society. *Mainawaon* was strong in Molo, *Ang Capawa* in Tanza, *Ang Liberal* in Fortunato St., *Paghimulat* in Barrio Danao, *Ang Pagbinuligay* in La Paz, etc. Linked closely to wealthy patrons, the societies initially enjoyed considerable official support. In October 1922, for example, when *Mainawaon*'s Iloilo branch celebrated the unfurling of its banner, the speakers included Gov. Ruperto Montinola, Mayor Serapion Torre, and Visitrango owner Cesar Barrios.⁶⁴ In 1924, however, after less than two years of peak activity, the mutual aid movement began to break up. Beatings and killings started between members of rival societies, those in Iloilo usually factional in nature and those in Negros often involving planter-worker conflicts. The Cebu branch of the largest national brotherhood, *Legionarios del Trabajo*, broke away from the national organization over charges of corruption. Finally, the colonial government applied pressure by auditing accounts, confiscating arms, and barring members from public office.⁶⁵ In 1925 the movement weakened after Kusog's president Felix Severino was sentenced to three years in prison on adultery charges; and by 1927, when the Insular Treasurer confirmed massive graft involving members' contributions in the *Legionarios del Trabajo*, it was stagnating.⁶⁶

During their prime in the early 1920s, Iloilo mutual aid societies were very much involved with the world of vernacular zarzuela. The unfurling of *Mainawaon*'s flag discussed above was commemorated in a zarzuela by Miguela Montelibano, and she also wrote

64. *Makinaugalingon*, 31 Oct. 1922, p. 4.

65. *Makinaugalingon*, 28 Mar. 1924, p. 1; 15 Apr. 1924, p. 2; 6 May 1924, p. 2; 30 May 1924, p. 4; 4 July 1924, p. 1; 25 July 1924, p. 2; 29 Aug. 1924, p. 1; 4 Nov. 1924, p. 4; 11 Nov. 1924, p. 1; 13 Jan. 1924, p. 4.

66. *Makinaugalingon*, 1 May 1925, p. 4; 1 Mar. 1927, p. 4.

another laudatory zarzuela titled "Kusog Sang Imol." Zarzuelista Jimeno Damaso's brother Canuto was president of the Tanza society Ang Capawa and zarzuelas were often produced at the society's annual Andres Bonifacio celebration. Cristobal also staged two plays titled "Mainawaon" and "Kusog Sang Imol" which criticized these societies for failing to live up to the movement's ideals.⁶⁷

Miguela Montelibano's "Kusog Sang Imol" (1923) makes the most laudatory statement about the societies. The play tells the story of Carlos, a poor farmer and hauling contractor who lives in an Iloilo suburb. Despite his poverty, Carlos has sacrificed a great deal to educate his two children, and makes a statement to this effect in one of the zarzuela's opening songs: "Even though I am poor and have no money/I have wealth when I count my two/ Children who are so anxious for our progress. . ." Carlos' son José has just graduated from high school with good grades, but cannot find employment since he lacks a wealthy patron. After he decides to make his fortune in Manila or California, Carlos approaches Pacifico, the head of the neighborhood's mutual aid society, for assistance to pay for his son's passage. In a scene showing the society members garbed in the exotic hooded uniforms typical of the movement, Pacifico declares that the society should aid its members to advance in life just as it assists them at the time of death since that is "the strength of poor" ("kusog sang imol"). The membership applauds the idea, and Pacifico draws the moral for the audience: "The force of the poor (kusog sang imol) is weak since they don't have the aid of money; but if the poor wish to be strong they can overcome the power of money." Six years later José returns from Manila with a law degree and, in the final scene, appears before the society to thank its members for their generosity. He concludes a long speech with an endorsement of the mutual aid movement: ". . . this variety of societies organized by concerned citizens are helpful and honorable . . . they share a common goal leading to the honor of our beloved Philippines." The play ends with a rousing didactic chorus of society members singing that the "spark of intelligence is the wealth and strength of the poor" (kusog sang imol).

67. *Makinaugalingon*, 29 Nov. 1929, p. 4.

While Montelibano's zarzuela "Mainawaon" (1924), is a numbing propaganda piece that culminates in the unfurling of the society's banner, Cristobal's of the same name (1922) is more of a conservative morality play. Tomas, a stevedore turned chauffeur and horse-rig driver, is a merciful or compassionate (*mainawaon*) man who succours a mistreated horse, takes a rice farmer's ailing daughter to the hospital, and returns the lost jewels of a wealthy sugar planter. In the final scene the driver's virtue has its reward: a Spanish speaking American named Jack Hoxie buys the horse with a check from the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank for ₱500; the rich planter gives him a share of his harvest, 200 bultos of rice worth ₱1,800, and presents him with the proceeds of the sale in cash; and the Negros planter gives him a PNB check for ₱2,200, the income from 100 piculs of sugar from his hacienda's harvest. The display of these basic symbols of the region's agricultural and commercial economy in rapid succession makes the play appear something of a workingman's parable. Cristobal seems to be telling his audience that Heaven will reward the worker with a greater share of these islands' wealth — rice, sugar, trade, cash, and checks — on the basis of his individual merits, and not, by implication, through collective action. The zarzuela's final chorus emphasizes this theme: "Do good works/ And don't you forget/That Heaven observes/That which you do."

ZARZUELA'S DECLINE, 1928-1932

After 1922 the number of zarzuelas performed or written in Iloilo City began to decline, and by 1929 it was apparent that this conservative, moralistic literary form was essentially moribund. Following months of slack activity on the vernacular stage, the city's *Anahaw* troupe led by Jose Ingalla, a zarzuelista of proven reputation, presented an evening of zarzuelas in December 1929 with some of Iloilo's favorite stars. To the chagrin of *Makinaugalingon's* reviewer, the theater was almost empty.⁶⁸ Within a year the production of original works had virtually ceased in Iloilo, and the zarzuela became the stuff of nostalgic revivals and literary history. There appear to be three factors in the zarzuela's demise: the declining volume of sugar handled on the Iloilo City waterfront be-

68. *Makinaugalingon*, 4 Jan. 1929, p. 1.

ginning in the late 1920s; changing working class consciousness, exemplified by the emergence of a radical labor movement alien to the ideology of the conservative literati; and, finally, the introduction of sound cinema in 1929-30.

Changing lower class consciousness and the formation of a radical labor movement seems to have been the critical factor in the decline of the zarzuela. In July 1928 a group of workers from the waterside, working class district of Lapuz — a neighbourhood not particularly involved in the mutual aid movement — approached José Nava and asked him to accept the leadership of a union they were organizing, the *Federacion Obrera de Filipinas* (FOF). Significantly, the initiative for the union's formation came from lower stratum dock workers, not the intelligentsia or elite nationalists as in the past. Under Nava's leadership it quickly secured a large local constituency in Lapuz.⁶⁹ The collapse of international sugar prices during the 1929-30 depression years and a unilateral decrease in waterfront wages by foreign export firms trying to pass the cost of the port's redundancy onto the workers, forced the city's stevedores to respond. In May 1930 the FOF launched a strike which closed the port for twenty-one days.⁷⁰ The FOF quickly expanded to include workers in all sectors of the region's export economy, and a series of strikes followed — at Vistranco, Insular Lumber Co., and again on the Iloilo waterfront — culminating in the Western Visayas general strike of February 1931, the only one of such dimensions in the history of the Philippine labor movement. For almost one month international shipping in the region was frozen. All docks in Iloilo and Negros Occ. closed and the workers at several sugar mills went out. When strikebreakers and Philippine Constabulary units were sent in to end the strike, the workers responded with violence. Scabs were assaulted and driven off the waterfront. Workers burned the house of the strikebreaking union's president, and a number of cane fields in Negros' La Carlota mill district were burnt.⁷¹

Significantly, the remnants of the earlier mutual aid movement and conservative intelligentsia were leading actors in the forma-

69. *Makinaugalingon*, 26 Apr. 1929, p. 1; FOF *Ivory Book*, pp. 17-18; *Prensa Libre*, 5 Apr. 1929, p. 1.

70. *Tribune* (Manila), 18 May 1930, p. 5.

71. *Progress* (Cebu City), 18 Feb. 1931, p. 1; 27 Feb. 1931, p. 1; 26 Feb. 1931, p. 1; *Makinaugalingon*, 22 Feb. 1931, p. 1.

tion of an opposition to the FOF. Rosendo Mejica was treasurer of Vistranco's company union; zarzuelista Serapion Torre its advisor; Felix Severino of Kusog Sang Imol announced his determined opposition; and Esteban Vasquez of Mainawaon formed a company union for the strikebound Negros sugar mills.⁷² Despite their opposition, FOF retained control of the Iloilo waterfront and organized almost all wage labor in Iloilo City. Although largely defeated in the sugar districts of Negros, by 1940 FOF had grown into the largest union in the country. According to a 1930 Bureau of Labor report, Iloilo already had 10,994 registered union members, by far the highest of any province in the Philippines and more than any other urban area with the obvious exception of Manila.⁷³ It appears, therefore, more than coincidence that the zarzuela died and FOF was born in the same period of social change. Iloilo's urban workers had grown beyond the conservative ideology of the zarzuela — although they had crowded into performances in years past — and were no longer interested in its individualistic moralism. Working class consciousness had outgrown the zarzuela and the vernacular theater had lost its audience.

The introduction of the sound cinema and decline in Iloilo's entrepot sugar economy are supporting factors in the demise of the vernacular stage.⁷⁴ Iloilo's first sound movie house opened in 1929, a factor which some zarzuela artists feel made it difficult to continue producing vernacular drama. The gradual decline in the percentage of Negros' sugar production warehoused in Iloilo from the mid 1920s reduced the amount of cash circulating in the city's economy and weakened its ability to support a lively entertainment industry. The amount of export sugar loaded directly off the Negros coast increased from 89,765 tons in 1924; to 231,478 tons in 1931 (the year of the general strike); and peaked at 488,358 tons in 1933. This latter figure represented 76 percent of Negros harvest of 640,388 tons, indicating that Iloilo was then handling less than one-quarter of Negros sugar exports.⁷⁵ Iloilo's

72. *Makinaugalingon*, 29 Apr. 1932, p. 4; 16 Sept. 1932, p. 1; *Tribune* (Manila), 29 Jan. 1931, p. 1.

73. Bureau of Labor, "Twenty Second Annual Report," p. 190, Quezon Papers, Box #143, Philippine National Library.

74. *Makinaugalingon*, 28 July 1929, p. 3; Salvador Sagarán, interview; Fernandez, *Iloilo Zarzuela*, pp. 141-63.

75. Bureau of Customs, Philippine Islands, *Annual Report of the Collector of Customs* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1925, 1932, 1934), pp. 37, 31, 33.

total personal and corporate income declined correspondingly from ₱6 million in 1929 to ₱4.8 million in 1936, while that of Negros Occ. increased from ₱10.9 million to ₱17.6 million during the same period.⁷⁶

CONCLUSION

The Iloilo zarzuela was, then, both a catalyst and a reflection of the city's changing mass consciousness during the early decades of this century. In most cultures, popular drama is perhaps the least "pure" of literary forms and the most responsive to its social context. By no means an act of individual artistic inspiration, popular drama is produced by a community of actors, writers and musicians for a mass patronage whose tastes determine, in a very direct manner, the company's artistic fortunes. If this statement is true for the professional stage of Europe or America, it is doubly so for the colonial Philippines. As in Iloilo, Philippine regional theatre was staffed by amateurs and sustained by patrons whose poverty made them a most demanding audience. Such circumstances forced the Iloilo zarzuela to mirror, at least in part, the values of its mass audience.

The most popular of Iloilo's dramatists, Cristobal, was also the most responsive to the consciousness and material conditions of the mass. Aside from the obvious musical brilliance of the songs, which was an important ingredient, his success seems to have been based on a consistent dramatic formula — moral maxims, current events, characters drawn from daily life, and, most importantly, a "true story." As in the contemporary *composo*, or ballad, and serialized radio dramas, Iloilo's zarzuela audiences had a strong preference for the "true story" — that is, documentation of daily life instead of fanciful creation.⁷⁷ All of those who can recall Cristobal's production of "Si Salvador," for example, insist that it was based on a true story, a key factor in its box office success.

Although the zarzuela no doubt reflected popular attitudes towards reality and morality, it was not limited to a passive role of

76. Collector of Internal Revenue, Philippine Islands, *Annual Report of the Collector of Internal Revenue* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1929, 1936), pp. 50, 56.

77. On the continuity of values from komedya and zarzuela through modern mass media, see Nicanor G. Tiongson, "From Stage to Screen," *International Popular Culture* 1, no. 1 (1980): 60-67.

social documentation. Both Cristobal and Montelibano, to cite just two, had very strong views on the reform of their society and used stage as their pulpit. In mirroring contemporary reality through the prisms of their artistic perception and activist prescription, the zarzuelistas played a subtle role in the transformation of popular attitudes towards both social morality and the conditions of working class life. As is evident in the vernacular press articles quoted above, Iloilo's working class was already acutely aware of its problems and place at the bottom of society before the zarzuelistas began writing. The dramatists' presentation of these conditions on the stage was both social documentation and artistic creation, while their didacticism involved an activist attempt at transformation of the reality which had served as their inspiration. Hence the very close correlation between changing popular consciousness and the zarzuela's fortunes. It is impossible to unravel the precise point at which an individual zarzuela stops being documentation and becomes artistic creation. Nonetheless, the Iloilo zarzuela remains today the most accurate available indicator of the city's changing mass consciousness during these critical decades.

Examination of the zarzuela in light of the theoretical literature cited at the outset would seem to indicate that the city's theater was involved in a cultural synthesis that resembles Redfield's "orthogenetic transformation." While Redfield expressed reservations about the capacity of the Asian city to make the transition from heterogenetic to orthogenetic in the post-independence period, Iloilo's zarzuelistas created such a synthesis at the high tide of colonialism. The zarzuela's marriage of indigenous values and language to a Western dramatic form spoke directly to the concerns of the region's urban and rural workers. None of the dichotomies that should have blocked such an interaction — Asian versus Western, rural versus urban, orthogenetic versus heterogenetic, or Great Tradition versus Little Tradition — seemed to obtain.

Clearly, then, much of the terminology spawned by the literature is so general and imprecise that it quickly becomes inappropriate for a detailed discussion of Asian urbanization. As colonized Asian urbanites locked into a heterogenetic Westernization, Iloilo's zarzuelistas should not have been able to communicate so effectively with an Asian mass still mired in a culturally remote "Little

Tradition." While such dichotomies may be overdrawn, Sigel's attempt at outright rejection of the literature's focus on the "Westernized urban intellectual elite" of the Asian city seems even more misplaced. With the dichotomous implications of these terms removed, they are of some use in describing Iloilo's zarzuelistas. Both Nava, the multi-lingual editor, and Cristobal, the unschooled carpenter, were members of a self-conscious "urban intellectual elite" that tried to transform their society and mediate the socio-cultural strains that accompanied the region's rapid economic development. In different ways, both represent an intellectual and cultural synthesis of the indigenous and foreign for which the most appropriate term would be neither "Western" nor "Asian" but "Filipino."