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Prostitution in Colonial Manila

LUIS C. DERY

Spanish rule made Manila the center of its colonial affairs.¹ Colonial rule is generally "based upon the principle of rewarding political services to the Government in power by the pillage of a colony."² The policies enforced tended to foster the exploitation and impoverishment of the colonial subjects. Eventually, poverty became "the permanent characteristic" of the working classes who largely comprised the Philippine population during the colonial eras.³ The spread of the cash-crop economic system during the nineteenth century eroded the patron-client ties in the country and removed the remaining vestiges of "crisis-subsistence guarantees" upon which most of the rural inhabitants depended.⁴ Lastly, the absence of incentives and the deterioration of conditions in the rural areas, especially during the last decades of the nineteenth century forced many rural inhabitants to migrate to other places, notably Manila.

Manila, by the nineteenth century, was already teeming with vagrants, vagabonds, and displaced persons.⁵ In colonial times it was the only place attractive enough for the impoverished and displaced persons to flock to. Its commercial districts, especially Binondo with its big business houses at Rosario and Escolta streets, caught the

1. For a detailed discussion of why Manila became the primate city in the Philippines during the Spanish era, see Daniel Doepfers, "The Development of Philippine Cities Before 1900," *Journal of Asian Studies* 31 (August 1972): 769-92.

2. Frederic H. Sawyer, *The Inhabitants of the Philippines* (London: Sampson, Low, Marston and Company, 1899), p. 48.

3. Hamilton Wright, *A Handbook on the Philippines* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1907), p. 302.

4. For a detailed discussion of this topic, see James C. Scott, "The Erosion of Patron-Client Bonds and Social Change in Rural Southeast Asia," *Journal of Asian Studies* 32, (November 1972): 5-37.

5. Marcelino A. Foronda, Jr., "Manila in 1840: Landscape and Figures," *Philippine Historical Review* 4 (1971): 139.

fancy of many migrants, who tended to reside in the congested districts of Tondo, Binondo, Sampaloc, and Paco. From these places, they sought jobs in Manila's hemp presses, cigar factories, and other business establishments. The cigar factories alone employed more than twenty thousand workers, mostly women.⁶ Those who failed to get employment in the factories became *labradora*, *lavandera*, *costurera*, *domicilla*, or *tindera*. Many of them became prostitutes as manifested in the court records (*espedientes*) of the period.

Other factors accentuated the growth of prostitution during colonial times. Spanish legalization of gambling as a source of revenue added to the inhabitants' demoralization. In many cases, it was a major reason for men made destitute by gambling to induce their wives or women friends to engage in prostitution or to commit crimes.⁷ Jagor described gambling as a "curse" on the natives. "The passion for the game," he said, "leads many to borrow at usury, to embezzlement, to theft, and even to highway robbery. The land and sea pirates . . . are principally composed of ruined gamblers."⁸ The provinces of Bataan, Laguna, Tayabas, Morong, Pampanga, Bulacan, and Batangas were reported to be infested with bandits and vagabonds.⁹ Later, the American authorities called Cavite "the mother of ladres." Even Governor William H. Taft noted that the gambling habit among the inhabitants was "so great that men will gamble the chastity of their daughters and their wives" just to satisfy their vice.¹⁰ Even Rizal memorialized the sad lot of gamblers in the *Noli Me Tangere*.

Aggravating these conditions were the many days of enforced idleness of the inhabitants by the Spanish religious authorities. Manila alone had 99 days of holidays or saints-days and 151 days in all of idleness every year.¹¹ The nineteenth century also witnessed

6. Frederic H. Sawyer, *The Inhabitants*, p. 158; Margherita Hamm, *Manila and the Philippines* (London: F. Tennyson Neely, 1898), p. 61; Charles Morris, *Our Island Empire* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1899), p. 385.

7. See, for example, the *espediente* of Ceferino Fernandez, *Prostitution*—Bundle I.

8. Friedrich Jagor, *Travels in the Philippines, 1859–1860* in Austin Craig, ed., *The Philippines and the Filipinos of Yesterday* (San Juan: Oriental Commercial Company, 1934), pp. 61, 63.

9. Edüberto C. de Jesus, "The Tobacco Monopoly in the Philippines" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1973), pp. 105–13.

10. William H. Taft to U.S. Secretary of War Elihu Root, 1 October 1890, *Taft Papers*, Reel 463, Series 8A.

11. Adjutant E. Hannaford, *History and Description of the Picturesque Philippines* (Ohio: Crowell and Kirkpatrick, 1900), p. 77; Alden March, *The History and Conquest of the Philippines and Our Other Island Possessions* (Philadelphia: World Bible House, 1899), p. 201.

a radical population growth, especially in the rural areas, which was not accompanied by a corresponding growth in opportunities for livelihood. One observer noted that the Philippine inhabitants were "a prolific stock" showing "a power scarcely exceeded by any race of people."¹²

Finally, there was the curious practice by the Spaniards and Chinese of not bringing their women to the Philippines. For instance, of the 5,580 Chinese residents in Manila in 1855 only ten were females.¹³ The male foreigners' "passing passion" and the benefits they bestowed on the impoverished native women led to the formation of "temporary or permanent alliances" between them.¹⁴ Even members of the clergy succumbed. "Some of the young women," said an observer, "impelled by the desire of obtaining (their) good graces" led some members of the clergy to forget their vow of chastity.¹⁵

THE MUJERES PUBLICAS

Philippine society still considers it "mal costumbre" (bad manners) for a woman to go out of her home without a companion especially at night since only cheap women do so. Society's worst opprobrium is reserved for the prostitutes. This can be seen in the various names given to them. Their appearance at night gave them the sobriquet *Dama de noche* (women of the night). They were also called *mujeres libres* or *mujeres publicas* (free or public women), *mujerzuela* (cheap women), or *kalapating mababa ang lipad*.¹⁶ At the extreme, they were called *ramera* (whore), *puta* or *prostituta* (prostitute), *vagamunda* (vagabond), or *indocumentada*—the last name to indicate that they did not pay their *cedula personal* to avoid arrest and imprisonment. Those without *cedulas* were called *indocumentado*.¹⁷

Most of the prostitutes in Manila came from the local population. They belonged to the working classes, although some of them were

12. Charles H. Forbes-Lindsay, *The Philippines Under Spanish and American Rules* (Philadelphia: John Winston Co, 1906), p. 116.

13. Charles Morris, *Our Island Empire*, p. 385.

14. Frederich Sawyer, *The Inhabitants*, pp. 204–205; John Foreman, *The Philippine Islands* (London: Sampson, Low, Marston and Co., 1899), p. 213.

15. Frederic Sawyer, *The Inhabitants*, p. 66.

16. Prostitutes came to be called *kalapating mababa ang lipad* from the name of an islet—Palomar—which is now a part of Tutuban, Manila which the Spanish authorities used as a detention place for prostitutes sentenced to be exiled or deported to Palawan or Balabac. *Palomar* means *kalapati* to the Filipino. Thus, the prostitutes came to be called *kalapating mababa ang lipad*.

17. See the *espedientes* of the prostitutes, *Prostitucion*—Bundles I–III.

foreigners who came via Hongkong (such as the Japanese prostitutes who congregated in Sampaloc district).¹⁸ Their ages ranged from thirteen to thirty, they were mostly single, and migrants residing in one of the congested districts of Manila. Many of them started quite young. This bothered the parish priest of Binondo who, seeing the sailors and soldiers passing daily by his church on their way to the brothel houses at San Jose de Trozo street, complained to the colonial authorities and asked them to do something about it. The request went unheeded.¹⁹

As recorded in the *espedientes*, the *mujeres libres*' previous occupations showed their depressed economic lot. They were listed in the records as *lavandera*, *costurera*, *domicilla*, *cigarrera*, *tindera*, *domestica*, *labradora*, *bordadora*, *vagamunda*, or plain *querida* abandoned by some members of the colonial forces who were transferred elsewhere and left their mistresses without means of subsistence.²⁰ Almost all of them were illiterates (*no sabe leer y escribir*) owing, no doubt, to their poverty and the highly restricted colonial education.

Like their counterparts today, colonial *mujeres libres* were of different varieties. There were those who either worked alone, or in two's, or three's.²¹ These usually hung around military garrisons, barracks, ports, etc.,²² near Chinese business establishments,²³ or used *carromata* drivers to solicit young men at night and invite them to the houses of the prostitutes.²⁴ From the record of their various *espedientes*, this group showed the highest incidence of venereal infestation since they catered, apparently, to any men who needed their

18. For a detailed discussion of the Japanese *mujeres libres* in Manila, see Motoe Terami-Wada, "The Early Years of the Japanese Community in Manila, 1890-1910," paper read at the Sixth National Conference on Local-National History, 11-14 December 1984, Philippine Social Science Council, Diliman, Quezon City.

19. See the *espediente* of Victorina de la Cruz and the folio signed by the parish priest of Binondo, dated 9 October 1871, in *Prostitucion*—Bundle I.

20. See *espediente* of Lorenza Casimiro, Francisca Garcia, and Vicenta de la Cruz in *Prostitucion*—Bundle I; also the *espedientes* of Petra Aguilar and Margarita San Pedro, in *Prostitucion*—Bundle II.

21. See *espediente* of Petrona Trinidad, Dominga Crisostomo, Dionisia de la Cruz, and Eugenia Mamangon, *Prostitucion*—Bundle I; and the *espediente* of Rufina de Jesus, *Prostitucion*—Bundle II.

22. See *espediente* of Maria Quinto and Maria Castañeda, *Prostitucion*—Bundle I.

23. See folio signed by one Vicente Olegario, Tribunal de Mestizos de Binondo, Septiembre 5 de 1883, *Prostitucion*—Bundle I.

24. Frank Charles Laubach, *The People of the Philippines* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1925), p. 409.

bodily services. They were also most difficult for the colonial authorities to control.²⁵

A second type of prostitutes were those who worked in a brothel but also practised their profession in their residences. In various instances, they were often a group of sisters, mother and daughter, father and daughter or husband and wife with one of them acting as the procurer of customers.²⁶

Another class were those prostitutes who stayed in a house of prostitution which was managed and operated by an *amo* (red-house maintainer). They were usually protected or licensed by the colonial authorities. This category usually catered to the moneyed patrons—the colonial officials, foreigners, Chinese traders, etc.

There was a peripheral variety among the colonial prostitutes. In the provinces, there were isolated women who plied this profession, although they were often denounced by their neighbors to the colonial authorities.

What could be regarded as the prostitution center in Manila was San Jose de Trozo Street, Binondo. Its proximity to Manila's ports and wharves placed the street in a very accessible site. Towards the latter part of the 19th century other places in Manila became prostitution centers also, such as the streets of Iris, Uli-uli, Balmes, Azcarraga, Meisic, Sta. Elena, Arranque, Lacoste, Gandara, Salcedo, Camba, Elcano, Singalong, Bangbang, Herran, and San Marcelino.²⁷

Prostitution appears to have dramatically increased towards the last decades of Spanish rule. No less than the governor general was scandalized by its omnipresence in the city. In 1887, he ordered a

25. See the *espediente* of the following prostitutes sick of venereal diseases: Rafaela Quicias, Maximiana de los Santos, Victoriana Malonzo, Basilia Quitalig, Enrica Nicolas, Juana Maravillosa, Bartola de los Santos, Apolonia de la Cruz, Trinidad Cervantes, Gervacia Lorenzo, Paula de la Cruz, Isidra Bitierra, Rafaela Magbitang, Policarpia de la Cruz, Apolinaria Santiago, Catalina de la Cruz, Nicolasa de la Cruz, Felicisima Malibay, Epifania de la Cruz, Maria and Josefa San Jose, Isabel de Leon, and Margarita San Pedro; see also the report of Jose Gomez, Comandante de la Subdivision de Binondo, Guardia Civil Veterana, to the Superior Civil Gobierno, Mayo 7 de 1877; also the report by Jose Morales, *Relacion de las 39 Mujeres que se hallan detenidas en la Carcel de Prostitutas*, Manila, Septiembre 12 de 1877—in *Prostitucion—Bundles I-III*.

26. See the *espediente* of Victoriana de la Rosa, Telesfora de la Rosa, Maria and Josefa San Jose, Antonia Chelea, Dominga Crisostomo, Francisca Garcia, Dionisia de la Cruz, and the case against Mariano Navarro and Ciriaca Domaal for prostituting their daughter Fragedes, in *Prostitucion—Bundles I-II*.

27. *Relacion de las Prostitutas*, Seccion de Guardia Civil Veterana Comandancia, Manila, 7 de Septiembre 1893, in *Prostitucion—Bundle III*.

vigorous campaign to suppress it.²⁸ It was obvious that it failed due to the usual neglect and colonial venality. In 1888 it was reported that no less than the interim Civil Governor of Manila, Jose Centeno y Garcia, protected the brothel operators.²⁹

The last years of Spanish rule saw the rise and spread of prostitution due to the influx of thousands of Spanish soldiers brought from Spain to crush the revolution in the Philippines. The coming of the Americans finally entrenched the profession in the country.

The revolution against Spain not only brought liberty to the Filipinos but also destruction of lives and property and the displacement of thousands of persons. The resurgent Filipino government also found itself confronted and concerned with the problem of prostitution. On 13 August 1898 President Emilio Aguinaldo created a Board of Health under Dr. Tomas Kabangis which laid out guidelines to supervise the profession. The guidelines required all prostitutes to secure a health certificate after undergoing a medical examination which would be renewed weekly. Concern and care for prostitutes sick with venereal diseases were also emphasized by the Filipino government but the cost of their care was charged against the brothel maintainers. But the shortlived Philippine Republic eventually left the prostitutes without government supervision.

The establishment of American rule in the Philippines exacerbated the prostitution problem in the country. The Philippine-American War that broke out in 1899, and the scorched-earth policies adopted by both combatants destituted the people and ruined much property. Taft reported the conditions obtaining in the Philippines during the early years of American rule:

Six years of war have led to the neglect of agriculture, especially the cultivation of rice, in these Islands. It had destroyed farms and farm improvements and has caused land to remain idle so as to make it uncultivable. During the war, the rinderpest [and surra] appeared in the Islands [and] has travelled from island to island, so that only one or two small islands in the [Archipelago] have escaped its ravages, and now 90% of the draft cattle, the water buffalo, and of other cattle, are dead.³⁰

28. See document *Secretaria del Gobierno General de Filipinas*, dated 13 de Julio 1887 where it noted the widespread existence of prostitutes in Manila and its *arrabales*, *Prostitucion*—Bundle III; also *Carcel Publica de la Provincia de Manila. Relacion Nominal de los Presos que existen en la misma*, 23 de Mayo 1887. This document covered the years 1886–87 and listed 142 prisoners, as follows: 14 prostitutes, 42 indocumentados, 18 for deportation, and the rest sentenced prisoners, *Prostitucion*—Bundle III.

29. Francis St. Clair, *The Katipunan, or The Rise and Fall of the Filipino Commune* (Manila: Tip. Amigos del Pais, 1902), pp. 61, 65.

30. Taft to Lodge, 27 November 1902, *Taft Papers*, Reel 464, Series 8.

The disorder that prevailed during these years engendered the spread of banditry, vagrancy, and prostitution. Taft described the litany of misfortunes that befell on the Filipinos as "monotonous."³¹

When the Americans occupied Manila in August 1898 they numbered about 10,000, increasing, at the height of the Philippine-American War in 1900, to 70,000 (some 10,000 of them were encamped in and around the city). The presence of thousands of soldiers presented a golden opportunity for enterprising local and foreign entrepreneurs and prostitutes. They followed in the wake of the soldiers and sold goods and services the soldiers needed most—liquor and women. As a result, Manila's streets became scenes of brawls among drunken soldiers. Escolta, in particular, acquired a new image:

The Escolta, Manila's principal business street has been written and spoken of as crowded with saloons, and given over to the disorders of our drunken soldiery. It has been called the disgrace of the American occupation of Manila. . . . All day long the Escolta is filled with American soldiers, and at certain times, especially when the troops in and near Manila have been paid off the street is very well filled with drunken men.³²

Some of those who followed in the wake of the American occupation of the Philippines were the Japanese, because cheap labor was needed for the construction of roads and bridges, military camps, etc. It was brothel operations, however, which were the most prosperous among the occupations of the Japanese community in Manila. Of the thirty-five Japanese-operated brothels, thirty-two were in Sampaloc, Manila.³³

Taft recognized the role served by the prostitutes for the American soldiers as "a military necessity." Towards this end, the American military authorities, through the Provost Marshall office, established a red-light district in 1901 apparently to control the spread of venereal diseases among the American soldiers.³⁴ This district must

31. Taft to Edward Colton, Baguio, 7 June 1903, pp. 2-3, *Taft Papers*, Reel 39, Series 3.

32. Harold Martin, "The Saloon in Manila," *The Independent*, 4 January 1900, p. 1539.

33. Quoted in Motoe Terami-Wada, "The Early Years of the Japanese Community," pp. 7-8.

34. U.S. War Dept. *Reports of the Philippine Commission, the Civil Governor, and the heads of the Executive Departments of the Civil Government of the Philippine Islands, 1900-1903* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), p. 29; Taft to Elihu Root, 25 June 1901, p. 8, *Taft Papers*, Reel 464, Series 8; Francis B. Harrison, *Origins of the Philippine Republic: Extracts from the Diaries and Records of Francis Burton Harrison*, ed. by Michael Onorato (New York: Cornell University Data Papers No. 95, 1974), p. 110.

have been the *Gardenia* which lasted until 1917 when Manila's Mayor Justo Lukban rounded up the women there and sent them to Davao. One incident, according to Teodoro M. Kalaw, precipitated Mayor Lukban to such a drastic move:

Lukban once asked [Teodoro Kalaw] to accompany him to the Luneta to see for himself how the city's women of ill-repute left *Gardenia* to solicit customers at public places. The Luneta was practically deserted that evening, until a calesa came along with a pair of "cooing turtle doves" as passengers. When ordered by the furious Mayor to come down, the pair turned out to be an American sailor with the laundress of the Lukban family.³⁵

Actually, it was Governor General Francis Burton Harrison who "reluctantly" ordered the closure of the red-light district when the Commanding General of Fort McKinley brought to him President Wilson's executive order banishing such districts within a certain number of miles of an army post.³⁶

Finally, influenced by the Prohibitionist Movement in the United States, the Commanding Officer of the U.S. Army in the Philippines issued an order on 20 September 1918 prohibiting all military and civilian personnel under his command from "entering or residing in a house of ill-fame."³⁷ Local colonial officials followed the commandant's example. Secretary of Interior Rafael Palma ordered the closure of all dancing halls, cabarets, and houses of bad reputation.³⁸ Officials tasked with the closure of these establishments were reported to have hurriedly drawn up the ordinances which were "railroaded though the town councils after a few hours, to gain full force and effect of law."³⁹ (Some prominent cabarets—like the Santa Ana Cabaret—escaped closure.)

The closure of the dancing halls, brothels, and saloons did not put an end to prostitution in the Philippines. There were traditional social activities in the colony held each year, especially in Manila, that served to cover up the activities of the prostitutes. One was the

35. Angel Estrada and Vicente del Carmen, trans., *The World of Felix Roxas* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1970), p. 91, see footnote.

36. Francis B. Harrison, *Origins of the Phil. Republic*, p. 110. The Manila Municipal Board, to erase the *Gardenia* district from the memory of Manila's inhabitants, changed the names of the streets in the said district with the names of virtues to foster, according to the board, positive virtues among the people. Thus, the streets in this district came to be named *Lealtad*, *Trabajo*, *Economia*, etc.

37. *The Manila Times*, 20 September 1918, p. 1.

38. *The Manila Times*, 21 September 1918, p. 1.

39. *Ibid.*

annual Philippine Carnival. Established during the time of Governor General William Cameron Forbes "to give Manilans a week of fun and diversion to break the monotony of the quiet and simple life of this city," the affair became very popular. Because of it, Manila came to be called "the Frolic Ground of the Far East."⁴⁰ The affair became a period of two weeks of fun, and people from far and near flocked to the city to enjoy the occasion. The prostitutes came, too. "They seem to come in largest numbers," Frank Lauback, a long-time Philippine resident, commented, "during the Carnival period."⁴¹

The other regular colonial activity that guaranteed the flourishing of prostitution in the Philippines was the establishment of military and naval bases by the Americans in the country. The regular docking of a flotilla of American warships helped "swell local coffers."⁴² By then, there was no more need for a red-light district because the entire city itself became the site of prostitution. Quezon pointed out to Governor General Harrison that "this closing [of the Gardenia district] had spread prostitution and venereal disease" from Manila to various places in the Philippines.⁴³

THE COLONIAL RULERS AND THE MUJERES

No systematic program was enforced by the colonial authorities to regulate or control prostitution in the Philippines. Save for the frequent denunciations and efforts by the religious authorities to suppress the practice, the matter was neglected by the civil authorities until the latter half of the 19th century. Religious efforts were largely confined to calling the attention of the inhabitants to the immorality of the practice. Pedro Murillo Velarde noted that the friar-missionaries in charge of Cavite El Viejo, which had become the public brothel of the nearby port of Sangley, made St. Mary Magdalene the town's patron saint to call the populace to repent.⁴⁴ Civil colonial authorities failed to implement a policy on the matter because many of them were themselves immoral. John Leddy Phelan commented that even in Manila, "Filipino women were more often

40. "Frolic Ground of the Far East," *The Sunday Tribune Magazine*, 9 February 1930, p. 2.

41. Frank Lauback, *The Peoples of the Philippines*, p. 409.

42. "The Trenton, Memphis, and Milwaukee help swell local coffers," *Foto News*, 15 March 1938, p. 46.

43. Francis B. Harrison, *Origins of the Phil. Republic*, p. 110.

44. "Jesuit Missions in the 17th Century. Pedro Murillo Velarde, 1749," Blair and Robertson, *The Philippine Islands*, Vol. 44, p. 44.

the mistresses than the wives of Spaniards" during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁴⁵

The various offices repeatedly mentioned in the mugeser' records were not involved only in the prosecution of the prostitutes. They were also tasked with prosecuting the *malos, infieles, vagamundos, and indocumentados*. These were the *Comite de Vigilancia* (composed of the *cabezas de barangay* and the *Casa Tribunal* members), the *Guardia Civil de Veterana* as the apprehending arm, and the *Carcel Publica* where the apprehended were jailed to serve the fines and terms imposed on them. The local parish priest's certification of the offender was also required. Once a *mala conducta* was written by the parish priest on the offender's *espediente* everything was finished for her.

As in the case of the prostitutes, the *Comite de Vigilancia* appeared to have liberally exercised its power, especially in making the apprehended prostitutes serve as extra sources of income of the colonial government through the imposition of stiff fines. *Cabezas de barangay* also used them to fill up the deficiencies in their quota of tax collections in their barangays by making the prostitutes pay for the years that they did not pay for their *cedula personal*. This manner of extorting from the *mujeres* does not include the additional benefits bestowed by them on the individual colonial officials they had to deal with, to facilitate their prompt release or dismissal of the charge against them. No less than the chief of the *Seccion de Higiene de la Prostitucion* was accused of extortion by the prostitutes themselves.⁴⁶ More hated, however, were the *Guardia Civiles* who, in their zealous performance of their task, apprehended even decent women and arbitrarily accused them of being prostitutes.⁴⁷

Apprehended prostitutes were usually detained at the *Carcel Publica de Bilibid* in Manila. Detention ranged from five to several months. Fines were imposed ranging from ₱5 to ₱30. It appears that the bigger fines presupposed that the apprehended prostitute had previous records of arrests.

For the first offenders, detention carried the extra penalty of *castigos corporales* (lashes and other forms of corporal punishment) and working for fifteen days in the *obras publicas* (government public

45. John Leddy Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines: Spanish Aims and Filipino Responses, 1565-1700* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1959), p. 106.

46. *Espediente Acerca de la Denuncia Hecha Contra Don Mariano Zabala, Jefe de Seccion Higiene, 29 de Julio 1890, Prostitucion—Bundle III.*

47. See *espedientes* of Maria del Rosario, Maria Robles, and Saturnina de la Cruz; *Relacion que se lista de Mujeres Publicas, Comandancia de Guardia Civil de Veterana, Segunda Linas, 31 de Marzo 1879; also document dated 23 de Octubre 1879, in Prostitucion—Bundle II.*

works). Those detained were also subjected to medical examination by the *Bilibid* physician. If found sick, the prostitute was sent to the San Juan de Dios Hospital for treatment—the only hospital during Spanish times where VD-infected prostitutes could expect treatment.

In the process of investigation conducted by the *Comite de Vigilancia*, the local *Tribunal*, the *Guardia Civil*, and *Celador* (jailer) of *Carcel Publica de Bilibid*, each of them could recommend to the governor general the imposition of penalties. The much-feared penalty for the prostitutes was deportation to Balabac or Puerto Princesa, then lonely and isolated Spanish outposts in Palawan. Deportation or exile to these places was greatly feared for it meant separation from loved ones with very limited prospect of seeing them again. The power to deport undesirables rested with the governor general who usually enforced it because it was the colonial view that the prostitutes' continued presence in their localities was prejudicial to the communities' conduct and morality.⁴⁸

The Spanish colonial authorities also gave attention the rehabilitation of the deported prostitutes. A deported prostitute, after serving two years of exile, could apply for pardon and permission from the governor general to return to her native place. The application was to be attested to by the authorities of the place of exile, including that of the local parish priest, to the effect that she had reformed and desired to live a decent life.⁴⁹ Given the archaic transportation system then and the relative inactivity by the colonial officials, it is doubtful whether any large number of the deported prostitutes ever saw their native places again. Most of them, perhaps, opted to reside in their places of exile. This may be deduced from an interesting letter by the Spanish governor of Jolo to the governor general

48. Almost every year, several prostitutes were deported to Puerto Princesa or Balabac. Forty-five were deported on 2 November 1871; twenty-five on 21 February 1872; nine on 20 May 1877; six on 27 July 1878; eleven on 2 October 1879; five on 20 March 1882; one on 20 February 1882; and another on 17 November 1882; four on 6 February 1883; thirteen from 5 September to 13 February 1886; and five on 10 January 1898. *Espediente* of Maria del Rosario re document dated 2 de Noviembre 1871 stating that the ship *Sud-Oeste* left for Balabac, Mindanao carrying forty-five deported prostitutes, *Prostitucion—Bundles I–III*; *Expediente Gubernativos, 1870–1884*. *Expediente principal referente al levantamiento de algunos deportados que tienen dos años en las colonias de Jolo y Balabac por haber observado buena conducta, 1883*; *Expediente Gubernativo, 1870–1890*. Gobernador Politico-Militar de Paragua [to] Secretario de Gobierno General de Filipinas, Puerto Princesa, 8 de Junio 1887; *Expediente Gubernativo, 1897–1898*. *Expediente sobre deportacion a Jolo de cinco mugeres y otra a Ponape de 42 individuos, todos vecinos de Manila, 10 Enero 1898*.

49. See *espediente* of Margarita San Pedro; Circular de 18 de Julio 1887 [al] Gobernadorcillo de Trozo [por] Gobor Civil de Manila, *Prostitucion—Bundle III*.

requesting that if there are women to be deported, one hundred of them should be sent to Jolo to become wives of an equal number of soldiers of the *Legazpi Regiment* stationed there who expressed the desire to reside permanently in Jolo. The governor justified his request by saying that it would give the prostitutes the chance to start a new life and that, in the long run, this would help create a new settlement which would be beneficial for the colonial government. The governor general approved the request.⁵⁰

Legalization of prostitution during the Spanish era came towards the last decades of Spanish rule. On 12 May 1880 the colonial government's *Centro Consejo de Administracion* proposed a measure to this effect. Spanish inefficiency took many years before this proposal became law, when the Governor General issued a decree on 31 July 1897. The measure was entitled *Reglamento de Higiene Publica en sus Secciones de Higiene de las Nodrizas y de la Prostitucion* and it provided the processes regarding the control and licensing of prostitutes and prostitution in the country. The stiff license fees to be paid by prostitutes and brothel operators defeated the aims of this decree, because many did not register since it meant lesser income and limited movement, as they would be subject to supervision and control. The outbreak of the Philippine Revolution also complicated the enforcement of this decree.⁵¹

When the Americans took over, they did not take vigorous measures to suppress the prostitution problem. Both American and local colonial officials, in fact, fostered it, because some of them were themselves brothel operators.⁵² What the American authorities did, recognizing it as a "military necessity," was to take the steps necessary to prevent the spread of venereal diseases (such as subjecting known prostitutes to medical examination and confining those found sick in special hospitals) which would undermine the fighting effectiveness of the American forces.⁵³ This was prompted by the alarm-

50. Gobernador Politico-Militar de Jolo [al] Gobernador General, 29 de Septiembre 1897. Para la Seccion Political. Interesados al envio de mugeres deportadas a este colonia; Expediente sobre la conveniencia de ser deportada en aquella Ysla Jolo en numero 100 mugeres. Secretario del Gobierno General de Filipinas, Manila, 5 de Noviembre 1897, *Prostitucion*—Bundle III.

51. Antecedentes Sobre la Organizacion de la Prostitucion . . . Gobierno Civil de la Provincia de Manila, 31 de Julio de 1897, *Prostitucion*—Bundle III.

52. Translation of an anonymous letter to Taft, *Taft Papers*, Reel 40, Series 3. The local colonial official referred to was Dr. Jose Alemany, a member of the Civil Service Board and owner of two public houses of prostitution.

53. U.S. War Dept. *Reports of the Philippine Commission, the Civil Governor, and the heads of the Executive Departments of the Civil Government of the Philippine Islands, 1900-1903* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), p. 29.

ing report by the chief surgeon of the American forces in the Philippines that "from twenty to forty percent of the American soldiers in the Philippines [were] incapacitated and unfit for service by being victims of venereal diseases."⁵⁴ Taft described this policy as "purely army police measure [and a] military necessity" and claimed that the Philippine Commission did not have any responsibility over the matter, since it was outside the Commission's jurisdiction.

When the American military government was replaced by a civil government with Taft himself as the first civil governor, he pursued the same policy—houses of prostitution were not licensed and the only steps taken were to prevent the spread of venereal diseases.⁵⁵ More truthful was Taft's admission to the query by David D. Thompson, editor of Chicago's *Northwestern Christian Advocate*:

Each prostitute was required to have a certificate showing when the examination had taken place. By direction of the President and the Secretary of War, that system which was temporary has been departed from in this, that no fee is exacted from any prostitute, and a further change was contemplated when I left the Islands by which no certificates were to be issued. In other words, the effort is to diminish as much as possible the injuries from the evil without recognizing in any way the legality of the unlawful business.⁵⁶

The heart of American colonial policy vis-a-vis prostitution in the Philippines can be gleaned from a letter of an irate American to Taft:

I have been informed that at every military post in the Philippine Islands in Manila in particular that under the plea of "Physical Necessities" that houses of prostitution are sanctioned, established, licensed and protected by the U.S. troops. Provided they have a license from the U.S. Internal Revenue Collector to sell beer and other intoxicating liquors.

It is said that these houses are classified. Some set apart for the officers, some for the non-commissioned officers, and others for the common soldiers.

These houses are all guarded by soldiers with instructions to prevent the commission and non-commissioned officers, and soldiers from invading the institutions not set apart for them, and to prevent any mix-up of the different classifications.

54. H.W. McFadden to Taft, 26 February 1902, *Taft Papers*, Reel 35, Series 3; also "Report of Sanitary Conditions in the Provinces of Rizal, Laguna, Cavite, and Batangas, by Dr. Lionel A. B. Street, Special Medical Inspector, covering the year 1902," U.S. War Dept. *Fourth Annual Report of the Philippine Commission*, 1903, part 2 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), p. 215.

55. Taft to Elihu Root, 25 June 1901, p. 8, *Taft Papers*, Reel 464, Series 8.

56. Taft to Dr. David D. Thompson, 12 April 1902, pp. 10-11, *Taft Papers*, Reel 35, Series 3.

This also reported that U.S. surgeons or physicians are required to examine each female inmate of these institutions weekly, with instructions to sift and turn out the infected ones if any are found.⁵⁷

Where the American colonial authorities left off, their local counterparts carried on. In 1907, the Manila Municipal Board allowed the continued operation of the red-light district in Sampaloc and in other places in Manila by calling red houses "lodging-houses," thereby circumventing the prevailing provisions of the Administrative Code which empowered the board to suppress houses of ill-fame. To protect themselves from public censure, the board officials at the time this policy was adopted decided that no records of the red-light district as such [were to be] made available in a public document.⁵⁸ In effect, both local and national officials of the colonial government accepted prostitution as a *fait accompli*.

CONCLUSION

Quezon mistakenly believed that it was the American soldiers who introduced and spread venereal diseases in the Philippines. Venereal diseases already existed in the country even before the influx of thousands of American soldiers at the turn of the century. It would be more plausible to say that the coming of the American soldiers and the establishment of American military and naval bases in the Philippines led to the entrenchment of prostitution and the spread of venereal diseases from Manila to Los Baños (which the American authorities used as a recuperation area for the sick soldiers) to Dagupan, Pangasinan where a big American garrison was established—and even as far as Tawi-Tawi where an outpost was also established.

Clearly, the policies enforced by both Spanish and American colonial authorities were intended not to suppress the profession and its practitioners. They could never be suppressed, because the roots of prostitution in the Philippines are much-deeper. They strike deeply into the socioeconomic fiber of Philippine society (as shown by the origins and conditions of the prostitutes), a society where only a few enjoyed the benefits of the nation's material growth. True, there were women who prostituted themselves so they could enjoy the vanities

57. H.W. McFadden to Taft, Havana, Illinois, 26 February 1902, *Taft Papers*, Reel 35, Series 3.

58. Serafin E. Macaraig, *Social Problems* (Manila: The Educational Supply Company, 1929), p. 148.

of life and not because of poverty and hunger. But the documentary records of the *expedientes* show that most of the prostitutes did not share such motives. Definitely, an empty stomach is a far more compelling force to drive one to prostitution than simply meeting one's vanities. One can not deny however, that the onerous policies enforced by the Spaniards and the Americans in the Philippines brought stagnation and impoverishment to the inhabitants, and led indirectly to the continuance of prostitution.

Colonial society remained unwavering in its treatment and regard of prostitution and those who were reduced to this degraded way of life. The institutions and practices created by both colonial rulers—like the *Comite de Vigilancia*, the *Guardia Civil*, the Board of Health, the prisons, etc. only accentuated the plight of the unfortunate *mujeres*. Obviously, the institutions and practices were established not to reform nor uplift the lives of the prostitutes, but to prosecute and exploit them. The colonial authorities' lackadaisical attitude towards them, as shown by the measures they adopted, only highlighted the lack of official concern for the prostitutes.

Documentary sources do not say much on what happened to the *mujeres publicas* once they had outlived their physical utility. It could only be presumed that, social services being woefully deficient in colonial times, they were left to fend for themselves, probably by begging.⁵⁹ Those who fell ill with venereal diseases—especially the incurable syphilis—could only wait for the compassionate hands of Death to end their suffering and degradation. Death, for the prostitutes during colonial times, appeared kinder to them, for it provided the only honorable way out of their hopeless predicament.

59. *Expediente Gubernativos, 1885-1889*. Expediente acerca de Veronica Santa Monica por sus malos antecedentes, Manila, 22 de Abril 1887. She was a native of Tinageros, Pueblo de Tambobo. About her, the *Gobernadorcillo* of Tambobo noted: "no tiene profesion conocida y cuya subsistencia se cree el que declara procedia del lucro de su prostitucion, y que por no tener casa propia y habitacion fija se alojaba de casa en casa de algunos de caridad por sus fingidas y humilde suplicas."