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# The Republic of Negros

*Filomeno V. Aguilar, Jr.*

The notion of a "Republic of Negros" established in the throes of the revolutionary struggle at the end of the nineteenth century has received wide acceptance in Philippine historiography. Through the writings of Constantino (1975), the term "Republic of Negros" has become emblematic of elite opportunism and betrayal of the revolution. As he explains in *The Philippines: A Past Revisited*, "Although it is not possible in a general history to discuss the revolutionary record of each province, it is worthwhile making an exception in the case of Negros Occidental, for here the actions of the sugar hacenderos present in microcosm and more clearly elite motivations on a national scale" (Constantino 1975, 277). In his view, the "Republic of Negros" was set up by recalcitrant men who "wanted nothing more than a nominal affiliation with Malolos"; except for Juan Araneta's acceptance of Aguinaldo's designation of him as brigadier general and interim politico-military governor of Negros Island in a decree of 12 November 1898, "in all other matters the Negrenses chose to decide for themselves" (280-81). Ultimately, the "Republic of Negros" is said to be nothing but a "farce," with its affluent leaders formulating "a constitution for this Republic" while warmly welcoming American military occupation (Constantino 1975, 277).

Constantino's view has been amplified in Fast and Richardson's *Roots of Dependency* (1979) the concluding chapter of which is titled "The Negros Republic: Exemplar of Betrayal." In that chapter the *hacenderos* or sugar planters of Negros are portrayed as "unenthusi-

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astic about the prospects of an independent Philippine Republic" due to the exigencies of the world sugar economy (Fast and Richardson 1979, 104). Thus, what is probably the dominant image at present of the "Republic of Negros" is that of an anti-nationalist province dominated by sugar capital, which sought its own destiny apart from the rest of the Philippines. As a descriptive label, the "Republic of Negros" has subsequently undergone further permutation in Cullamar's (1986, 40) book where the phrase "Federal Republic of Negros" is used.

Before the 1970s, however, the strongest proponent of the term "Republic of Negros" had been Gregorio Zaide. In his *The Philippine Revolution*, Zaide (1968, 231) he narrated that on 26 November 1898 the Provisional Revolutionary Government of Negros Occidental changed its name to "Cantonal Government of Negros," citing its Spanish name as *Gobierno Cantonal de Negros*. He categorically stated that it was "popularly known as the 'Republic of Negros'." He also unequivocally declared that it "recognized the authority of Aguinaldo," a view contradicted later by the Constantino school of history. Zaide continued to use the phrase "Republic of Negros," as in Volume 9 of his useful *Documentary Sources of Philippine History* (1990, 382–87). Apart from Zaide's work, however, other historical texts such as those of Alip (1954) and Benitez (1954) had made no mention at all of the "Republic of Negros," an omission probably attributable to their narrowly Tagalog-centric perspectives. Zaide's *The Philippine Revolution* published in the late 1960s would appear to be the first scholarly work that employed the term "Republic of Negros."

Among historical texts that deal specifically with the province, the "Republic of Negros" as a categorical entity hardly appeared until after the 1970s. The largely hagiographical work of Francisco Varona, originally published in 1938, was translated into English by Raul Locsin in 1965. The English version used the term "the Canton Republic," which was further qualified as "under the republican federal government of the country" (Varona 1965, chap. 16). Ma. Fe Hernaez Romero's *Negros Occidental Between Two Foreign Powers (1888–1909)*, a pivotal study of the province at the turn of the century, saw publication in 1974. Throughout Romero's book, the preferred term was "Cantonal Government." In the one instance when the term "Republic of Negros" appeared, it was preceded by the cautionary modifier "so-called" (Romero 1974, 172), probably an implicit intertextual reference to Zaide. Nevertheless, it was she who first proffered the interpretation that the formation of Negros's Cantonal Government

signalled "that the Negrenses wanted to act on their own" (Romero 1974, 104). That interpretation found its way to Constantino who, in turn, dutifully cited Romero in his endnotes (Constantino 1975, 437). Thus, Zaide was probably the one historian most responsible for disseminating the phrase "the Republic of Negros," but its appropriation by Constantino and others since the mid-1970s has imbued it with an imagery and substantive meaning contrary to Zaide's version of history.

As far as can be ascertained, after the capitulation of the local Spanish governor on 6 November 1898, a *Junta Provincial Revolucionaria* was convened in Bacolod. The *hacenderos* decided to form the Provisional Revolutionary Government of Negros Occidental and proceeded to select its officials through public acclamation among those present in the assembly (cf. Fuentes 1919, 95–102). The key personages elected into office were Aniceto Lacson, who was designated President, and Juan Araneta who became Delegate of War (cf. Aguilar 1998a, 173). Twenty days later, Lacson summoned his Cabinet for its first formal meeting during which it was decided to establish the *Gobierno Republicano Federal del Canton de Ysla de Negros* which would have its own elective *Congreso de Diputados* or Congress of Deputies (Fuentes 1919, 118–25, 143–47).

Note that the government so formed was strictly not a *Gobierno Cantonal de Negros*, as Zaide had reported. Even more certainly was it not named "Republica Federal de Negros," which would have been easily translatable as the "Federal Republic of Negros," which might have been shortened further to "Republic of Negros." Clearly, the phrase "Republic of Negros" cannot be claimed to be a faithful translation of the original Spanish name. Although it may seem pedantic, it should be underscored that there is a major difference between Republic as a noun and Republican as an adjective. Bearing such distinction in mind and the positioning of adjectives in the Spanish language, we can render into English what the Negros elites sought to constitute as the "Federal Republican Government of the Canton of Negros Island." It follows that, if any shortcut is to be resorted to, it should not be the "Republic of Negros" but rather the "Canton of Negros"—"Canton de Isla de Negros" as indeed it was officially abbreviated in the documentary stamps issued by its agencies such as the *Delegacion de Justicia* and the *Jefatura Militar* (see photo in unnumbered page in the middle section of Romero 1974). Romero's employment of the term "Cantonal Government" is acceptable. However, Zaide's "Republic of

Negros" is misleading, and directs attention away from the complexity of the historical moment.

The discussion up to this point may seem to be fruitless nitpicking over semantics. I hope not. On the contrary, it highlights the fact that the Negros elites styled their political unit as a canton, most likely in the Swiss model. The implication is that the intended autonomy of Negros would make sense only in relation to a larger whole comprised of several other cantons. To think of an "independent canton," like an island floating alone in the sea of world politics, would be oxymoronic. No canton, which means part or division, exists by itself.

Undoubtedly, the Negros Canton was not imagined as an isolated entity but rather as part of a Federal Republic. Melecio Severino, secretary of the Negros Canton, issued a "certificate" on 28 November 1898 to inform Iloilo and Malolos about the establishment of the Canton. In it was articulated the view that the best form of government for Negros and "for the entire Filipino people" was a Federal Republic—*"el mejor Gobierno para realizar esta hermosa aspiracion de la Ysla, que es tambien la de todo el pueblo Filipino, es la Republica Federal"*—and that the Negros Canton composed of the Occidental and Oriental provinces was unambiguously part of *"la gran Republica Filipina."* The organizers of the Negros Canton thus expressed the view of a Filipino nation bound by a federalist polity.

It can be argued that they distinguished, wittingly or unwittingly, the unitary *"pueblo"* from the federalist *"gobierno,"* a distinction consistent with today's conceptual decoupling of nation and state. Consequently, the establishment of the Negros Canton by itself did not mean a negation of the Filipino nation, a construct that was itself being forged in the crucible of war. As it happened, despite the Negros elites' federalist stance, the island's national membership was evinced in the affective domain of national symbols: by the 4th of November, "many towns were already flying the Philippine flag" as there was negligible Spanish resistance, and the fall of Spanish Bacolod two days later "was immediately followed by the historic raising of the Philippine flag" (Romero 1974, 91, 98), a flag which, it must be stressed, was similar to the one hoisted at Kawit, Cavite during Aguinaldo's declaration of Philippine independence on 12 June 1898. The elites of Negros shared with other local elites in the erstwhile Spanish colony a similarly evolving conception of a Filipino nation, but those of Negros possessed their own strong views about the structuring of the state.

## Federalism and the Negros Canton

The judgment that, from the outset, the formation of a separate political entity in Negros necessarily signified a repudiation of Aguinaldo's leadership or, at best, a nominal affiliation with the Republic headquartered at Malolos fails to account for events from the perspective of the historical actors themselves and their changing strategies as events unfolded. It also pays scant attention to the political model the Negros elites consciously sought to mimic. That the establishment of the Negros Canton automatically meant segregation from Malolos or, for that matter, from the rest of the Philippines is a view that ignores the effective unity of the Swiss Confederation and the viability of the balance between central and cantonal powers particularly since the establishment of the federal republic in Switzerland in 1848. That Swiss nationalism at the end of the nineteenth century was young and fledgling (Hughes 1975; Anderson 1991, 135–39)—and thus might not have been an appropriate model for Filipinos at that time to emulate (although today it can be held up as a fine example of a multilingual nation)—is not raised by analysts as a possible source of objection to Negros's modelling of itself after the then oligarchic Swiss cantons. Rather, the foundational assumption behind many historians' work is the routine privileging of the Tagalog view of the center and its assimilation of the peripheries, which thereby downplays the legitimacy of alternative possibilities for configuring the Philippine state as enunciated by actors in the periphery. From such a perspective, the establishment of the Negros Canton is interpreted instinctively as separatist and a repudiation of the nation.

However, the Negros elites' assertion of their preference for a canton was not out of the ordinary, especially as its desired autonomy was envisaged within the proposed framework of a Federal Republic of the Philippines. The latter, in fact, was the notional structure contained in the Ponce Constitution which Aguinaldo brought with him on his return to Manila from Hong Kong on 19 May 1898 but which he cast aside in declaring a Dictatorial Government five days later (cf. Zaide 1990, 156–62, 168–69). Federalism would resurface in the political agenda when, some three months later, Felipe Agoncillo wrote to Aguinaldo on 26 August 1898 to suggest that the government's name be changed to "Provisional Government of the Federal Republic of the Philippines" (Agoncillo 1960, 235). However, the Federal Republic as

a political concept did not prosper amid the forces that sought to centralize and concentrate power in the emerging national center.

The formation of the Negros Canton disappointed the elites of Iloilo, not because they were any more formal unitarians than the Negrenses, but because they too had contemplated a Federal Republic whose constituent units would not be island-based cantons but rather three federal states, one each for Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. Because the envisioned Federal State of the Visayas (formally declared on 2 December 1898 in lieu of the provisional revolutionary government formed on 17 November) had its seat of power in Iloilo, the formation of the Negros Canton undermined the control and authority that Iloilo would have wanted to exercise over the whole Visayas. The different local elites were deeply suspicious of each other as they jostled over power, status, and superiority. Considering the intertwined origins of the Negros and Iloilo elites, with the former composed of a population largely derivative of the latter, but with the Iloilo elites in control of the port from which Negros sugar was exported to the world market, economic interests and status concerns were implicated in the disagreements over the structuring of the Federal Republic. The relative strengths and interests of provincial elites were brought to bear upon the squabble over the precise contours of the envisioned federal polity, but in no case did they seek to deny "*la gran Republica Filipina*" whose constitution, after all, would not be promulgated in Malolos until January 1899. Still, Malolos found it expedient to "back up" the Federal State of the Visayas, although the outbreak of the Filipino-American War soon legitimated the need for a "unified command" (Agoncillo 1960, 428–29).

Even after events had eventually resulted in the warm welcome of the American occupation force in Bacolod on 4 March 1899 and a separate constitution was drafted for Negros under the supervision of Col. James F. Smith, the Negros elites continued to exhibit the same ambivalence about pursuing internal autonomy and concomitantly wanting to be included in a Philippine state. Section 21 of the proposed Constitution for Negros Island contained the caveat that "In case the United States shall form a federal government for the Philippine Archipelago, then the island of Negros claims the right to become a portion of the federation so formed" (cf. Romero 1974, 285, Appendix C). By including such a provision, the Negros elites were hedging their bets. They did not want to be forever dissociated from the Fili-

pino people with whom they shared a common identity, but also clutched on doggedly to their idea of a federal state, even one organized by the United States, for the federal polity was the only form of political relations with other Filipino elites they found acceptable at that time.

Heavily influenced by the desire to safeguard material and symbolic interests, the intra-class factionalism that surfaced among various Filipino elite groups during "the birth of the nation" has since characterized center-periphery relations in the Philippine state—a situation that may have found some degree of resolution about a century later with the passage of the Aquino administration's Local Government Act and its devolution of government. However, the tension over state structures which came to the fore in 1898 can be understood by viewing the revolutionary period as a conjuncture of various earlier historical processes. In other words, the problem that confronted the emergent Philippine state is explicable in the context of the longer history of Spain's colonial governance.

Although Spanish Manila endeavored to establish institutional centralization during the second half of the nineteenth century and "to weld the archipelago into a reasonably cohesive political entity" (Robles 1969, 289), and thereby overturn the hitherto political fragmentation of the colony, this belated project was far from a definitive success (even if we were to exclude Muslim Mindanao and the Cordilleras in this assessment). In the case of Negros, as I have demonstrated elsewhere (Aguilar 1994, 1998a, chap. 4 and 5), the hacenderos pursued their interests in the export-oriented sugar industry founded after 1855 by simultaneously acquiescing with the state while negating it at the same time. In the early 1880s, for instance, Spanish Manila would not approve a set of pro-planter regulations to ensure greater control over sharecroppers and other farm workers, even when those suggestions were strongly endorsed by the Spanish provincial governor. The avowed neutrality of the Spanish colonial state triggered further attempts by *hacenderos* to circumvent the dictates of the state. Meanwhile, in willful disregard of the colonial capital, provincial-level Spanish authorities adopted a *de facto* regime tolerant of planters' interests. Thus, the ambiguous relations between Negros and Manila had cultivated among the Negros elites a particular ethos that held together submission and subversion, accommodation and resistance, autonomy and integration. Given this historical antecedent, the Negros elites—while identifying themselves as Filipinos—would not passively



acquiesce to the form of state that in 1898 was looming from the colonial, and by then ascendant national, capital. Welded to the nation but separated by class, the Negros planters had preferred a Federal Republic to resolve the conflicting goals of structural autonomy and symbolic communality.

In the counterfactual event that U.S. colonialism did not come to pass in the Philippines, strong, perhaps even armed, demands for local autonomy would have erupted soon after the establishment of what might have been the newly independent Philippine Republic. An historical parallel may be found in Indonesia where federalist uprisings took place after the country won its independence from the Dutch in 1949, fissiparous tendencies not meant to secede (except for the South Moluccas) but rather to gain greater autonomy within a united Indonesia (Anderson 1987, 6); these conflicts had to be quelled by Sukarno's declaration of martial law and eventual imposition of Guided Democracy. When viewed in a larger historical-comparative framework in which post-colonial states are generally isomorphic with the territory under colonial governance and are inheritors of the colonial apparatus, its basic edifice as well as its cracks, the drive for an autonomous Negros Canton as part of a Federal Republic was not surprising at all. The force of colonial experiences under Spain generated the concomitant but contradictory trends which, on one hand, created a national identity but, on the other, fomented a segmental state. The conjoined but divergent trajectories were embodied by the Negros elites who saw themselves as part of the Filipino nation but asserted the terms by which they would relate with the political center.

### **Conformity amid Noncompliance**

Undoubtedly, 1898 was a time of great flux and a period of intense contestation. As Guerrero (1982) has shown, the supervision of local governments in areas of Central Luzon which professed unencumbered adhesion to Malolos was extremely problematic. Many towns experienced serious conflicts between military commanders and civilian election commissioners seeking to institute the 18 June 1898 decree on the formation of local governments issued by Aguinaldo, whose "instructions were sometimes disregarded" in various local contests for personal supremacy (Guerrero 1982, 166). In this context, the relations between Bacolod and Malolos can be characterized analogously as

"sometimes disregarding, sometimes following" the edicts emanating from Aguinaldo, a vacillating relationship of conformity and resistance pursued within the Negrense's paramount desire for a Federal Republic of the Philippines. Various instances of conformity with Malolos can be cited along with instances of noncompliance and even opposition to Malolos.

After the signing of the Spanish act of capitulation on 6 November 1898, the "revolutionary forces" marched in parade and assembled in front of the government house after which Juan Araneta delivered a "solemn lecture," admonishing the crowd to obey Aguinaldo's edict on the conduct of war issued on 24 May 1898 (Fuentes 1919, 63). Five days later, the towns of Negros Occidental were supplied with instructions concerning such matters as the secularization of cemeteries, following instructions received from Iloilo which, in turn, were in conformity with Malolos (111-14, 121). In the Negros Canton's executive session of 1 December 1898, the letter of Aguinaldo (identified in the proceedings as "*M. H. Sr. Presidente de la Republica Federal*") designating Araneta as brigadier general and interim governor of Negros Island, which was received in the last week of November, was read during the meeting; for this recognition Araneta received the felicitations of his colleagues (150). One would have to be an absolute sceptic to see in such behavior nothing more than that Aguinaldo was being humored or "tolerated" by the Negros elites (cf. Romero 1974, 102). In his letter of 5 December to Aguinaldo accepting his appointment, Araneta "politely explained" that Negros could not abide by the 18 June decree on local governments because Negros preferred the Cantonal form (Romero 1974, 104-5), an assertive but not separatist stance explicable in view of the Negros elites' commitment to the idea of a Federal Republic.

By January 1899, however, their insistence on a Federal Republic had been transformed into insubordination after the Philippine Republic was inaugurated at Malolos on the twenty-third of that month. Nonetheless, the Negros Canton was not prepared to completely sever its ties with Luzon. On 2 February a decision was reached to send a delegation to Malolos to air their stand on the "absolute independence" and the "absolute autonomy" of Negros, which they saw as "depending alone upon the central government of the Philippine Republic in order to foster national unity" (131). It would appear that the Negros Canton was anxious that other provincial authorities, such as those of Iloilo or even Cebu, might interfere in its internal affairs,

hence the stipulated condition that, "to foster national unity," the Negros Canton was to be linked directly and exclusively to the "central government" of the Republic. The Negros delegation to Malolos was also commissioned to assert its stand on the separation of church and state and the freedom of religion. The day after the Canton decided to send representatives to Malolos, all but one (Fray Fernando Cuenca of Talisay) of the thirty-nine friars held captive by the Canton since the fall of Spanish rule in early November 1898 departed from Negros, having been released after 30 January 1899. In an act of compliance, Araneta participated in the negotiations for the prisoners' release "in accordance with the instructions received from the Malolos Government" (Fuentes 1919, 171).

The record shows that, in their insistence upon a Federal Republic in order to preserve their "absolute autonomy," officials of the Negros Canton simultaneously conformed with and disobeyed the dictates of Aguinaldo's Malolos. I have argued that this pattern of behavior was not atypical. It was a product of the history of Spanish colonial governance and the fragmented state structure within which the native elites, particularly those of Negros, pursued their economic interests. In addition, it is possible to read something peculiarly ancient about the behavior of these elites. As Wolters (1982) has shown, the precolonial polities of what we now call Southeast Asia can be characterized as *mandalas* or unbounded circles of rulers built upon hierarchical networks of alliances and relationships of vassalage with other petty rulers and chieftains. One of the features of a mandala was the autonomy of local power centers, a practice Wolters (1982, 21) has called "under-government." The configuration of a mandala was not a matter of absolute totalities; rather, the realm was one in which the dominance of a center coexisted with the autonomy of multiple peripheries whose rulers did not always conform with, or even actively defied, the center, as seen in Wiener's (1995, 148-58) elaboration of Bali's polity. The behavior of conformity and noncompliance exhibited by Bacolod vis-a-vis Malolos resonates with the sort of loose political map of the mandala. Pre-conquest notions survived through the centuries of Spanish rule which, in many respects, also resembled the mandalas of old. As I have argued elsewhere (Aguilar 1998a, b), traces of the mandala worldview can be discerned in popular notions of social stratification and in the overall construction of Filipino nationalism. In 1898, precolonial and colonial histories can be seen as converging in the Negros elites' desire for an autonomous canton with

its prerogative to both conform with and defy the center. Inadvertently, they evoked an old practice but couched it in the modern language of federalist politics.

## The Invention of the "Republic of Negros"

Having seen that the term "Republic of Negros" is a stale gloss over a complex period of history, we can now inquire into its origins. How did it come about in the first place? Interestingly, Zaide, in his pioneering text, did not cite Fuentes, nor even Varona, nor any archival source or oral testimony to support his claim that the Canton was "popularly known as the 'Republic of Negros'" (Zaide 1968, 231). The only material he cited as reference was a feature article by Rodolfo Garbanzos entitled "The Republic of Negros" which appeared in the *Philippines Free Press* in its issue of 11 December 1948. The article itself merely recounted the downfall of Spanish rule in Negros Occidental and acknowledged the setting up of what the author referred to as the "*Gobierno Cantonal de Negros*," a phrase which was ostensibly borrowed by Zaide. Towards the end of his short article, the author stated unblinkingly that after the Spanish capitulation "a constitution previously prepared was ratified by the delegates from the different towns of Negros, and the Republic of Negros was proclaimed," adding "The Republic lasted for almost 16 months until the Americans came in 1900" (Garbanzos 1948, 60-D). It would not have been difficult to spot the errors in this article, but curiously enough Zaide uncritically picked up the phrase "Republic of Negros" from Garbanzos, leaving the legacy of a term that has since acquired a life of its own.

During its brief existence the Negros Canton could possibly have been "popularly known as the 'Republic of Negros,'" but we have no evidence for such an assertion. The term could have circulated at a later time, say, before the Second World War, but again no sources are available in aid of such a supposition. What we do know is that the phrase appeared in a magazine article a few years after the war, during which time the changed historical conditions made this linguistic invention particularly salient. Writing in 1948, Garbanzos was evidently celebrating a half-century of the end of Spanish rule in Negros Occidental. Recalling 1898 seemed fitting in light of wartime developments, such as the heightened tension between the remaining Spanish planters and the local hacenderos, which resulted in Spanish-owned

farm properties being put to the torch (Aguilar 1998, 214). At the war's conclusion, this intraclass ethnic conflict precipitated the final departure of many Spaniards from Negros. One could surmise that Garbanzos was celebrating the final outworking of the official Spanish defeat fifty years earlier.

Moreover, Garbanzos was using the half-century marker to assert a Negrense identity based on a putatively democratic credential. As Garbanzos (1948, 44-A, emphasis in the original) wrote in his opening paragraph, "THE FIRST democratic government in the Philippines was not the one proclaimed by Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo at Kawit, Cavite, on June 12, 1898. It was the Republic of Negros started in Bacolod, on November 5, 1898." The author probably used the term "Republic" to render into English what he reported as the *Gobierno Cantonal de Negros* in order to add weight to the seriousness of his claim that Negros Occidental produced "the first democratic government" in the country. (Cognizant of Filipino humor, he might have anticipated that the phrase "Negros Canton" could have elicited crude jokes as it rhymes with Pancit Canton.) The point is that for Garbanzos, and probably for many others from Negros, "Republic" sounded more impressive to the insular mind than the word Canton: "Republic" rang true of both democracy and autonomy.

However, the use of "Republic" was evidently secondary to the principal aim of the writer. The paramount concern of Garbanzos was to advance the claim to being "THE FIRST" in forming a government which was "a democracy from the beginning" unlike "General Aguinaldo's republic" which was "dictatorial in form." Bacolod was ahead, way ahead, in what appeared to be in Garbanzos' mind as a sort of competition as to who would form "the first" democratic government in the Philippines. In so doing, Garbanzos was being distinctively Filipino. Indeed, the need to claim to be "the first" to do this or that—to be, in the peculiarly Philippine English word, the "topnotcher"—not just in "real" life but even in the ideological sphere of the imagined community is symptomatic of a fundamental dilemma of Filipino nationhood. The nation as an imagined community is supposed to be a comradeship of equals, theoretically devoid of status inequalities, hierarchies and ranks, at least in the fictive world of the national imagination (Anderson 1991). However, in the very discursive creation of the nation, Filipinos have been preoccupied with ranking its various members, as in a mandala, thus negating the homogeneity and flatness of the imagined community (Aguilar 1988b). The classic

ranking is based on which provinces were "THE FIRST" to launch the revolution in 1896. On that score, Negros would be an outfielder with no chance to join the major league. But maybe it could be "topnotcher" in another contest. And, as we find in Garbanzos' article, Negros wins the Number One spot in the race over who would form "the first democratic government" in the Philippines. The pride of landing "first place" was advanced not out of any separatist or anti-nationalist agenda, but to assert local-provincial pride within the national framework.

The Philippine nation is equal, but it is concomitantly hierarchical. The ideological sphere of the nation is infected with preoccupation over status, while the empirical politics of the state is driven by the imperatives of class. Although in other countries the homogeneity of the nation as an imagined community compensates for the inequalities of class, the Filipino nation is hampered by the desire for rank and status stratification, which only serves to amplify the profound inequalities in the class structure. At the same time, the imagined community grapples with the dynamic tensions which characterize the relations between center-periphery and capital-region within the state apparatus. A century after the end of Spanish rule, these dilemmas remain salient.

### **Negros and Malolos: On Being an American Protectorate**

The launch of the Negros Canton on 26 November 1898 may seem odd in light of the fact that, a fortnight before the Canton was established, the Negros elites had embarked upon a most idiosyncratic course of action. On the twelfth of November, an emissary of the Canton crossed the Guimaras Strait to present a message to Admiral Dewey, then already in control of Manila, through Capt. Glass of the U.S. cruiser, *Charleston*, which had been docked at the Iloilo port at least a day before the November fifth uprising in Negros Occidental. The Canton's message opened with a proud explanation that Negros Occidental had attained its independence from Spain and had treated the vanquished Spaniards in a manner the civilized world would approve. Having described the Negrense feat, the document expressed the fear that Spain (which, by then, was still in control of large parts of Visayas and Mindanao) or some other foreign power (presumably the German Empire) might attack and ruin the province (cf. Bacareza 1998). To repel a possible aggression of Spain and other powers, the

Provisional Revolutionary Government was placing itself as a Protectorate of the United States, "entrusting for safeguard on the faith and honor of so noble and generous nation the lives and *haciendas* and all that constitute the collectivity of Negros Occidental, reclaimed by the force of our arms from the ominous domination of Spain" (Fuentes 1919, 128–29).

Why did the Provisional Revolutionary Government seek American protection even before it constituted itself into a Canton within a Federal Republic? The explanation proffered by Fuentes (1919, 132–40) is useful in helping us understand the decisive challenges of the historical moment. In his reconstruction of events, the meetings in Paris between Spain and the United States which commenced on 1 October 1898, or roughly one month before the Spanish surrender in Bacolod, were seemingly inconclusive. The rumor mill spawned the view that Spain might retain its dominion over the Visayas and Mindanao. Indeed, Captain-General Diego de los Rios was trying his best to retain the residual portions of the Spanish colony. On the other hand, when U.S. representatives sat at the negotiating table in Paris, they were definite in their demand for the end of Spanish control over Cuba and the cession of Puerto Rico and Guam. Although there was some consensus that Spain should cede Manila and probably the whole of Luzon, the United States was unsure about its stance concerning other parts of the Philippine archipelago. The U.S. determined to gather more information. Soon after hostilities between native and Spanish forces erupted in Cebu and Panay, the U.S. made the demand for the cession of the whole archipelago on 31 October 1898. Spain rejected this demand, for which the Americans were reportedly seen in Europe as brutal aggressors (cf. LeRoy 1914, 354–77).

Perceiving the uncertain fate of Negros but relishing the euphoria of the Spanish defeat, six days after the capitulation of Spanish Bacolod the local elites took a gamble by offering itself as a protectorate of the United States. The hacenderos of Negros saw their action as influencing the power brokerage in Paris. Their message to Europe was two-fold: one, that Spain had been resolutely and irreparably repudiated as a colonial ruler; and, two, that American protection was welcomed in Negros and, by implication, throughout the whole archipelago. Their action sought to validate the U.S. demand for the cession of the Spanish colony in its entirety.

In this context, the Negros elites' request for U.S. protection cannot be interpreted simply as "emphasizing their independence from

Malolos" and that, by taking such a step, they sought to further their "chances of preserving their independence as a Cantonal government," as Romero (1974, 107-8) has argued. In the first place, the Negros Canton had not been established at the time of the request, during which time also other parts of the Visayas were still officially under Spanish rule, including the adjacent province of Negros Oriental. Secondly, when the Canton was announced about two weeks later this entity encompassed both eastern and western coasts of Negros, and the island's Canton was itself not meant to be dissociated from what they envisaged as a Federal Republic of the Philippines. Nonetheless, in the swiftness of their action, the Negros elites saw no need to coordinate with Aguinaldo on this important matter.

Fuentes (1919, 137) had made the suggestion that U.S. representatives in Paris needed incontrovertible evidence on paper to demonstrate "*que los filipinos deseaban la soberania, o la proteccion de los Estados Unidos.*" Fuentes's Spanish text used the word "*soberania*," but there is no certainty as to its meaning, for it could have been an interjection made with the benefit of hindsight, in much the same way that "*los filipinos*" seemed unproblematically referring to "Filipinos" when it could still have referred to Spaniards born in the colony. What the message of Negros Occidental's Provisional Revolutionary Government did say was a request for a "*Protectorado*" or Protectorate. The existing studies of this period tell us little about the reaction of Malolos to the Negros elites' overture to the United States. Aguinaldo was probably peeved, considering that by this time he had entertained profound doubts about the intentions of the U.S. government. Nevertheless, he might have temporized in expressing any reaction because (a) Aguinaldo was said to have wanted "to influence the peace settlement at Paris" and thus sent agents to the Visayas in early September 1898 to set up "military and civil organizations" there (Romero 1974, 87-88); and (b) Aguinaldo from about August 1898 until the end of that year entertained the idea of and even made a concrete proposal for an American protectorate, if it would be the only means to obtain Philippine independence as well as to prevent the country's partition by other foreign powers, a fear harbored similarly by Negros elites (Agoncillo 1960, 315-58).

Evidently, the latter's idea of a protectorate was not an entirely wild card. In Aguinaldo's various pronouncements after his return from Hong Kong, such as the establishment of the Dictatorial Government and his decree on the laws of war, he openly declared reliance on the



protection of the United States. Above all, the declaration of Philippine independence in Kawit, Cavite acknowledged "the protection of the mighty and humane North American Nation"; of the ninety-eight signatories one was an American (cf. Zaide 1990, 235–41). With a view to understanding the Negros request, we may query this aspect of Aguinaldo's proclamation. How could Philippine independence coexist with American protection? How could the Philippines be free and independent while protectorated by the U.S.? Why did the signatories not see any contradiction in this pronouncement? By pondering these questions, we may be able to visualize the Negros request for American protection in its proper historical context.

Interestingly, the Negros message of 12 November 1898 concluded by stipulating two conditions: (1) that the "*independencia interior*" (internal independence) of Negros be recognized by the United States; and (2) that the agreement on the protectorate would be subject to "the clauses which will be agreed upon in due course between ourselves and the said protectorate nation" (Fuentes 1919, 129). Although it may seem laughable from our present-day perspective, the Negros elites sought protection yet made certain demands as if Negros could treat the U.S. as an almost equal party to an agreement. Although Aguinaldo and Dewey held conversations in Hong Kong such that the former began to avow American protection in the Filipino fight for liberty from Spain, the Negros elites did not seem to require any such prior negotiation, but merely assumed that their request for protection entailed recognition of their "*independencia interior*." Separated by about five months in their issuance, the declaration of independence at Kawit and the request of Negros Occidental for protectorate status shared some common ground.

## Independence and the Recency of National Sovereignty

Except for the occasional reminder by some historians, it is noteworthy that the Philippines in 1998 could commemorate the centenary of the declaration of independence without being burdened by the thought that it was made under U.S. protection. Indeed, a century after Kawit, the fact of U.S. protection no longer seems to tarnish the integrity, and even the sacrality, of the independence so proclaimed. The selective social memory that suppresses the issue of American protection at the proud moment at Kawit may be seen as somewhat valid if

we inquire into the notion of a protectorate. At the outset, it must be noted that the practice of protection as a guarantee of independence—which Formosa failed to garner, thus thwarting its plan to declare independence in 1895 (cf. Bacareza 1998, 915)—properly belonged to the age of the dynastic realm prior to the consolidation of the modern nation-state system which occurred after the end of the First World War in 1918.

In international law at the turn of the century, fashioned not unexpectedly by the imperial powers of Europe, a protectorate referred to the relations between two states or polities, the stronger acting as a guardian over the weaker polity but without the stronger assuming territorial sovereignty over the weaker polity. Moreover, the relation of protection was established by quasi-treaty (Parry et al. 1986, 308–9). In some cases, protectorate referred to the relation of a suzerain to a vassal state (*Oxford English Dictionary* 1933, 1501). The protectorated entity remained formally independent and autonomous, except in the area of international relations over which the protecting state generally had complete control. In Europe some examples include the Principality of Monaco which became a French Protectorate in 1861, and the Republic of San Marino which has been under Italian protection since 1862, a political status which has not barred it from eventually acquiring a seat in the United Nations.

Closer to the Philippine archipelago, the *negeri* (“states”) of the Malay peninsula were officially independent even as they were under British protection beginning with the Pangkor Engagement of 1874. While these polities can now be regarded in essence as forming colonies of the British, the contemporary “Malays” nonetheless believed in their autonomy. By formal agreement, the British allowed the traditional hierarchy of the sultans, rajas and other aristocrats to be retained, and any loss of power was handsomely compensated—as a result of which the Malay elites could style themselves outwardly as “true royalty” and as patrons of religion (Sadka 1968). Through overtly racist strategies, the British even came to be regarded as the protectors of all Malays against the Chinese (Hirschman 1986). It would take the Japanese Occupation to officially abrogate the power of the sultans as “sovereign heads of Malay states” and to expose what had then become the fiction of Malay sovereignty (Akashi 1980). Nevertheless, from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, the Malays did not deem themselves to be a colony despite British protection. Similarly, the establishment in 1863 of the French protectorate over what

became Cambodia could be distinguished from the period commencing in 1906 when it was felt that the "Cambodians stopped governing themselves" (Chandler 1992, 137-38). Amid the diversity of imperial strategies, there was a difference, experientially and technically, between a protectorate and a colony.

However, there were cases where protectorate and colony were inseparable constructs. As a result of the Berlin Conference and the ensuing Congo Act of 26 February 1885, the concept and practice of "colonial protectorate" acquired general acceptance among the European powers as a means of regulating the "mad scramble for Africa" between 1870 and 1914. Arguably, the colonial protectorate was a distinct type applied specifically, but not exclusively, to large parts of Africa where the imperial powers of Europe could not pinpoint a polity according to their expectations, which thereby were considered "politically unorganized areas" over which European powers could stake possession as long as they notified each other (Parry et al. 1986, 309).

The heterogeneous global context of the time suggests that the leaders of the Provisional Government of Negros Occidental were, in one sense, quite right in asserting that their request for U.S. protection did not necessarily disenfranchise them of formal independence, a point not appreciated by historical commentators. Indeed, we have often anachronistically viewed the extremely fluid *fin de siècle* using ideas, concepts and practices that crystallized only after this period. Already influenced by the ideals of the Spanish-American and French revolutions, Filipino intellectuals at century's end were developing concepts of "freedom," "independence," and "sovereignty" in relation to their specific historical experiences and in variable ways that may even be incomprehensible to later generations (cf. Majul 1967). Globally, the principle of state sovereignty was still in the process of evolution, particularly in its national form. It was possible in the interstate politics of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for foreigners to enjoy extraterritorial rights and to exercise supervision over state activities, such as revenue collection and the fixing of tariff rates, in formally independent states like Siam and China (Hobsbawm 1994, 207; Hong 1984, chap. 5). In the case of Siam, its nineteenth-century history as a dynastic polity with vassal and tributary states was discontinuous with the sovereign nation-state that would take shape in the twentieth century, the borders of which were determined cartographically by the European imperial powers that engulfed it (Thongchai 1994).

The modern principle of the absolute and exclusive sovereignty of the nation-state, in tandem with the doctrine of national self-determination, the juridical equality of all states, and the practice of membership in an interstate system, would come only at the conclusion of the First World War (Anderson 1991; Hinsley 1986; Cobban 1969). Yet, many historians have looked at the Philippines in 1898 as if national sovereignty were a timeless abstraction (cf. Camilleri and Falk 1992). If we reinsert ourselves to the world of 1898 as it was rather than as we would wish it to be, we would not find any contradiction in invoking American protection and, in the same breath, declaring the independence of the Philippines. Moreover, if we pursued Iletto's (1979) argument, the event at Kawit would also have been viewed differently by Tagalog peasants for whom independence and sovereignty were not strict legal concepts but rather evoked millenarian visions of community, wholeness, and liberty from oppression. We need to guard against reifying social constructs, and to be mindful of disjunctures and discontinuities in history. Although presentist concerns are unavoidable, the turn of the century or any period for that matter must be understood without lapsing into inordinate anachronism.

It would be nice if, at this point, we could draw the inference that Negros elites at the turn of the century made the request for American protection in full cognizance of international law and that they knowingly exercised the right to demand recognition of their "internal independence." Maybe they assessed the global horizon and decided that a protectorate was different from a colony, and that it signified a dramatic improvement over the situation under the chaotic rule of the decaying Spanish empire. They could well have considered that an American protectorate would provide them the internal autonomy they desired, plus the tantalizing prospect of preferential access to the lucrative U.S. sugar market, which Cuban sugar had enjoyed but not Philippine sugar as a result of the latter's exclusion from agreements forged between Spain and the United States between 1885 and 1895 (cf. Aguilar 1998a, 120–24). However, in the absence of evidence on the deliberations among the Negros officials leading to the formulation of the request for American protection, no conclusive statements can be made. Moreover, we have no evidence whether the elites of Negros (as well as Aguinaldo and his associates who did consider an analogous protectorate) realized the multiple meanings and practices of protectorates in different parts of the globe.

Although Negrenses and other Filipino elites were acutely aware of the need to gain international recognition of the independence they believed they had won, their level of political sophistication can be gauged from Juan Araneta's indignation at the inclusion of Negros in the "sale" of the Philippines by Spain to the United States. In the Cabinet meeting of the Negros Canton on 15 December 1898, Araneta insisted Spain had no right to "sell" Negros Island in view of the Spanish capitulation on 6 November 1898 and because they had served notice of their independence to Capt. Glass on 12 November (Fuentes 1919, 164). Incidentally, Mabini felt a similar indignation at the "sale" of the Catholic Philippines to an "infidel nation" (Majul 1960, chap. 6). Officials of the Negros Canton agreed to "raise a protest"; with whom the protest would be lodged was unspecified. It was unlikely that they proceeded with lodging a formal complaint; but, if they did, they would have learnt the difference between "sale" and "indemnification."

The Filipino elites' apparent parochialism would continue to manifest itself in Philippine history. For a brief period in 1900, the group of T. H. Pardo de Tavera worked for a protectorate, but soon gave it up in favor of outright American statehood, a position rebuffed by the United States; in 1905 they began to sing the tune of gradual independence (La Ravoire and Romualdez 1936, 350–57). But the elites' desire for an American protectorate did not simply vanish. In discussions of Philippine independence until at least 1919, many prominent national leaders advocated a protectorate as their preferred status after independence (Golay 1997, 103, 166–67, 197, 211, 223). A twist to the protectorate dream would be mooted even after the principle of national sovereignty had been firmly established in international relations. Fear of Japanese expansionism, the uncertainty about national security once Philippine independence shall have been proclaimed, and the lack of U.S. guarantee for an aspired-for Philippine neutrality (harking back once more to the Swiss model) prompted Commonwealth President Manuel Quezon in the mid-1930s to "flirt" with the British Empire and offer the country "on a plate" as a British protectorate (Pritchard 1984; Salamanca 1995, 5, 12; Golay 1997, 358–59). Quezon seemed unaware that the First World War had strained the British Empire's resources and even weakened its hold on India (Hobsbawm 1994, 210–11). Even more inexplicable was Quezon's failure to anticipate that Britain would inform the United States about his stratagem, which proved

sufficient to quash his fantasy. One can only speculate if this episode left Quezon feeling sufficiently chastened.

## American Occupation and the New Rules of the Game

After the signing of the Treaty of Paris on 10 December 1898, rumors began to circulate that a U.S. squadron would arrive in Iloilo to seize it by force. When the vessel did dock in Iloilo, the meeting of Negros Canton officials on 15 December decided to name a three-man delegation to meet with the Americans and inquire about the status of their earlier request for a protectorate. By raising anew the issue of American protection, the elites of Negros sought to forestall the possibility of a military assault on Bacolod. But it was not just a clever ploy because, apparently, they continued to believe that the U.S. would recognize Negros's "internal independence." The tenacity of their stand on the protectorate had clouded their comprehension of the terms of the Paris Treaty. Indeed, as Felipe Agoncillo asserted in his letter of protest of 12 December addressed to the Spanish-American Peace Commission, the Filipinos were "the only ones who can legally decide as to their future in history," but the Treaty left "the independent personality of the Filipino . . . entirely unrecognized" (cf. Zaide 1990, 399–406). The United States had delivered the message that it was not willing to play the role of protector as desired by the Negros Canton. The U.S. had changed the script; it was a new ball game. But, perhaps, the Negros elites believed they could maneuver and strategize through the complex situation that was unfolding and through it all maintain their "internal independence."

The feared bombardment of Iloilo came to pass on 11 February 1899. The following day the Negros Canton voluntarily raised the American flag in Bacolod to spare the city from a similar attack—the decisive moment when they openly broke ranks with Malolos. On 16 February "an assembly of citizens" met in Bacolod to decide on the American offer of "refuge under the American flag," but there was a major disagreement which the Canton top brass quelled by resorting to and winning a vote of confidence (Romero 1974, 134). On 21 February, in a meeting held in Manila with the military governor of the Philippine Islands, Major Gen. Elwell Otis, the Negros elites were still talking the language of protection, but this time against possible Tagalog reprisals and soon against the anti-American forces of Papa Isio

whose movement launched the second phase of their campaign at around this time. At the end of February, Negros Oriental decided to support Malolos.

On 4 March 1899 U.S. troops under the command of Col. Smith arrived in Bacolod to a warm welcome by the elites, who were assured the Cantonal government would continue to function and for which a constitution would be framed with Smith's assistance. By 5 April a draft of the Negros Constitution was ready. To woo back Negros Oriental to the Canton, Araneta proceeded to Dumaguete and convoked a meeting on 11 April to convince the elites there about "the true purposes of the Americans in Negros" (149). In his arsenal was the draft constitution in which the island's internal independence was supposedly guaranteed. One can suppose he highlighted the provisions concerning elective local executives, a locally elected Negros legislature (where proposed laws would contain the clause "Be it enacted by the people of Negros"), and their expressly stated "right" to join a "federal government for the Philippine archipelago" should one be formed (cf. Romero 1974, 285, 291). By the end of April the American flag had been hoisted in Dumaguete. On 3 May, after nearly daily deliberations in Bacolod beginning 20 April, the Congress of Deputies of elected delegates from the various towns of Negros Island approved the Negros Constitution.

The Canton's president, Aniceto Lacson, wrote a letter dated 27 May 1899 to submit the Negros Constitution to the U.S. president. Regardless of what the top echelon of the Canton might have told the town delegates, in his letter Lacson promised to "endeavor to be worthy citizens of [the great American] Republic which is the model of morality and justice" (cf. Aguilar 1998a, 190). Lacson's reference to citizenship in the American Republic was stretching the notion of "internal independence" in an American protectorate to the extreme. In any case, Otis was not convinced that the people of Negros could "maintain the character" of a republican government. However, in its desire to coopt local elites, the Philippine Commission asserted that a civilian government for Negros Island would be "promotive of peace and quietness" as long as an American was placed "in full control." It stressed the importance of giving the Negros elites "as great a show of self-government as was possible" because it was "desirable to conciliate them." The civilian commission's reasoning prevailed over the military's objections, and Otis forwarded the proposed constitution to the U.S. president on 23 July with the explanation that the "people of

Negros deserve great consideration" for by its actions it served as "the wedge by which the American Government has been enabled to split open" the ranks of Filipino resistance fighters (Aguilar 1998a, 190)

Nevertheless, a day before submitting the Negros Constitution to Washington, D.C., Otis had delivered the *coup de grace* to the protectorate dream by issuing General Order No. 30. This Order mandated the appointment of an American military governor of Negros who would exercise absolute veto powers over what the island's proposed constitution specified as an elective native civil government. This military-type control was far too blatant, belittling the niceties of even the British Residential System in Malaya. Some Negros elites must have realized that their desired protectorate had vanished. To meet such disappointment, it was explained that General Order No. 30 would be "temporary," pending the consideration of the Negros Constitution by the U.S. government; it was also emphasized that this ruling would ensure military supervision, protection and order so that "the people may enjoy the largest measure of civil liberty compatible with prevailing conditions" (Romero 1974, 154-55). Meanwhile, Filipino "*libertadores*" operating out of Panay began to plan on how to reclaim Negros from the Americans, the various attempts terminating unsuccessfully by mid-December 1899.

Smith, who had been promoted to the rank of brigadier general earlier in April of that year, was appointed as military governor of Negros and under his direction serious preparations were made for the "show of self-government." Elections were held on 2 October 1899, with Melecio Severino, the secretary of the Negros Canton, emerging with a small plurality to be elected as native governor. On 6 November 1899, the anniversary of Spanish Bacolod's capitulation, the new government was inaugurated and the native officials took an oath of allegiance to the United States. With festivities lasting for three days culminating in a "grand ball" on the evening of the 6th, the "first Filipino civil government under the sovereignty of the United States," in Smith's own words, was established. In his speech, Severino reportedly remarked that "a close relationship with the United States would be advisable for the future of Negros" (Romero 1974, 156-59). The "close relationship" in Severino's turn of phrase mildly contradicted Smith's enunciation of "sovereignty."

The "show of self-government" was not entirely satisfactory to some elites in Negros. In fact, the election of Severino may be seen as the last gasp of the dream of Negros's autonomy and internal indepen-



dence in a protectorate. On 8 May 1899, a few days after the acceptance of the Negros Constitution by the Congress of Deputies, Severino, along with some others, was detained and suspended temporarily in connection with a "conspiracy against the Americans" (157, n.40). The case was dropped "on the ground of insufficiency of evidence" and his release was ordered by Gen. Smith. Nonetheless, his election as governor six months later was considered "unexpected" as it contained a tinge of protest at Otis's imposition of General Order No. 30. But Severino lied low while the resistance movements by Papa Isio's followers and the libertadores were taking place. After armed oppositions had been quelled and a new military governor, Col. E. W. Miner, had been appointed on 6 October 1900, Severino tried to mount his coup. But a loyalist to the Americans revealed the plot and the coup was foiled (161). Since Severino was a minor figure and support for the Americans was considerable, he was allowed to remain in office until his replacement by Jose Luzuriaga on 1 May 1901, who held the fork until a regular province was created on 4 July 1901 as part of the establishment of a civil government for the Philippines.

Little is known about this plot, but it reminds me of the October 1875 murder of J.W.W. Birch, the first British Resident of Perak, instigated by the Malay elites themselves when their district revenue powers were taken over by the British. Although control of internal administration, except in religious matters, was stipulated in the Pangkor Engagement, the Malay elites did not fully realize what it meant to be under British protection. In like manner, Severino and a few others evidently did not realize what "taking refuge under the American flag" really entailed, and thus were astounded by the absolute veto powers of the American military governor, which all but eroded their "internal independence." However, other Negros elites, like the aristocrats of Malaya, would soon realize that they had made the right choice in siding with their foreign "protectors."

As the new colonialism got under way, the United States, being a neophyte in the imperial game, granted the Filipino elites a significant role in colonial governance not seen elsewhere in Southeast Asia. Metropolitan and colonial politics converged to result effectively in some form of protectorate, with the sugar planters and capitalists figuring among its principal beneficiaries by the 1920s and 1930s, even as the elites themselves were segmented into intraclass fractions with opposing interests in the centrifugal sugar mills and in the haciendas. Collectively, however, Filipino elites received unparalleled military

support and economic bounties. Philippine exports enjoyed preferential access to the U.S. market which had been denied them under Spain. They even learned to invoke nationalism in advancing the interests of domestic sugar capital, in the process outwitting their colonial protectors (Aguilar 1998a). But when the prospect of independence became unavoidable by the late 1930s, they saw the mountains crumble and sought ways to preserve American protection. Narrow class interests had made Filipino elites anachronistic in the age of modular nationalism.

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