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Editor's Introduction

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Editor's Introduction

Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr.'s "The Termination of Tribute in the Spanish Philippines in 1884: The Treasury and Spanish Sovereignty" poses the question of why Spain abolished the system of colonial tribute even if it was a huge generator of revenue. The article traces the series of events that led to this momentous decision. Aguilar sees Spain's loss of Latin America and the political crisis in the Peninsula in the 1860s and 1870s as the main factors that forced the metropole to rethink how it generated revenue in its Asian colony, which depended mainly on state monopolies back then. He highlights the important point that Spain at that juncture was no longer a major global power and had to adapt to the rules of the imperial game of the late nineteenth century. He also argues that within the colony there was a growing sense that the tribute system was grossly unfair and inefficient as it put the pressure of sustaining the tax base on income-poor households: "The anomaly was that the colonial treasury was languishing, while many individuals and groups were gaining unprecedented wealth, a trend that began after midcentury when various parts of the archipelago, especially in the Visayas, began to engage in export crop production, particularly sugar" (328).

In 1885 the decision of the Spanish government to adopt the *cedula personal* marked the end of colonial tribute, which was also a signifier of the antiquated racial categories that divided the population in the Philippines. In a sense, the *cedula* was an attempt at modernizing colonial fiscal governance. That notion, however, was something that revolutionary Filipinos did not share.

It was in August when Katipuneros tore their cedulas to signify their resolve to put an end to Spanish colonialism through armed struggle. An otherwise innocuous detail, the fact that the start of the Philippine Revolution happened in the middle of the rainy season is the starting

point for a significant insight about this historical period, as Isa Lacuna suggests in her article “A Year of Clouds: Storm and Cloud Tropes between the Manila Observatory and the Katipunan, 1896–1897.” Using a wide array of documentary sources, from weather reports issued by the Manila Observatory (MO) to the reminiscences of a revolutionary general about the pseudonyms used by his comrades, Lacuna studies the way ideas about weather were deployed by certain segments of the population in pursuit of their respective objectives. Whereas MO’s scientists were confined to the scientific empiricism of talking about meteorology with the aim of making forecasts, which were consumed mainly by the city’s growing commercial elite, ordinary Filipinos viewed the weather in terms of popular folk imageries, showing how entangled the environmental and cultural worlds were in the consciousness of ordinary masses.

This issue features two articles on Negros during the Second World War. Satoshi Ara’s “Filipino Collaboration and Atrocities in the Japanese-Occupied Philippines and Their Unjust Judicial Consequences: A Case Study of Sagay, Negros Occidental” narrates the brutalities committed by Mayor Jose Puey, who collaborated with the Japanese to protect his sugar interests. Justin Jose A. Bulado’s “‘We All Must Work, Fight, or Starve’: The Food Supply Problem in Negros Oriental during the Japanese Occupation” analyzes the factors behind the widespread hunger that plagued the island during the occupation.

Although focused on events that happened during the war, both articles give due emphasis on economic and political structures that had been in place in Negrense society prior to the Japanese occupation. Ara complicates our understanding of the collaboration issue by showing how many Negrenses who committed violent acts against fellow Filipinos during the war were only forced to do so due to the long-standing asymmetrical power relations that had kept them subservient to landowning sugar barons such as Puey. Bulado avers that the food supply problem of Negros cannot be explained without discussing the island’s inability to generate its own food supplies due to its high dependence on food imports paid for by export income from cash crops, mainly sugar, which had been the main generator of wealth on the island since the latter part of the Spanish colonial period.

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