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Negros in Transition: 1899-1905

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This fertile, cultured and potentially profitable island of Negros, whose excellent condition in all ways surpasses the other islands day by day, will be without doubt the scene of great enterprises.

(Jose Genova, *El Archipielago Filipino* 1896)

As the Spanish writer and traveler, Jose Genova, rightly foresaw, Negros at the turn of the century became the scene of rapid development. Land was surveyed, borders set, haciendas were established and massive migration of people from other islands, especially Panay, took place. The first European plows came into use and the steam engine was introduced.¹

In particular, the germinal seeds of the hacienda structure which operates to this day in Negros Occidental grew rapidly from 1898 to 1905. The merging class consciousness of those who came to control vast tracts of land under the hacienda system was manifest in the surviving social artifacts of the period, like the Constitution of the short-lived "Estado Federal de Ysla de Negros" [Federal State of Negros Island]. This Constitution which was framed soon after the successful overthrow of the Spanish control of Negros granted full citizenship only to those with land and capital. The document which is a collective reflection of the ethos of the emergent Negrense elites, set the trend for political power formation in the province at the start of the century. From the onset of American rule in 1899, the prosperity of landholders was parallel with their rise in political power under the patronage of the Americans.

1. Cf. Robustiano Echaiz, *Sketches of the Island of Negros*, trans. and anno. Donn V. Hart (Ohio: Center for International Studies, Ohio University, 1978).

True to their ideological biases the move of the Negrense elites renouncing their support of the Spanish regime in favor of the Americans was not at variance with the collective persona of the upper class. The underlying motivation behind this renunciation was consistent with the *ilustrado* view that possible reprisals meted out against them would wreak havoc on their economic interests. The pragmatism and the lack of a nationalist ideology of the Negrense elites is reflected in the following excerpts from the regional Visayan newspaper of the period, *La Libertad*:

When an evil cannot be avoided, that evil has reason to become necessary. *The practical outlook of things is an important factor indispensable in life . . .* The era of romanticism has passed and we live in the full twentieth century. There is not the least doubt that the happy hour will [eventually] come when the Filipino people will secure their complete independence. The American people will certify to this because they had been through the same situation as Ourselves, and being a practical nation, they know that it is humanity's eternal tendency to dream of liberty. The powerful North American nation is lending us her support, offering us in our plight a pill of salvation. To reject this when our very lives depend on it is to commit suicide . . ."²

Ironically, at the onset of the mass social movements in Western Visayas the Negrense ilustrados gave all-out support to the Spanish forces. As McCoy has delineated, this support was extended for as long as their landed interests were protected by the Spanish government.

. . . allowed to expropriate lands almost at will, and granted a liberal degree of local autonomy by the administrative reforms of 1890s, the region's leading planters had little basis for grievance.³

It was within this context that Western Visayas "sent an Ilongo battalion of 500 Filipino troops to fight the Tagalog rebels in Central Luzon," for which act the Queen of Spain awarded Iloilo, the principal city of the region, the title *La Ciudad Muy Noble y Muy Leal*.⁴ When it became apparent, however, that the Americans were gaining the upper hand, the Negrenses quickly withdrew their allegiance to Spain, and distanced themselves from their Ilongo compatriots.

2. Cited in Francisco Varona, *History of Negros*, xix, trans. Raul Locsin (n.p., 1938), pp. 6-7. (Underscoring supplied.)

3. Alfred William McCoy, *Iloilo: Factional Conflict in a Colonial Economy*, Iloilo Province, Philippines, 1937-1955, vol. I (UMI, 1977).

4. Alfred William McCoy, "Muy Noble y Muy Leal: Revolution and Counterrevolution in the Western Visayas, Philippines 1896-1907," 1978.(Draft.)

Rightly reading the turn of political events, the Negrense hacenderos saw the eventual ascendancy of the Americans and petitioned the new colonizers for "protectorate status." In fact as early as 3 February 1899 General Miller reported that the Negrenses, along with the Cebuanos, "realized that they could not successfully establish an independent government and wished the United States to exercise control."⁵

The response of the Negrense elites was diametrically opposed to their Ilongo counterparts whose reaction to the intrusion of American forces was more closely aligned to the response of the growing mass of displaced Negrense peasants. The latter two social groups never voluntarily accepted the presence of Americans and, consequently, both did not hesitate to take up arms against the new foreign invaders. The protagonists in this historical drama thus had the Negrense ilustrados collaborating with the Americans on the one hand, and the Negrense mass and the Panay inhabitants in revolt, on the other.

A divided class interest was a dominant factor propelling Negrense hacenderos to align themselves with the Americans. True, the Panay hacenderos also had vested interests rooted in land, but these Ilongo elites differed from the Negrense for they at least had a national consciousness, a fact shown by their armed support of the fledgling Philippine Republic.

In fact, the Ilongo revolutionaries, considering the Negrense capitulation to the Americans treasonous sent armed troops from Panay to Negros to rally the hacendero support for the American resistance, but their efforts failed. Thus, the Americans remained fully in control of Negros. To be fair, a few Negrense elites lent support to their Ilongo compatriots, but they were easily overwhelmed by the effective espionage and collaboration of the Negrense elites who were co-opted by the Americans.

The governor of Negros Occidental clearly illustrated this fact in his report:

Nine months have passed since civil provincial government has been established here, and although this is rather a short time to mark the character of a political epoch, yet there already prevails in these towns a condition which may be considered the prelude of an era of general contentment and of love for a government which has been ardently desired for such a long time, and this cannot but form a stable foundation for a future radical and thoroughly autonomic constitution.

If at a time when the warlike spirit was at its height in the other provinces, its contagious germs, hardly had they reached here, were immediately

5. Annual Report of the Major General 1899, part 2, 122.

suppressed by the discretion of the authorities governing Negros, and more so by the public opinion here which has shown itself unanimously opposed to the politics of the irreconcilables; if during the most critical stages of the insurrection the island of Negros has, as its inhabitants and outsiders say, been a paradise of tranquillity: then it will certainly not be necessary for me to give you now a detailed description of the present conditions, under the protection of the civil government which has been the ardent desire of its inhabitants, who will never forget the last pages of their history and adhere to ideas which would deviate them from the course which they have been following by a happy and providential intuition. The only desire here is for peace, and all the hearts beat only for the prosperity of the province.⁶

In listing certain factors which directly played a part in the ease with which the American colonizers assumed military and political control of Western Visayas, one must necessarily point to the operation of the situational logic of the Negrense hacenderos. Their strategic decision to shift their loyalty from the Spaniards to the Americans may be attributed to the fact that Spain no longer served as a good market. Possessing a strong insular and practical mind, the concern of the Negrense hacenderos was the continuity of the industry which sustained them all. Thus their response to the revolutionary tide that swept Western Visayas stemmed largely from their desire to protect their power base rooted in raw sugar production.

The strategic access the Negrense elites had to information about the superior force of the Americans, and the political power which they gained through the successful staging of a short-lived armed struggle against the puny Spanish force in Negros, provided the rational ground for their pragmatic choice to opt for American rule. Rational as it was, the decision to formally cede the political control of the island in exchange for their personal peace and comfort was largely an elite choice.

As LeRoy observed, "the men chiefly instrumental in adopting a conservative and peaceful course in Negros were the men of property, owners of large estates . . ."⁷ If there was anything remarkable about the Negrense influential elites led by Aniceto Lacson, it was that they were the first to declare independence before Malolos, and also the first to raise the American flag in Negros before any American ever set foot on the island.⁸

6. Annual Report of the Governor of the Province of Negros Occidental, Philippine Islands for the year 1901, RG 350, Entry 5, 3029.

7. James A. LeRoy, *The Americans in the Philippines*, (n.p., 1914), p. 106.

8. Annual Report of the Major-General Commanding the Army 1899, 123.

THE ROOTS OF AMERICAN EXPANSIONISM

Francisco and Fast express the view that American colonial interest in the Philippines had its origin in William McKinley's controversial links with the Sugar Trust, an American government monopoly tied up in sugar.⁹ Thrust into the presidency of the United States by the aggressive campaign of strategic sectors which poured funds into his campaign for office, McKinley necessarily had "debts" to pay to his political patrons. As it turned out, his backers were influential men running the most powerful corporation at the time in the United States—the Sugar Trust.

Previous to the entry of beet sugar into the domestic market the Sugar Trust monopolized the American sugar industry. However,

... at the very zenith of the Trust's corporate power, an accident of horticultural science permitting the extraction of sugar from beets, and an accident of political economy, enabling beet to be produced for profit in America for the first time, threatened the underpinnings of [this] monopoly.¹⁰

Proposals to put up beet factories rapidly gained ground among the beet farmers and their representatives in Congress. Understandably, the concern arose among adherents of the cane refiner's Trust that unless checked, the beet sugar industry was capable of cutting into, and ultimately cornering the bigger share of the sugar market.

To compete with the beet industry, it was necessary to refine cane sugar in extremely large amounts. Hawaii was incapable of supplying this demand, so America looked to Cuba. The threat posed by the Teller Amendment, which essentially guaranteed Cuban independence by the Americans, deterred her, however, so the Sugar Refineries group looked for new frontiers to develop for sugarcane production. For this venture, the Philippines, along with Puerto Rico, were eyed as strategic zones for expansion. A memo in the Insular Bureau which alluded to the possibilities of the Philippines questioned,

From whence then are we to get a domestic supply of sugar? The annexation of Cuba with the consent of her people would afford a solution of the question, but any form of annexation without that consent would destroy the sugar industry of the Island or cost more to save it than it would be worth.

9. Luzviminda B. Francisco and Jonathan S. Fast, *Conspiracy for Empire: Big Business, Corruption and the Politics of Imperialism in America, 1876-1907* (Foundation for Nationalist Studies, 1985).

10. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

These things being so we most naturally turn to the Philippines in which we find the soil, climate and labor from which can come a bountiful production. The islands are conceded to be good for from one to three million tons. What is required to secure a result is capital and that capital awaits a definite official assurance that, invested, it and its product would be protected; it must be understood that our dominion or power in the Islands will not be too far withdrawn in favor of either the native, nor entirely so in favor of some foreign nation.¹¹

By design, it was envisioned that the influx of raw sugar to the American market would offset the gains envisioned by the infant beet sugar industry. Following the reasoning of Francisco and Fast, the subsequent incursion of American capital in the Philippines was undertaken to achieve the defined ends of the Sugar Trust.¹²

President McKinley of the United States was deemed to be the master plotter behind the whole scheme of placing the Philippines under American control. Retention of the islands, as well as the exercise of authority, virtually assured the United States an entry to the markets of the Far East. The Philippines lay on the direct route plied by the major shipping vessels on their way to the various ports of call in Asia—in particular, China. The Americans were eager to gain a footing inside the Chinese empire, thus assuring themselves of a superior position in the Pacific.¹³ It was an added bonus for them that the commercial prospects in the Philippines, while undeveloped, augured well for both the American consumers and producers.

Not only did they have a supplier of raw materials, but they also had a market for their manufactured surplus goods. Intrinsic to this would be an increase in sugar production, thus making the product more accessible to the consumers. Inasmuch as the sugar refineries in the United States were obviously favorable to the idea of annexation, the trading advantages that would accrue to the U.S. with such a move were underscored.¹⁴

The class which had the most to gain from the fulfillment of America's aim to subdue the Filipino people was the ilustrado landholding class. Of this social class, William Howard Taft said:

They are generally lacking in moral character; are with some notable exceptions prone to yield to any pecuniary consideration, and are difficult

11. USNA RG 350, 4122.

12. See Francisco and Fast, "Conspiracy."

13. Cf. Moorfield Storey and Marcial P. Lichauco, *The Conquest of the Philippines* (G. Putnam's Sons, The Knickerbocker Press, 1926); Francisco and Fast, "Conspiracy."

14. Francisco and Fast, "Conspiracy," p. 163.

persons out of whom to make an honest government . . . They are born politicians; are as ambitious as Satan, and as jealous as possible of each other's preferment [Taft 1900].

Taft, who was appointed civilian governor-general of the islands, was charged with the responsibility of "pacifying" the archipelago. To facilitate his objectives, Taft gathered together members of the ilustrado class to aid him in bringing about a semblance of order and law to the countryside. Other than the more subtle ways of domination that were set in place through institutional mechanisms like education, this process, unfortunately entailed hunting down "insurgents"—in reality, men and women fighting to be free of another oppressor. In Negros the peasant rebels found an unexpected ally against the new colonizers among a handful of Spanish mestizos like Remigio Montilla who remained steadfastly loyal to Spain. Montilla's role in the resistance against the American military troops in Negros was related by a ninety-seven-year old informant, Mr. Fulgencio del Castillo, to Petronila Peña Garcia, granddaughter of Remigio Montilla:

Mr. del Castillo still recalls the revolution in 1896. According to him, "Tio Mioy" was really a *revolucionario*. After the Spaniards were defeated, there was peace in the town. It was only when the American soldiers came that trouble started. Some people believed in continuing the fight against the Americans this time. Others did not believe in fighting. Remigio Montilla believed in the revolution and supported the cause in the mountains with his cattle herds . . . (and) with the rice and corn harvests of his farms. But the people who did not believe in fighting the Americans told the Americans about this Capitan Mioy who was the main support of the revolutionaries (now called *insurrectos*) against the Americans. There were four informers who told the Americans about this act of Remigio Montilla. They were: Lauz, Captain Gregorio Borrromeo (brother of Rafael Borrromeo and father of Rustico Borrromeo), Captain Ramos of Bulad (father-in-law of Capt. Gavino Gasataya, the fourth person to tell the Americans about the acts of Remigio Montilla). They were rewarded handsomely. (Lauz was able to open a *carinderia* which his daughters and some were still running until the war broke out . . . and Capt. Gavino Gasataya had to build a torril in the plaza to accommodate all the cattle given him as reward for the information).

On the day when Remigio Montilla passed their home in Tabao, Valladolid on his way to Isabela, Fulgencio del Castillo recalls his stepfather Marianing Paguntalan cautioning the former not to proceed to Isabela because word had been received from Inocentes Masculino that there was already a warrant of arrest for him. Montilla answered that if that was his *suerte*, so be it. But he had to go to Isabela and visit his farms because he had not done so for a long time, and his attention was badly needed. He planned to go to Barrio Aranda passing the seashore, then go inward at

Tugis and proceed inland to Isabela, where he had a house. Mr. del Castillo does not recall exactly where he was taken into custody because he was not there. He only heard that he was taken at 2:30 in the afternoon after lunch, while he was resting, and shot at Nalipay.

THE ELITES AND THE EMERGING CORE OF RURAL PROLETARIAT

To understand the nature of wealth and power formation in Negros one's point of reference must necessarily be the hacendero or landholding class on the one hand, and the *obrero* or working class, on the other.

Various names have been ascribed to the landed group. To the *pumuluyo*, the folk mass, those who have "financial capability and affluence" are *manggaranon*. Romualdo Araneta, a keen observer of the Negrense society in the early 1900s, referred to them as the "monied and educated class," while Colonel James Smith who was the American officer-in-charge in Negros characterized them as "being intelligent, educated and holders of property" whose vested interests, as we shall see, were expressed through the Constitution.¹⁵

Aside from being heads of estates the elites also held sway over the political arena. In fact, those in power were dominated by the gentry. The elections for *gobernadorcillos* during the Spanish regime demonstrate how candidates with large estates were the ones who dared run for the position. Witness the case of Don Valeriano Monton who was elected *gobernador* of Jimamaylan. Of Monton the archival records note, "He possesses properties (*bienes de fortuna*) . . . and he comes from a good family of Molo."¹⁶

Past records similarly listing the men who had held the position of captain of Bago were the principalia of that town. Among them were Don Vicente Araneta, Don Mariano Torres, Don Remigio Salas, Don Dionisio Martin, and Don Mariano Advincula.¹⁷

The gentry, in addition to being property holders and leaders in local office, enjoyed certain privileges and rights not granted to the lower class. Article 6 Section 1 of the Constitution framed by the short-lived Federacion de Republica Negros betrays its upperclass bias on the right of suffrage and qualifications for office:

15. Romualdo Araneta, "Social Classes in Bago," H. O. Bayer paper 82, 1918; Smith 1899:338.

16. Varias Provincias, Bundle II Mss/num. 77, PNA.

17. Ibid.

Every man over the age of 21 years who is a householder or who is able to read or write the Bisayan dialect or the Spanish language or is the owner of real property with the minimum value of \$1,000 shall have the right to vote in all elections provided his state, city or township tax is paid.

General Juan Araneta, Delegate of War during the Provisional Government, reflected the same attitude towards the working class. Tasked to organize local juntas, Araneta specified that the men expected to head the various positions had to have "a high character, social position and honorable conduct."¹⁸

The class lines had been drawn, and the distinction between "princes and paupers" would persist through the years. The social life of the Negrenses would enter an era of unmatched glamour and conspicuous consumption. Certainly, *The Commoner*, a prewar newspaper given the gushy headlines, did nothing to dispel the image of a fabulously affluent society in the island during the latter part of the American colonial era:

Bacolod's fashionable wedding of the season due to the social position of the parties is the Dizon-Ramos wedding . . .

The groom is Raymundo Dizon, a ranking employee of Bacolod branch of the PNB.

The bride is Hermenegilda Ramos, the daughter of Don Mariano Ramos and Doña Josefa Villanueva, related to practically all the old and prominent families of Bacolod.¹⁹

And:

Mr. and Mrs. Anselmo Diaz and other friends left Manila last Tuesday on a world tour expected to last for about 14 months. The employees of his electric light service gave him a "despedida" banquet at the University Club before he sailed to Manila.²⁰

The social structure had fostered the class differences existing between the manggaranon and the *pigado*. The continued dependency of the laborers on their *amo* had lamentably engendered a loss of pride and esteem on the former. The structure was open to exploitation.

18. Ma. Fe Hernaez Romero, "Negros Occidental Between Two Foreign Powers (1898-1909)," *Negros Historical Commission*.

19. *The Commoner*, 1 April 1937, p. 6.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

HUNGER AND THE EMERGENCE OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

In the transition phase of the establishment of the American colonial government in Negros, many among the disenfranchised peasants now working as laborers in the haciendas experienced food scarcity. The nature of the hunger problem faced by the laboring class may be gleaned from the following military report of a commanding officer based in the Manapla and Victorias districts:

This scarcity amounts to suffering in many cases which may be expected to increase for about three months . . . At this time those in want are unable to procure work and have great difficulty in procuring food.

The unusual dryness of the season has operated against the crops . . . and has materially injured the sugarcane. On these account, many owners of haciendas have been forced to discharge part, if not all of their laborers as they could not be fed. These laborers are now without means and work and the price of food is high.²¹

The first lieutenant of the sixth infantry, James Heidt, was of the opinion that unless the situation was remedied, these idle and hungry people would resort to organized robbery to procure food.²² In response to the widespread hunger crisis, Brigadier General Smith commanded that a "Hunger Commission" be formed with the object of raising funds with which to purchase rice directly from China. Subcommissioners were appointed in every pueblo and various methods were used to obtain money and food for the relief of the poor.²³

Basic staples like rice and other goods were in such critical shortage that the American military had to control their movements. In particular, the Chinese who were slowly incorporated into the island's social structure, controlled the sale of rice. Military records in the U.S. National Archives disclose that the retail trading stores of Go Toco and Tan Tianco in Victorias provided supplies to military garrisons.²⁴ Moreover, there were several references to Chinese-owned haciendas and to assistance extended by the Chinese traders to the insurgents by supplying the latter with rice.²⁵

The aboriginal people of the island did not remain unaffected by the growing social restlessness and lawlessness in Negros. The displacement of the island's ethnic community arose with the fencing of

21. USNA RG 395, 13 June 1900, 1160.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*, 27 June 1900.

24. USNA RG 395, E-52900, 1899.

25. *Ibid.*, 31 July 1900.

the land. Driven away from their base in the cleared forest lands, they were forced to move into the town areas in search of food. Unhappily, their arrival in the lowlands was considered to be an "omen of famine."²⁶ Eventually, these once proud inhabitants of the forest were culturally emasculated and assimilated into the lowest strata of the increasingly stratified society of Negros. Having become the dregs of society, they became subject to labor exploitation and disdain by the Hispanized Negrenses.

The increasing reports of robberies, killings and kidnappings belied the surface impression that the poor were satisfied with their lives. Although those of the landed might have found a measure of success or prosperity, the greater number of people suffered from hunger and disease. As a result some armed men identified in the extant documents as *tulisanes* and *ladrones* took to burning haciendas. In one such instance, a confidential directive sent to the commanding officer of the U.S. forces stationed in Silay disclosed the following orders:

The Regimental Commander directs me to inform you that he desires the Northern portion of the island reduced to a state of order and the roving band of robbers, revolutionists, *Tulisanes* and *Babaylanes* destroyed.²⁷

A similar report from Gen. James Smith disclosed:

... about 5 p.m. of today (Sept. 12) the Señora Rosa Jalandoni, wife of Señor Juan Carballo, presented herself in this ... and deposed that her husband had been murdered by *tulisanes* who passed their hacienda this morning.²⁸

The growing restiveness of the *pumuluyo* (the masses) which found expression in occasional acts of violence against the landed, forced the hacenderos to take up arms to protect themselves. Records as early as 1900 show the disposition of planters to collect an array of arms and guns.

One Pedro Maravilla of Saravia, for example, registered the following arms in his possession:

- 1 Colts Rifle Cal. 44 No. 70859
- 1 SW Rev Cal. 45 No. 2776
- 1 SW Rev Cal. 44 no number
- 1 SW Rev Cal. 38 no number

Another individual hacendero, Jose Araneta, a resident of Silay registered the following:

26. Emilio B. Tarrosa, "The Life of the People of Occidental Negros in the Last Half of the 19th Century" as told by tradition. Paper No. 10, H.O. Beyer Series, 1916.

27. USNA RG 395, 7 December 1899.

1 revolver Spanish make no name
no number 3 in barrel 6 chamber
32 cal. 6 cartridges

It may well be argued that the hacenderos had good cause to arm themselves. For instance a report sent to Major F.A. Whitney, Commander of the N. W. District in Silay disclosed orders to the former that he should return the arms seized at the hacienda of Señor Alunan. Apparently some rebels had burned down Alunan's hacienda and in retaliation he seized a native believed to be a member of this band of ruffians. The letter to Major Whitney concluded that "as a reward for his (Alunan's) friendship to the Americans . . . arms should be returned, (but) with the understanding that they were to be given solely for the protection of the hacienda."²⁹

Prominent among the armed bands roaming the countryside was a mass-based group which terrorized the haciendas by robbing and pillaging. The members of the babaylanes, as the group was popularly known, were mostly discontented marginalized peasants.³⁰ As Cullamar convincingly argues in her work, the Babaylanes were essentially "a peasant protest movement with messianic, revivalistic and nativistic overtones."³¹

This band which roamed at will, evading capture by the authorities, was mostly a reaction against the unjust practices committed against the laborers. As mentioned previously, many laborers were laid off because the hacienda owners were hard pressed to pay for their services. Those who were lucky enough to be retained in the hacienda labor force were paid pitiful wages. Inevitably, the laborers who found themselves with neither board nor lodging were attracted to Babaylanism. The ideology spouted by the movement advocated violence as a means to changing the exploitative social structure—i.e., the hacienda system. Thus Babaylanism attracted many types of followers—malcontents with axes to grind, while others were simply disheartened idealists. A few like Papa Isio who led the movement to social prominence from 1898 to 1902, had nationalistic ideals.

The end of the Philippine-American War by 1902 brought the eventual demise of the insurgents led by Papa Isio. From 1902 as noted by Cullamar, Isio's revolutionary connections collapsed, and the movement degenerated into social banditry.

28. Ibid., 12 September 1899.

29. Ibid., 20 January 1900.

30. A substantive discussion of Babaylanism in Negros is presented in Evelyn Tan Cullamar, *Babaylanism in Negros: 1896-1907* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1986).