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Greg Bankoff



Victor Villegas was a Spaniard from Toledo who lived "alone" in a house on Calle Basco in Intramuros from which he ran a local store and take-away restaurant. He was short, dark, heavily built, in his forties and known for his hot temper and overbearing nature. When he suddenly disappeared in mid-January 1893 and his establishment remained locked and shuttered for three days, a neighbor reported his absence to the local magistrate. A search of the premises revealed a mysterious letter, a rusty iron bar, upturned furniture and a blood trail that led to the watercloset on the first floor landing. Here Villegas's corpse was discovered, dressed in his undergarments and with a severely bludgeoned head. At this point, the clerk, who had been meticulously recording the details of the search, interrupted the flow of his narrative with the observation that "the servants were immediately suspected" (*Asuntos Criminales* 1893).

There is nothing particularly new about the adage that "the butler did it": such a sentiment has formed the basis of countless thriller plots. If servants have somewhat lost their traditional role as prime suspects in more contemporary work, this merely reflects the realities of modern life in western industrial societies, where few people have direct experience of the servant-master relationship. Among the judicial records of nineteenth-century Manila, however, servants are omnipresent. Largely invisible, they are mainly two dimensional: frequently mentioned, often called as witnesses but figures of the periphery except when they themselves become the object of judicial procedure. To reconstruct their lives, the historian is forced to resort to evidence that is fragmentary in nature, clearly not impartial and, at times, of dubious validity.

This article is based on a paper delivered at the Centenary Conference of the Department of History, University of Sydney, New South Wales, between 18 and 20 July 1991.

Criminal Cases Involving Servants Referred to the Real Audiencia, 1865-1885*

Year	Cases Involving Servants	All Cases	Percent
1865	125	4,113	3.0
1866	122	4,036	3.0
1867	189	4,954	3.8
1868	141	5,754	2.5
1869	n/a	n/a**	—
1870	n/a	n/a**	—
1871	165	5,099	3.2
1872	180	5,636	3.2
1873	184	5,883	3.1
1874	168	5,413	3.1
1875	556	5,302	10.5
1876	207	6,832	3.0
1877	196	5,969	3.3
1878	323	6,688	4.8
1879	204	7,139	2.9
1880	189	5,614	3.4
1881	176	5,982	2.9
1882	191	5,939	3.2
1883	174	5,718	3.0
1884	139	6,369	2.2
1885	109	6,991	1.6

* See Bibliography of Sources of Statistics (pp. 299-300).

** Data not available.

The official collation of criminal statistics in the Philippines dates from a royal decree of 28 March 1850 which provided for the establishment of a system of recording such data analogous to that followed in Spain (Montero y Vidal 1895 3: 148). Criminal statistics, therefore, exist for much of the second half of the nineteenth century, though it remains unclear from precisely which year publication became regularized.¹ Servants can be identified as a separate occupational category but the data is not always comparable between annual reports. Thus, in the years where it is possible to compare

domestic servants to other occupations, that is prior to 1872, they comprised the third largest group of offenders after peasant farmers and day-workers. No such comparison is possible after this date, nor is there sufficient data to permit a statistical comparison of offences involving servants committed only in the capital.

The primary source on servants in Manila during this period, therefore, is the archival case histories of the criminal and civil courts, the *asuntos criminales* and the *asuntos civiles*.² These records were compiled by Spaniards and policemen, neither of whom, as this article will show, were particularly sympathetic to the plight of servants. Moreover, the evidence contained in these series is only the surviving judicial and police records and may not be representative of the subject as a whole. Then there is the "delinquency factor," that the information on servants largely exists precisely because these men and women transgressed the behavioral constraints of society, albeit a society defined by a colonial state. It is not surprising, therefore, that the records emphasize conflict and disharmony in the relationship between servants and masters. The question of validity must remain central to both an appreciation of the historical sources and the representational nature of any generalizations drawn about such matters from a handful of judicial cases and police reports. This study, then, is in the way of a life impression, a rare glimpse at a sector of society that historiography has tended to pass over without undue concern.

Masters often maltreated their servants. Victor Villegas was known to have habitually bullied his servants. This was not only confirmed in statements made by his own employees, but was corroborated by a former Spanish lodger in the house who had heard Villegas insult his servants on several occasions and had witnessed him assault another. One of the servants, seventeen-year-old Celedonio Labsan, admitted to having run away as a result of being mistreated. Labsan was heard to say on a number of occasions that he would either "escape" from Villegas's employ or kill him, a threat he reiterated on the day of the murder. Another servant accused of stealing, had been beaten and then dismissed from Villegas's service the previous December, while a third had recently been hit by Villegas for being too slow in his work. Villegas was not unaware of his servants' resentment and kept a loaded revolver by his bedside (*Asuntos Criminales* 1893).

In fact, the whole fabric of colonial society in the Philippines was structured along racial lines. The *peninsular* Spaniard born in Spain

felt superior to the *creole* Spaniard born in the colonies. All Spaniards looked down on Spanish *mestizos* who in turn felt Chinese *mestizos*, the Chinese and the indigenous population to be socially inferior (Bernad 1974, 5).³ The innate superiority felt by the master toward the servant is so evident that the fact that it was often based on race can easily be overlooked. The Spaniard was a master because he assumed the legacy of the *conquistador*; the Filipino was a servant because his antecedent had forfeited sovereign power. The Chinese was both—regarded by the Spaniard as a servant but often by the Filipino as a master. Obviously, these are somewhat simplistic generalizations. Some Spaniards, especially Spanish *mestizos*, were poor; most Chinese were certainly so. Some Filipinos, mainly in rural areas, were officials, landowners and employers. However, particularly in Manila where non-indigenous sectors comprised 30 percent of the population, race was an important aspect of master-servant relations.⁴ The cold reality of this fact formed the basis of interaction between colonized and colonizer and engendered much of the resentment and mistrust felt between servant and master.

This article will explore servant-master relationships in late nineteenth-century Manila from the perspective of the household, the workplace and the rental market. The definition of such relationships has been extended to include situations in which perceived feelings of racial superiority coincided with transactions based on unequal access to socioeconomic resources. Thus the domestic servant, the employee and the tenant were all subjected to some degree of material, physical and psychological exploitation. Some found release in compulsive gambling or experienced downward social mobility through vagrancy and prostitution. Other servants, however, actively defended their rights and sought redress through the colonial judicial system rather than passively acquiesce in their own subordination. Masters, on the other hand, frequently exhibited excessive fear of their servants and called for more rigorous measures of social control. In fact, as the article will show in its conclusion, social tension based on racial antagonism was increasing in the decade immediately preceding the Philippine Revolution.

Domestics, Employees, Tenants

The various categories of servants as defined in this article are not mutually exclusive: a person could be both a domestic servant and work as an employee in a shop or enterprise owned by the same

master. Similarly, an employee might live in a property owned by the same person who, in effect, would be both his employer and landlord. Whatever the details of the relationship to a master, however, servants mainly shared a common origin. Most were young, under twenty-five with many being in their late teens. Most had not been born in the environs of Manila, but had been drawn to the city either in search of opportunity or, increasingly, as a result of competition for agricultural land.⁵ All, as a result of their status, experienced differing degrees of maltreatment, intimidation and restrictions on their personal liberty.

Migrants came to Manila from all over Luzon and many found employment as domestic servants.⁶ Here they exchanged a life lived outdoors for one bounded by the precincts of a house, hedged in by restrictions on their personal liberty and liable to abuse and maltreatment. The world of the domestic servant was one of unremitting boredom and drudgery. A domestic's days were filled by an endless cycle of cleaning, cooking and washing that started anew each morning. Justo Rufino was used to sweeping out his mistress's room at around eight o'clock each morning, but did not dust or arrange the furniture. This task was left to Lorenza Gutierrez, who was usually accompanied by the children of the house over whom she had charge (*Asuntos Criminales* 1890). If there was a business attached to the house, then the master or mistress was also likely to be an employer, with the servant acting in the capacity of an employee. Celedonio Labsan, besides being a domestic servant in the house of the murdered Victor Villegas, also worked in the shop. Whether Labsan doubled as the cook or not, the hours were long; Villegas was murdered a little after nine o'clock at night, shortly after the departure of the last customer (*Asuntos Criminales* 1893). Domestic servants were given little financial remuneration for these long hours, often only their board, lodging and sometimes cast off clothing. In return for his services as porter at the *Colegio de la Imaculada Concepcion* in Intramuros, Martin Bernardo received nothing more than a food and clothing allowance for himself and his family and was allowed to occupy a house at the rear of the establishment (*Asuntos Civiles* 1893).

Living and working in the same environment left little time for family and personal life. Parents left in the provinces sometimes had to come to Manila in order to see their offspring in service. The father of Hermogenes del Rosario, a porter at Calle Palacio, came from Cavite to see his son because of the relatively short distance involved

(*Asuntos Criminales* 1890). Other parents living further away rarely saw their children—only on the occasion of important religious festivals, when the latter were between jobs or in trouble. Celedonio Labsan caught a steamer to his parent's home in Subic, Zambales, the morning following the murder of Villegas and was later arrested there (*Asuntos Criminales* 1893). Many domestics already had family members and relatives living in Manila and visiting them was naturally much easier. The same Hermogenes del Rosario was a frequent visitor at the house of his brother's widow located on the road between Sampaloc and Marikina (*Asuntos Criminales* 1890). Likewise Pedro Lopez, another domestic implicated in Villegas's murder, stayed at his uncle's house before being arrested (*Asuntos Criminales* 1893). Such family connections were helpful in making the adjustment to an urban environment for the newly arrived migrant, and they continued to provide an important link for the servant with his previous life in the provinces.

A domestic servant's relationship with members of the opposite sex appears to have been more difficult to maintain. These relationships were always subject to the censure of their master or mistress, who might choose not to encourage such activities. The bad feelings between Celedonio Labsan and Victor Villegas were said to have been caused by the latter's refusal to allow him to visit his fiancee (*Asuntos Criminales* 1893). Often such a state of affairs would leave a domestic servant with no other alternative than dissimulation. Maria Visitacion, accused of infanticide in July 1860, used the excuse of a daily walk with her eleven-month charge to secretly meet with her fiance, a corporal stationed in front of the Banco Español Filipino in Intramuros (*Asuntos Criminales* 1860).

Despite the abuse and lack of personal liberty, however, the principal basis of resentment and distrust between the two worlds of master and domestic servant, of Spaniard and Filipino was the question of property. Some servants may not have regarded stealing from their foreign masters as a particularly serious offence; certainly some Filipinos inwardly considered that it was "not a sin to rob a Spaniard."⁷ Domestic servants found themselves in a house surrounded by a multitude of objects worked in precious metals and other materials. Gold and silver watches, rings, coral combs and rosaries, silver tableware, even gold buttons, silk shirts and shoes provided readily portable wealth that could be disposed of without drawing undue attention. Moreover, in the absence of widely available banking facilities, sizeable sums in gold and silver coin were frequently

kept in houses, often in bedrooms (Montero y Vidal 1895, 3: 167-68).⁸ Doña Angela Cortasar, a resident of Intramuros, had P850-900 in gold and silver coin stolen from her bedroom in December 1890. The money had been kept in a pouch that was wrapped in a singlet and placed in her sideboard. The sideboard showed no signs of having been forced and so, at the lady's insistence, four of her servants were arrested and imprisoned while the matter was investigated (Asuntos Criminales 1890).

In some cases, accusations of theft might be brought against a domestic who had complained of the master's treatment. A woman who filed a complaint against her employers for maltreatment in January 1892 was, in turn, accused of having stolen P200 in lottery notes.⁹ Or a master's wealth could act as a temptation to others, inflicting injury and even loss of life on domestic servants charged with its protection. A young servant who defended his absent master's possessions during an attempted house robbery in 1887 received six knife wounds to his head and torso for his pains.¹⁰ When the monastic house of the Franciscan order in Manila was assaulted by an armed gang in January 1891, an old porter and a ten year old maid were among the more seriously wounded.¹¹

Another household situation in which the latent tension between servant and master manifested itself was the relationship between an apprentice and his master. Many journeymen and apprentices ate and slept in their master's house, where they fulfilled certain domestic duties beside their tasks within the workshop. Resentment at a master's high-handed treatment could easily fester in the mind of a journeyman within the restricted confines of a household, as there was little check on a master's authority apart from the common bonds of humanity and the bare precepts of the law. A little of this life is evident in the details surrounding the attempted poisoning of the Muyot family in 1892. At about 7 P.M. on 13 July, Domingo Muyot, a silversmith, his wife and son sat down to a meal in their house on the Calle de Crespo. This same meal was eaten a little later by Muyot's cousin and one of the servants. Everyone except the son washed the meal down with water drawn from a container in the workshop. The other servant, Rufino Macario, who had prepared the meal neither ate nor drank anything. Afterwards everyone sat around talking until the wife started to complain of feeling ill and collapsed in a stupor. She was quickly followed by Muyot, his cousin and the servant who had eaten. While the son ran into the street for help, Macario quietly disappeared. It was thought that the water had been

contaminated with one of the chemicals used by the silversmith in his craft.¹²

More often, however, theft was the main cause of tension between employees and employers in the workplace. Much of this theft was casual pilfering such as occurred in the tobacco factories of Binondo. In response to the discovery of a couple of female employees attempting to smuggle two pounds of tobacco out of the factory, an official wrote: "I believe that it must show that not to punish this type of theft in the factory, would lead to serious shortfalls in the end of year accounts that could have grave financial implications and it is the opinion of the Inspector, who unfortunately has to deal with more than five thousand women in whom delicacy is almost unknown but the vice of theft universal, that only with severe punishments, might it be possible to root out (theft) from this factory" (*Asuntos Criminales* 1842-49). Other thefts involved planning and a fair degree of sophistication. A Tondo jewel broker agreed to employ the unmarried daughter of a man who had approached her with a hard luck story. Within a short time the girl had so endeared herself to the broker that the latter had come "to repose complete confidence" in her employee, entrusting her with important deliveries to the provinces. The girl waited until she had an especially valuable delivery to make before absconding with P200 worth of merchandise (*Asuntos Criminales* 1870-90). Petty theft, such as a coachman driving off with his fares' luggage, was commonplace and part of the daily hazards of life in Manila.¹³

Manila's role as a depot for agricultural goods also provided contractors, subcontractors and haulers with ample opportunity for sharp practises. Primary produce such as rice, abaca and sugar were frequently among the articles stolen. A pilot and two rowers were surprised stealing bundles of abaca from a cargo they had contracted to bring up river to Tondo in 1847. The pilot's confession reveals the ease with which such goods were disposed of to a variety of middlemen and merchants who were not over-scrupulous about the source of their supplies (*Asuntos Criminales* 1840-52). The amount of agricultural produce stored in Tondo for distribution in the city or for shipment overseas made the disposal of stolen commodities relatively easy.

The relationship of a tenant to a landlord shares some of the same characteristics as that between a servant and a master. The tenant was vulnerable. He could be bullied and threatened, evicted, and his property requisitioned and sold. Contracts were mainly verbal, "as

is usual with rents of little importance" declared one landlord in court, and so easily broken (*Asuntos Civiles* 1870-79). In the event of arrears, a landlord was entitled to seek a court order entitling him to enter the premises, make an inventory of a tenant's possessions—albeit in the presence of two witnesses, and then recover the sum outstanding by offering such goods for public auction within thirty days. Just such a writ, authorizing the seizure of goods and furnishings, was issued against Josefa Cardena for the recovery of unpaid rent and repairs over a twenty-two month period in February 1831 despite the lady's ill health (*Asuntos Civiles* 1810-65).

In some cases, the Church was the evicting landlord. The full extent of ecclesiastical property in Manila during the nineteenth century is unclear. It is apparent, however, that the Church did own properties apart from those fulfilling a spiritual function or housing religious personnel. The ownership of rental properties by individual priests sometimes involved them in civil litigation, though all actions had to be carried out by a third party empowered to act on their behalf. Priests enjoyed special judicial privileges and did not appear personally except in ecclesiastical courts. In 1818, Fr. Domingo de la Anunciacion was granted an eviction notice against a tenant who had consistently failed to pay the rent or leave the premises. Still the tenant proved adamant and the priest was eventually compelled to lodge an appeal with the local magistrate to have him forcibly evicted (*Asuntos Civiles* 1808-50).

As the relationship between tenant and landlord was a legal one, in the sense that there was either a written or oral contract, the former's rights were protected to a certain extent by the letter of the law. The sitting tenant at 40 Calle de Magallanes countered the leaseholder's attempt to have her evicted by arguing that, while she regularly paid the rent of P8 monthly in advance, she was entitled to security of tenure. "According to generally held custom," she told the court in 1892, "rental contracts for urban properties specified that monthly payments should be made in advance and would be renewed so long as the agreed sum was paid." The judge agreed, denied the plaintiff's request to have her evicted, adding that in such cases: "one ought better to subject oneself to the general custom of each place rather than to the strict letter of the law" (*Asuntos Civiles* 1882-98).¹⁴ Similarly, in the earlier case involving the priest, the tenant was able to successfully have the eviction order stayed for a considerable period of time on the pretext that he was unable to find suitable alternative accommodation (*Asuntos Civiles* 1808-50). In

reality, however, though the tenant may have been less obviously within the power of the landlord than the domestic servant or the employee, he was also subordinated to those who owned property.

Servant-Master Reactions

Downward social mobility was a constant feature of a servant's life. He or she was often a rural migrant attracted by the opportunities for social advancement offered in Manila. Many were temperamentally unsuited to life as domestic servants or employees and were unfamiliar with the obligations of urban tenancy. Some found release in gambling; others drifted into vagrancy and begging; women turned to prostitution to support themselves.

Gambling and theft were often interrelated activities. Servants or employees stole from their masters to provide funds for gambling or to repay already incurred gambling debts. Miguel Ricafort, a thirty-five year old shop agent, first misappropriated his employer's funds to go gambling and then stole more in an attempt to replace the money, losing in excess of P100 in a gambling spree that lasted for two days and one night (*Asuntos Criminales* 1858-68).¹⁵ Gambling was one of the few leisure activities that domestic servants were able to engage in. What little time remained at the end of the day was often passed playing endless games of chance. Esteban Pajardo confessed to taking money and a watch from an army colonel in 1856 because "he was presently terribly in need of money" to cover certain debts. Later evidence disclosed that he had lost his position as cook for the Company of Halberdiers for losing P3.00 gambling with money that a Spaniard had given him to buy food with. In sentencing Pajardo, the judge noted that: "it is both urgent and necessary to make examples of these cases, giving them the greatest public exposure possible so that it might serve as a stern warning." He then sentenced Pajardo to fifty lashes in public and two years imprisonment (*Asuntos Criminales* 1780, 1812, 1831-56).

Many servants and employees, dismissed or otherwise unable to secure a position, became vagrants and beggars in the streets of Manila. Colonial authorities became particularly alarmed at the growing number of vagrants during the economic downturn caused by the collapse of agricultural prices during the 1880s and 1890s. The city was unable to absorb the influx of persons fleeing rural hardship and cholera. A newspaper editorial of 1887 commented on how

bands of beggars could be seen roaming the streets of Manila. Until recently, the editorial continued, beggars had been drawn from the most humble backgrounds or from those physically handicapped, but nowadays able-bodied and persons "of other class" could be seen among their numbers.¹⁶

Many female migrants were drawn to Binondo in search of employment either in the cigar factories or as domestic servants in the houses of merchants. Felipa Almario was only fourteen years old when she was arrested in September 1869 for absconding from her master after allegedly stealing money and jewellery. She had decided to leave her home town after the death of her parents and migrate to the city in search of work. She found employment as a domestic servant in a house where her duties brought her into daily contact with a certain Mariano de Castro. He first seduced Felipa and then persuaded her to leave her employment by promising marriage. She reluctantly agreed to become a prostitute when it became clear that Castro had no intention of marrying her.¹⁷ Such was the fate of many peasant girls lured by the promise of opportunity to Manila.

While some domestic servants and employees drifted into gambling, vagrancy and prostitution, others took more active measures to defend their rights and turned to the courts to resolve servant-master disputes. The attitude of ordinary Filipinos in Manila towards the civil law was undergoing a transformation during the last decades of the century; a change that involved the gradual substitution of village based customary mechanisms of conflict resolution by new structures suited to a socially more complex and less cohesive urban environment. More traditional methods of dispute resolution no longer applied in the new urban environment with its mix of racial groups and social classes. Doña Mariana Menije attempted to resolve a conflict over some jewellery between one of her servants, Inocencia Prudencia, and a seamstress in May 1881. The servant had lent her friend a gold and coral rosary and pin to wear at the festival of Obando, which the latter had pawned instead of returning. Doña Mariana initially commissioned another servant to investigate the matter and seek the recovery of the jewellery by appealing to the seamstress's mother, but, when this failed, supported her servant's attempt to file a civil suit and appeared as a witness on her behalf.¹⁸

The use that members of the laboring classes made of the civil law expanded during the 1890s as working people both individually and collectively began to instigate suits against persons of higher socioeconomic status. These cases involved workmen or tradesmen

filing suit against an employer or contractor for the recovery of wages withheld for one reason or another. Thus Benito Ostan sued the owner of a warehouse for the payment of nine pesos that was owed to him for eighteen days labor during September 1894. Three other warehouse workers were also in the process of filing suit for the recovery of wages that the owner had failed to pay them (*Asuntos Civiles* 1891-98). Sometimes the dispute involved genuine interpretations over the meaning of work agreements. Thus Lorenzo Rivera, a carpenter, filed an action against a building contractor claiming that, as each of the partition boards in a house had two faces, he should be paid for the finishing of both sides. As there was no dispute as to the rate per square meter of board or to the measurements of the partition erected, the judge ruled in the carpenter's favor, awarding him the full claim (*Asuntos Civiles* 1874-97). Such cases brought by working people in defense of their own self-interests suggest a growing recognition of their own rights both as workers and before the law.

Tenants, too, increasingly sought redress through court action during the last decades of the nineteenth century. The Navotas dispute of 1888, while having none of the publicity conferred by Jose Rizal on the Calamba controversy of the same period, illustrates how ordinary Filipinos began to employ the colonial judicial system against those whose interests it had hitherto served. The dispute involved a brother and sister, Gil and Angela Antonio, who were made heirs to their grandmother's *hacienda* in Navotas, a little way outside of Manila, while she was still alive.¹⁹ In a later codicile, they were further empowered with the full rights of ownership, to dispose of the property, litigate and collect rents. However, when they attempted to collect these rents, "a veritable conspiracy was formed among many of the tenants and leaseholders with the object of making themselves the owners of the land they occupied." The lawyer acting on behalf of the heirs referred to this action as a plot, because the tenants, "believed, and continue to believe, that by refusing to pay the rent and initiating many civil suits they would strike terror in the heirs of Doña Crisanta Gonzalez, who would not be able to sustain the cost of so much litigation." The success of this ploy, the lawyer continued, was self-evident, as there was not a single court within Manila in which there was not two or three cases pending brought by the tenants. "Truly," he wrote, "it is very difficult to sustain so much litigation because of the costs that are in-

curred as a result of the legal matters moved by some of the other parties that costs them nothing." The tenants escaped most of the legal costs by pleading poverty.

Naturally the tenants saw the matter from a somewhat different perspective. They were confronted by a demand for payment of the *canon* or land rent on the plots they cultivated. Payment of the canon implied that they did not regard themselves as the lands' owners but failure to pay brought threats of eviction. Instead they responded by banding themselves together and initiating a series of cases in the court. The Antonio's lawyer complained that: "these leaseholders, some on their own volition, others seduced and others badly advised, lend each other mutual support and in the legal briefs, in the interdictions and in their evidence they cite one another as witnesses with the object of remaining with the lands they now rent." One such litigation was brought in 1888 by Leogarda de Jesus, a resident of Navotas, who occupied a *terreno* on the disputed lands. She petitioned the court for an injunction against the Antonios on the grounds that the pair had been causing her excessive annoyance, pestering her for payment of the canon, and threatening her with eviction and the dismantling of her house if she refused. Claiming that her family had occupied the land for more than sixty years, she produced a witness to corroborate that she had inherited the plot from her parents some thirty years previously. She was known not to be a wealthy woman and so, she added, "lacked the resources to litigate like a rich person."²⁰

Servants, then, responded in a variety of ways to the constraints imposed upon them by their subordinate relationship to a master—whether he be householder, employer or landlord. While some sought release through gambling, vagrancy and prostitution, others defended their rights through litigation in the courts. Masters, therefore, often found themselves on the defensive: exhibiting signs of an almost pathological fear of their servants and calling for stronger measures of social control.

Spanish women, in particular, felt vulnerable to the unwanted attentions of their male servants. It is likely that their sense of racial superiority and religious belief manifested itself in an obsessive fear of sexual assault by their servants. Sexual intercourse and even more formalized relationships between Spanish men and Filipina women were not beyond the bounds of acceptance, but carnal relations between Spanish women and Filipino or Chinese men were

socially unthinkable. Paranoia may never have been far from the mind of a Spanish woman left alone in the house with male servants. In 1845, Doña Claudia Veltran y Oyelo accused a male servant of laying a hand on her while she slept in her room in the early hours of the morning. She promptly bit the offending hand and continued to shout and threaten him until he left the room. The servant claimed that he had merely entered his mistress's room to seek permission to hear early morning Mass.²¹

Spaniards' principal obsession, however, focused on the question of stealing by servants. This fear was not altogether unjustified considering the actions of the anonymous domestic servant who robbed his master at 25 Calle de San Vicente on 6 September 1888. The servant was hired in the morning but had absconded by midday having broken open a sideboard and taken jewellery and other valuables.²² A newspaper article of 1890 summed up Spanish perceptions in an editorial that declared: "petty theft and other such things happen so often that tranquility disappears from the bosom of the family, many of whom deny themselves from going out for a stroll, to the theaters and to other distractions, so as not to leave their houses at the mercy of servants."²³

Spanish concern took more concrete form with the organization in 1881 of the *policia de la servidumbre domestica* or the Domestic Servant Police Force. This force was charged with establishing a register of all indigenous servants to Spaniards and other Europeans, including the military, living in Manila and its environs as far as Makati. The register was to contain details of the servant's name and those of his parents, his place of birth, civil status, special characteristics, present occupation, name of employer and the address at which he worked. Servants were to be issued with an identity card, the *papeleta de acomadado*, and a record card, the *libreta del padron*, on which an employer was required to enter details of a servant's employment, reason for leaving and comments on their conduct. Any complaints concerning a servant were to be communicated to the police, who would enter the details on their central register. Any person who wished to become a servant needed to present a letter to the police from their prospective employer certified by their *gobernadorcillo* and with a character reference from their parish priest. Servants who left an employer's house unexpectedly were to be tracked down by the police, receive fifteen strokes of the cane and eight days imprisonment. Details on Chinese servants were kept on a separate register but were subject to the same regulations.²⁴

Class and Racial Conflict

Mistrust and fear on one side, resentment, restrictions and maltreatment on the other characterized the relationship between master and servant in Manila. Class divisions largely based upon racial lines were an important contributing factor to social tension. Three distinct racial groups lived alongside one another in the urban centers: the Spaniard, the Chinese, and the Filipino.²⁵ There can be little doubt that the Chinese were regarded with suspicion by both the Spaniard and the indigenous population. The prevalent social attitude was one of intermittent persecution so that the Chinese shopkeeper was much more likely to become the victim of gratuitous violence than was his indigenous counterpart. Racial antagonism was reaching new heights both in Manila and in rural areas during the decades immediately preceding the Philippine Revolution of 1896.

As the tenor of Filipino animosity became more extreme, brutal attacks on Chinese businesses and individuals became more frequent. In particular, Chinese shopkeepers were often singled out as potential targets. There were four such assaults in the Manila area alone between 22 August and 1 November 1886.²⁶ During one of these incidents, a brawl at the Divisoria market in Tondo, various infantrymen resorted to beating the Chinese stallholders with clubs.²⁷ On another occasion in which three infantrymen assaulted a Chinese shopkeeper in Tondo during August 1886, a newspaper editorial blandly stated that: "It is not infrequent above all in Tondo to see shopkeepers and especially Chinese shopkeepers being importuned by soldiers and other natives."²⁸

Newspapers recorded the savagery that frequently accompanied attacks on Chinese shopkeepers: "The municipal doctors Messrs. Luna and Maseras were also present at the scene of the crime, having been so advised, and made the first inspection of the wounded man, pushing back parts of the intestines that had fallen out of the enormous wound he had in the stomach. Besides this, Limuco had other mortal wounds in the head and the right side of the chest that had penetrated to the lung, and various grazes to the neck, hands and right foot."²⁹ In another incident, the horribly mutilated corpse of Aho Cangco was found sprawled over a sack of salt in his shop storeroom on the morning of 10 May 1895 with the head almost severed from a body riddled with wounds.³⁰ Racial antagonism lurked just below the surface of day-to-day intercourse awaiting the slightest provocation to flare into violence.³¹

The Spaniard, too, became the target of racial antagonism during the last decade of the nineteenth century. While the traveller, Alfred Marche, could write in the early 1880s that it was very rare for a bandit or a thief to attack a European from fear of the consequences, this was plainly no longer the case during the last decade of Spanish rule (Marche 1970, 75). The Spanish residents of Vigan were thrown into a panic following the assault on two of their numbers by an *indio* in September 1891. Apparently, as dusk fell over the town, a Filipino armed with a revolver entered the house in which the two Spaniards were talking and shot them in the belly, wounding both men seriously.³²

Priests, in particular, became targets. The *casa parroquial* of San Fernando in Camarines Sur was assaulted during the early hours of the morning of 28 July 1889 by some twenty local residents variously described as sacristans, members of the choir and domestic servants, who used ropes and ladders to surprise the friar in his private apartments before his cries for help alerted the *guardia civil*.³³ The parish priest of Tagudin in Ilocos Sur was not so fortunate when twelve assailants attacked the *convento* on the night of 29 February 1889. Father Mariano was stabbed fifteen times before his attackers made off into the night. The governor of Ilocos was so concerned by the event that he requested local authorities in the neighboring town to immediately investigate whether the assault: "was an isolated case or a response to something that collectively might affect public order" (*Patronatos* 1885-89). The most sensational incident of all occurred when the provincial house of the Franciscan order in Manila was assailed on the night of 15 January 1891 by some ten to twelve armed men. Friars and lay brothers surprised in "agreeable conversation" round a table were forced to defend themselves with chairs against the blows of *bolos* and knives. At least five priests were wounded before the attackers fled with some P900 in silver.³⁴

Conclusion

Attacks on Chinese shopkeepers and Spanish priests were indicative of a rising level of class and racial antagonism during the final years of Spanish rule over the archipelago. Migration, the commercialization of agriculture and growing class differentiation increased social tension at a time when a separate sense of identity, of Filipino nationalism heightened awareness of racial differences, especially in Manila where most nonindigenous people resided. Servant-

master relationships only represented in microcosm the servile nature that permeated the whole structure of colonial society; in a sense all Filipinos were servants and all Spaniards were masters.

The degree to which that relationship was characterized by resentment, mistrust and maltreatment depended on the extent of control exercised by the master over the servant. The domestic lived and worked within the confines of the master's house, subject to continuous restrictions on his personal liberty and constantly exposed to the latter's ill-humor. The employee sold his labor for a certain number of hours a day during which he performed actions at the behest of an employer or his agent. The tenant was less obviously within another's power yet he, too, was subject to eviction and deprivation of goods at their instigation. The status of all three was one of subordination to those who owned property—of subordination to mainly Spanish and Chinese masters.

Servants responded in various ways to the material and psychological constraints of their condition. Some sought release in compulsive gambling, others became vagrants or prostitutes, while still others actively defended their rights in the courts. In rural areas, too, there were indications that the social fabric of colonial society was under severe strain. There was a rise in nonconfrontational forms of insubordination such as vagrancy and flight, while messianic movements spread in the Visayas (Bankoff 1990, esp. chap. 5). Masters responded to such developments by expanding the mechanisms of social control, but the creation of new enforcement agencies could not disguise the fear that lurked just below the surface of colonial society. As the nineteenth century and Spanish rule in the Philippines drew to a close, master-servant relationship became increasingly characterized by violent attacks upon the symbols of colonial repression—Spanish officials and Chinese businessmen.

Notes

1. The Archives of the University of Santo Tomas in Manila lists data on the 1850s, but this material is no longer possible to locate. However, The Augustinian Library at Valladolid in Spain does house the annual assessments from the early 1860s onwards. Detailed statistical breakdowns on crime were certainly published for the years 1863 to 1885. Again, it is unclear what procedures were followed in the 1890s as no official data is available for this decade beyond occasional newspaper references. Apart from official publications, however, some statistical data is contained in contemporary newspaper accounts or in manuscripts in the Philippine National Archive.

2. The *asuntos criminales* and *asuntos civiles* comprise some 2,500 variously labelled bundles held by the Philippine National Archive. Sorted according to province and

roughly by date, these bundles contain the records of individual criminal and civil cases, some of which run to several hundred pages in length. The case histories provide a unique insight into the type of offences committed, the methods employed and the perpetrators involved. More importantly, they often illustrate the values at work in eighteenth and nineteenth century Philippine society.

3. Even among peninsular Spaniards regional identity was strong; Basques, Galle-gans and Andalucians tended to form their own social groupings based upon notions of cultural separatism. The Chinese had their own concept of social divisions based on speech dialect, wealth and status.

4. Nonindigenous people amounted to 108,800 persons or 32 percent of the population of Manila in 1896. The relevant figures are: *Indios* 231,200; Chinese *mestizos* 56,610; Chinese 41,650; Spaniards 5,610; Spanish *mestizos* 4,420; and Other European 510 (Foreman 1899, 355). Nonindigenous persons comprised little more than 1 percent of the total population of the Philippines.

5. Ilocanos from the Northwest not only led the way in the settlement of the inland frontier in Cagayan and Nueva Viscaya, but also migrated to Manila seeking work (Leroy 1968, 53).

6. Newly arrived migrants in Manila were helped by friends and relatives already settled in the city to find employment as domestic servants. Employment agencies evidently existed by the late nineteenth century as Crispulo Labios, one of the servants implicated in the Villegas murder, found work as a cook in Intramuros through the services of such an establishment. See *Asuntos Criminales* (1893).

7. Former Alcalde Ordinario of Manila to Simon de Anda, n.p. n.d. PNA, *Bandos y Circulares*, Bundle 1.

8. Jose Montero y Vidal (1895, 3: 167-68). The *Obras Pias* were funds originally established out of the wills of devout clergy for charitable purposes which, in time, came to operate as types of bank. The first Filipino bank to be established in Manila was the Rodriguez Bank in 1835. Other private banks included the Gorricho Bank and the Tuason Bank. Two British Banks were later established to help British trading interests: the Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China in 1873, and the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation in 1876. The first government bank, the *Banco Español-Filipino*, was established in 1851.

9. "Sucesos," *El Comercio*, 23 January, 1892. Counter claims seem to have been a frequent response of masters when faced with an official complaint from servants. In 1888, Silvestre de la Cruz complained that his master had mistreated him, cutting off his hair and failing to pay his salary. In reply Silvestre was accused of taking P4.00 and a ring. "Servicios de la Veterana," *El Comercio*, 15 June 1888.

10. "Crimen," *El Comercio*, 17 January 1887.

11. "Crimen," *El Comercio*, 16 January 1891.

12. "¿Crimen ó accidente?," *El Comercio*, 14 July 1892.

13. "Robo de equipaje," *El Comercio*, 30 May 1888.

14. *Asuntos Civiles* (1882-1898). The judge said: "mas bien debe sujetarse a la costumbre general de cada pueblo que por las estrictas disposiciones de la Ley."

15. "Malversacion" 1859, PNA, *Asuntos Criminales*, Binondo 1858-1868. A measure of the passion for gaming in the Philippines can be gauged from a comparison of the revenue derived from cock-fighting in New Spain. In 1810 the respective colonial exchequers derived P40,141 from the sport in the Philippines and P45,000 from New Spain, a country with over twice the population. See Tomas de Comyn (1969, 77 and n. 19).

16. "Mendicidad," *El Comercio*, 11 June 1887. The other cities of the archipelago underwent a similar influx. "In Manila . . . and in some of the other major urban centers exists that plague of individuals, men and women, who try to live by under-

hand and corrupt means." Juan Caro y Mora, *La Situacion del Pais. Colección de articulos publicados por << La Voz Española >> acerca de la insurrección tagala, sus causas principales, cuestiones que afectan á Filipinas*, 2a. edicion, Manila: Imprenta de << Amigos del pais >>, 1897 p. 104-5.

17. The biographical details of Felipa Almario's life have been reconstructed from the various statements she made connected with the case.

18. The seamstress is given the title of "doña" because she is a *mestiza española*.

19. According to the *Novisima Recopilación* (law 9, title 15, book 6) a person might divide an estate among the heirs while still alive.

20. Details for this case can be found in *Asuntos Civiles* (1886-89). I was unable to locate any of the other documents or cases connected with this dispute. For an account of the Calamba Controversy see: Roth (1977, 16-21).

21. "Robo" 1845, PNA, *Asuntos Criminales*, Tondo 1834-1847. The document in question makes no mention of the racial origins of Doña Claudia Veltran y Oyelo. However this omission, the title accorded to her by the court and the mention of both family names suggests that the person was Spanish.

22. "Robo," *El Comercio*, 6 September 1888.

23. "Robos y otros excesos," *El Comercio*, 14 July 1890.

24. *Reglamento Provisional Para La Policia De La Servidumbre Doméstica*, Manila: Imprenta De Chofre Y Ca. 1881. There are indications that a similar force existed in 1848 but the extent of its powers are unknown.

25. There was a *mestizo* or half-breed element to the population. The Spanish *mestizo* tended to emulate his Spanish father if economic circumstances allowed, while the Chinese *mestizo* or *mestizo* sangley, though economically distinct, was culturally affiliated with the native population due to the influence of his mother and his adoption of Christianity.

26. The four incidents referred to are: an attack by three infantrymen on a Tondo shopkeeper on 22 August (see: "Herido," *El Comercio*, 22 August 1886); an attack on Chinese shopkeepers at the Divisoria market in Tondo on 8 September (see: "Otra escaramuza," *El Comercio*, 9 September 1886); an assault on a Chinese shop in Tatanan on 27 October (see: "Asalto," *El Comercio*, 28 October 1886); and a similar attack on a shop in Pandacan on 1 November (see: "Asalto," *El Comercio*, 2 November 1886).

27. "Otra escaramuza," *El Comercio*, 9 September 1886.

28. "Herido," *El Comercio*, 22 August 1886.

29. "Asalto," *El Comercio*, 28 October 1886.

30. "Crimen misterioso," *El Porvenir de Bisayas*, 10 May 1895.

31. Just such a spark was ignited when a Chinese shopkeeper in Binondo refused to accept a one peso coin for some wine from a local policeman in 1894, claiming that the money was counterfeit. The *carabinero* seized a length of cane and struck the shopkeeper several blows with it. "Numero 357" Binondo 1894, PNA, *Asuntos Criminales*, Binondo 1892-96.

32. "Crimen en Vigan," *El Comercio*, 6 September 1891.

33. "Asaltos," *El Comercio*, 8 August 1889.

34. "Crimen," *El Comercio*, 16 January 1891.

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