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Notes and Comments

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MARIA LUISA T. CAMAGAY

Prior to the nineteenth century when the institutional care for mental patients was introduced in the Philippines, the mentally ill were confined at home or, if violent, were confined in the town jail together with the lawbreakers. The worst that could happen to demented persons was abandonment by their families.

The Hospital of San Juan de Dios and the Hospicio de San Jose were two institutions which provided medical care to mental patients in the nineteenth century. Of the two, the Hospicio de San Jose tended to give special care to the insane.

THE HOSPICIO DE SAN JOSE

The Hospicio de San Jose was founded in 1782 with the purpose of attending to the urgent needs of the poor and the abandoned. The Hospicio started from a donation of ₱4,000 by Don Francisco Gomez Enriquez and his wife Doña Barbara Verzosa. It was earlier named "Hospicio General" but later the name was changed to "Hospicio de San Jose" when it made Saint Joseph its patron saint.¹

The Hospicio had moved from one place to another in its history. From Pandacan it moved to Intramuros, to Binondo, to Nagtahan and temporarily to Echaguc. In 1810, it was permanently established in a

1. Mimeographed hand-out on the *Historical Background of the Hospicio de San Jose* available at the Hospicio de San Jose.

small island in the Pasig River in the district of San Miguel. This island was previously known as "Isla de San Andres" in honor of Don Andres Blanco Vermudez who owned the island but who later donated it to the San Juan de Dios Hospital. Later it was renamed "Isla de Convalescencia" since it was used as a recuperating place by patients of the San Juan de Dios Hospital.

The Hospicio de San Jose which was originally conceived in 1810 as a home for the aged and the orphaned, assumed its new task of providing care for the insane when arrangements were made for the confinement of mentally ill sailors in the institution.² From that day on, the Hospicio de San Jose served as the only mental asylum in the colony in the nineteenth century.

The staff of the Hospicio de San Jose included a director, a chaplain and a doctor. One of the benefactors of the institution, Doña Margarita Rojas de Ayala, in 1865 invited the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul to take care of the internal administration of the Hospicio.³

There is no data available on the number of mental patients which the Hospicio could accommodate. In 1873, a figure of 445 was given as the total number of residents of the Hospicio.⁴ This figure included a number of orphans, the aged and the insane. Of this total, the number of insane was not indicated.

The Carcel de Bilibid received patients who could no longer be accommodated by the Hospicio de San Jose. The Hospicio, however, was careful not to accept mentally-ill patients detained at the Carcel de Bilibid for having committed criminal acts.

The Hospital of San Juan de Dios accepted mental patients who were not violent. Patients who were prone to violent acts and therefore dangerous to other patients were recommended for transfer to the Hospicio de San Jose. Some patients who were prone to violent attacks were kept at the Carcel de Bilibid. The Carcel de Bilibid had six rooms reserved for violent lunatics. The government defrayed the transportation of patients from the provinces who were to be admitted to the Hospicio de San Jose.

2. Emma Vitan Arce, "A Survey of Mentally Ill in the National Psychopathic Hospital," (M.A. thesis presented to the Committee on Graduate Studies, Department of Education, National Teachers College, December 1950).

3. See the note on Doña Margarita Rojas de Ayala in *Philippine Studies* 35 (1987):103-10.

4. Dr. Georges Taulier, *L'Archipel des Philippines*, (Avignon, 1879), p. 19.

PROCEDURES FOR ADMISSION

A look into the records of those admitted to the Hospicio de San Jose reveals the procedure of admission for the mentally ill to the Hospicio de San Jose.⁵ When complaints from the town people or relatives were received regarding demented persons, the *Guardia Civil* of the district took custody of them. The complaints usually revolved around their disturbances of public peace. Angelo Benzon, for example, of Barrio Concepcion created quite a scare when he frequently armed himself with a bolo and attacked people. Demetrio Ayguals, on the other hand, was reported as disturbing and scandalizing people in social gatherings. Manuel Pilapil was reported for setting houses on fire and roaming the streets late at night. The demented person was then examined by a *medico titular* who ascertained whether the person was indeed suffering from mental illness. If determined to be truly ill, the *medico titular* wrote a letter to the governor-general requesting admission of the patient to the Hospicio de San Jose. All requests for admission to the Hospicio de San Jose had to be addressed to the governor-general since the latter headed the Board of Directors of the Hospicio. Once admitted the doctor of the Hospicio again examined the patient.

Many people were involved in the process of admitting a demented person for institutional care. If the patient had apparently been abandoned by the family and had become a public nuisance in the town, the *gobernadorcillo* assumed the task of requesting the admission of the sick person to the Hospicio de San Jose. The request was accompanied by a medical certificate made by the *medico titular*. If the family requested admission of a sick member of the family, the request was coursed through the *gobernadorcillo* who wrote a letter to the governor-general requesting admission to the Hospicio de San Jose.

The Spanish residents in the colony who were ill of insanity were usually admitted to the Hospicio de San Jose. In many cases, the family of the Spanish patient opted to send the demented person back home to Spain. The wife of Don Francisco Mesa requested financial assistance from the government to defray the transportation expenses of her husband to Spain. He was then confined in the Hospicio de San Jose.

The role of the governor-general in the admission of patients to the Hospicio de San Jose cannot be minimized. It was the governor-general

5. These records are found in the bundles labeled *Dementes* available at the Philippine National Archives.

as Head of the Board of Directors of the Hospicio who decided whether or not to admit the demented person.⁶ As far as the records show, no request to the governor-general asking for admission to the Hospicio de San Jose was ever denied.

PROFILE OF MENTAL PATIENTS

There were more male mental patients than female mental patients in the requests for admission to the Hospicio de San Jose. This trend may have been due to some hesitation by families to commit female members of the family who were mentally ill for institutional care. Families were apprehensive of what might befall the female patients if cared for outside the home.

The distribution of mental patients according to racial groups indicated a significant number of Filipinos, though a few Chinese and peninsular Spaniards also figured in the statistics.

We cannot make conclusive statement of their age and occupations because of the lack of information on these two categories. On the few occasions when the professions of patients were mentioned, there are such professions as *pintor* (painter), *mendicante*, (mendicant), *criada* (female domestic help), *sacristan*, *labrador* (farmer), *capitan del Ejercito* (Army Captain), *soldado del Batallon de Ingenieros* (soldier), *Guardia Civil* and *Cocinero* (cook).

The geographical origins of the patients shows a majority from Manila and its *arrabales*, as well as the outlying *pueblos* of Manila. A number of patients also came from Central Luzon, notably Bulacan and Pangasinan. In 1898 a significant number of mental patients (fourty-four came from the first eight provinces which revolted against Spain. Another year which saw a high number of mental patients was 1895, a year before the outbreak of the Revolution. The year 1881 also witnessed a significant number of mental patients. Understandably between 1895 and 1898, the period which spans the revolutionary period may have caused much stress and anxiety to a number of people, leading to a significant rise of insanity for these years.

Based on the few patient records, two causes were identified as triggering insanity. One was the inability of the person to face reality,

6. Sister Mary James, R.G.S. "A Gathering of Waifs: How Cold Forbidding Walls Became Sunny Convivial Foundling Homes," in *Filipino Heritage: The Making of a Nation* (Lahing Pilipino Publishing, Inc., 1978), vol. 6, pp. 1612-16.

while the other was organically caused. Domingo Barreto Enriquez was a Spanish mestizo who wandered in the streets of Tondo at night. His wife, Benita Macario, notified the authorities that for the past three days, her husband had shown signs of insanity which, according to her, was the cause of the serious scandals he caused. Ariston Villanueva manifested symptoms of "enagenacion mental" which authorities inferred may have been triggered by a series of deaths in the family. One patient was said to have lost her mind because she lost her house in a fire, while still another patient's insanity was attributed to his carrying on an affair with a sister-in-law. There seems to be an indication that the inability of the person to face reality and handle pressure was identified as a cause of insanity. Sisa, a character in Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* illustrates this concept.

Under the category of organically related insanity are cases referred to as "neurosis epileptica con trastornos mentales." Even the behavior of a disturbed child was considered as the behavior of an insane person. Thomas San Juan de Guzman may have been a schizophrenic child. He was described as having had "enagenacion mental" as a young boy of thirteen who exhibited frequent attacks of fury.

The data that we have does not provide a very precise diagnosis of insanity. In most cases the term "enagenacion mental" encompassed all forms of mental aberrations. Descriptions of observed behavior were used to make a diagnosis of insanity. Most of the time, an individual was diagnosed as insane when he inflicted injury upon himself like jumping from a high place, or inflicted harm on others, as well as when he became a public nuisance, as when he shouted or screamed in public, rang church bells or set houses on fire.

We are not aware of the rate of recovery from mental illness of those committed to the Hospicio de San Jose. However, we do come across names of patients who were discharged from the Hospicio and considered cured. The year 1898 witnessed the release of many patients from the Hospicio de San Jose, probably dictated by the precarious political situation.

TERMS USED TO REFER TO INSANITY

The documents make use of the term "enagenacion mental" which encompassed all forms of dementia or insanity. Other terms which appear frequently, aside from the above term, were *demente*, *demencia*,

locura and *menomania*. In some cases the degree of the state of demencia was reflected by such terms as *tanto demencia* and *cumpleto estado demencia*.

In the case of those referred to as *menomania*, there were cases illustrative of *menomania religiosa* whose behavior was characterized by imitating the actions of the priest during Mass. Valeriano Tiangco was suspected by authorities of *menomania religiosa* when he would go to the altar and imitate the priest who was saying Mass.⁷ This behavior made the sacristan and the acolytes conclude that Tiangco was insane. He was then referred to the municipal authorities and then to the medico titular of the province. He was finally admitted in 1892 to the Hospicio de San Jose. Another case encountered was a *piromaniac* who was described as fond of setting houses on fire.

It is unfortunate that medical records of the mentally ill patients of the Hospicio de San Jose are no longer available. It is from the letters of admission to the Hospicio de San Jose that we are able to reconstruct the beginnings of institutional care of the mentally ill in the nineteenth century. The patients admitted to the Hospicio de San Jose belonged more often to the laboring class. It could be surmised that the wealthy preferred to keep members of the family who were mentally ill within the confines of their own homes. A small number of Spaniards and Chinese were admitted to the Hospicio de San Jose. The Spaniards, obviously peninsular Spaniards, as mentioned earlier, preferred to send their mentally ill back to Spain. The Chinese, too, were admitted to the Hospicio de San Jose instead of being referred to the traditional Chinese doctors found in the colony. For both these racial groups, the patients involved were more often males than females.

CONCLUSION

By the nineteenth century, the Filipino perceived insanity as an illness attributed to the individual's psychological make-up rather than to environmental or soul-spirits who were displeased. What is clear, however, is that when an individual was committed to institutional care, it was more out of fear of the insane inflicting harm on himself or others, and an apprehension that they would be a public nuisance.

7. Philippine National Archives, *Dementes*. These bundles numbering four are not classified according to year, hence this general reference to the said bundles.

The nineteenth century was a period still probing the mysteries of the mind and examining the phenomenon of insanity. If there was institutional care extended to the insane, it was more custodial care rather than medical treatment. It is in this sense that we view the Hospicio de San Jose as providing custodial care for the mentally ill, motivated by humanitarian reasons. The establishment of the Hospicio de San Jose constitutes, therefore, an early interest in the care of the insane as well as a start toward providing institutional care for the mentally ill in the Philippines.