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The Philippines:

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by

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Revolution and Nationhood

The concept of nationhood had its earlier roots in the scattered and fragmentary uprisings against the Spaniards. But these spontaneous reactions to various forms of exploitation and abuse could not weld the people into one because the material basis for a nation was absent. Moreover, the lack of communications facilities and the colonial policy of deliberately keeping the people in a state of ignorance by severely limiting educational opportunities and suppressing the dissemination of new ideas further delayed the growth of a national consciousness.

But even after the faint outlines of a national market and a national economy had become visible, the corresponding national consciousness began to take form only as articulators who could project the different grievances and aspirations of the people emerged. It was through their articulation that the common denominators of these resentments and expectations were crystallized and disseminated on a scale sufficient to create among a majority of the people a sense of nationality separate and distinct, and a counter-consciousness that provided a set of alternatives to colonial oppression.

These articulators were the ilustrados. They belonged to the classes that arose as a result of the developing national economy. Coming from families that had benefited from the economic development of the country, these young men were able to take advantage of the educational opportunities that a liberalized Spanish colonial policy offered at the time. Sons of the provincial elite went to Manila to study and came into contact with one another and with the sons of the Manila elite. The more affluent families sent their young men to Spain. In less than a generation, the products of the new educational policies became the early spokesmen for the people’s grievances

and aspirations.

Their consciousness was the product of objective reality, more specifically, of their status within that reality, but the articulation of their ideas would help mobilize forces that would effect changes in the emerging nation and in the people, changes which would in many ways be more far-reaching than the ilustrados themselves envisioned. The ilustrados served to project a consciousness of nationhood among the people that was already latent in their practice.

The New Filipinos

The growth of the concept of nationhood was coterminous with the development of the concept of Filipino.¹ The first Filipinos were the Españoles-Filipinos or creoles — Spaniards born in the Philippines. They alone were called Filipinos. (See Chapter 8) Thus, in the beginning, the term Filipino had a racial and elitist connotation. However, with the economic progress of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Chinese mestizos and urbanized natives who together eventually dominated the ranks of the new principalia became considered as Filipinos because of their essentially Hispanized cultural background and inclinations.

The term Filipino was growing in scope, although its application was still limited by property, education, and Spanish culture. Those who called themselves Filipinos were still Spanish-oriented, but at the same time they had already developed a loyalty to the Philippines as a distinct entity. The concept and the feeling of being a Filipino was becoming established. The term Filipino which before was used to refer only to creoles and later also to Spanish mestizos who could pass for pure Spaniards, was being appropriated by the Chinese mestizos and the native elite who had Hispanized themselves.

Having benefited from economic development, the creoles, Spanish mestizos, Chinese mestizos, and urbanized natives now had an economic base to protect. The drive for individual economic expansion, especially after it found sanction in the ideas of the Enlightenment and of the French Revolution, fostered among the local elite a keener perception of the restrictions imposed by Spanish colonialism on their own development. This aggravated the feeling of oppression caused by colonial policies, by the abuses and arrogance of individual officials and friars, and by the general lack of those civil liberties that the new liberal concepts led them to aspire for.

151
A PAST REVISITED

The grievances of the masses and the self-interest of the principals therefore became ingredients in the development of a new consciousness of interests distinct and separate from those of Spain.

Through their propaganda work, the ilustrados first shared, then wrested the term Filipino from the creoles and infused it with national meaning which later included the entire people. Thus, the term Filipino which had begun as a concept with narrow racial application and later developed to delineate an elite group characterized by wealth, education, and Spanish culture, finally embraced the entire nation and became a means of national identification. From then on, the term Filipino would refer to the inhabitants of the Philippine archipelago regardless of racial strain or economic status. 2

The Reform Movement

The nuclear form of nationhood first found expression in agitation for reforms. Although attempts to expose the evils of Spanish colonialism and particularly the abuses of the friars were made within the Philippines, the principal propaganda effort was exerted in Spain. In Spain, those who agitated for reforms could more freely express themselves. Moreover, since the principal drive at this time was for reforms within the colonial system, the logical place for agitation was in the “mother country.” The hope was that if the Spanish Government could be made aware of what was really happening in the colony, some reforms might be forthcoming.

Three groups formed the nucleus of the movement for reforms which has come to be known as the Propaganda Movement. First, there was the group of suspected filibusteros including Españoles-Filipinos and Spanish mestizos who had been banished to the Marianas during the crack-down on liberals in the wake of the Cavite Mutiny of 1872. Granted executive clemency two years later, on condition that they did not return to the Philippines, the majority of these men congregated in Barcelona and Madrid. The second group was composed of young men who had been sent to Spain for their studies. These two groups were augmented by refugees who left the islands to escape persecution. Among the latter, the most prominent were Graciano Lopez Jaena and Marcelo H. del Pilar.

Lopez Jaena had written a tale whose principal character was Fray Botod. 3 Since the word botod in Lopez Jaena’s native dialect, Hiligaynon, means full-bellied, the reference to the greed of the friars was clear. The story in fact depicted all the vices and abuses of the Spanish priests. Although the tale of Fray Botod circulated only in manuscript form, it came to the attention of the objects of its satire and Lopez Jaena found it expedient to leave the Philippines.

Marcelo H. del Pilar’s reputation as a propagandista was already established before an order for his arrest forced him to flee the country in 1880. Gifted with the common touch, he found ready audiences in the cockpits, the piazas, and the corner tiendas of his native Bulacan. Unlike Rizal who wrote his novels in Spanish, a fact which cut him off from most Filipinos who did not know the language, del Pilar wrote his propaganda pamphlets in simple Tagalog — lucid, direct, and forceful. His parodies of the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Apostle’s Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the catechism published in pamphlets which simulated the format and size of the novenas were highly effective propaganda. 4

Among those who had gone to Spain to study, Jose Rizal was to emerge as a highly respected leader. 5 His prestige was derived from his considerable and varied intellectual gifts and was greatly enhanced by the publication in 1887 of his novel, Noli Me Tangere, an incisive study of Philippine society which earned him the enmity of the friars and was promptly banned in the Philippines.

Expatriates, refugees, and students made repeated attempts to band together in associations and to establish organs through which they could project their demands for reforms, counteract the friar-supported newspaper, La Politica de España en Filipinas, and refute such anti-Filipino writers as Wenceslao E. Retana, Pablo Feced and Vicente Barrantes.

Early demands for reforms had been aired by Españoles-Filipinos in El Eco Filipino, a fortnightly magazine published in Spain. Some copies reached Manila where there were a few subscribers. However, the magazine was banned after 1872. Españoles-Filipinos at first tried to maintain the leadership in the campaign for reforms, but the associations they formed did not prosper. 6

In 1882 Juan Atayde, a Spaniard born in Manila, founded the Circulo Hispano-Filipino in Madrid. The society died practically at birth due to a shortage of funds and the lack of confidence of the members in Atayde. Another attempt to organize was made by another Spaniard, Professor Miguel Morayta, who tried to form the Asociacion Hispano-Filipino. Inaugurated on January 12, 1889, the association lobbied successfully for the passage of
some laws such as the Maura Law, the law providing for the compulsory teaching of Spanish, and another one for judicial reform. Its members campaigned actively for Philippine representation in the Cortes.

Morayta’s association, however, failed to secure the support of many Filipinos, among them Jose Rizal and Antonio Luna, mainly because its membership was composed mostly of Spaniards. These were mainly Españoles-Filipinos, an older group of retired officers, merchants, and landowners living in Spain. They favored the use of tact and prudence in asking for reforms. The young Filipinos felt that the Spaniards and the creoles were too moderate or were unwilling to risk the displeasure of the Spanish authorities. The Spanish mestizos were caught in the middle, some eventually electing to join forces with the Filipinos.

The desire to form a purely Filipino organization was fulfilled with the establishment in Barcelona on December 13, 1888 of La Solidaridad. This organization was a sort of rival of Morayta’s Madrid group although the two organizations joined together in a petition addressed to the Minister of the Colonies asking for representation in the Cortes, abolition of censorship of the press, and prohibition of the practice of deporting citizens merely through administrative orders.

The president of La Solidaridad was Rizal’s cousin, Galicano Apacible. Among the other officers were Graciano Lopez Jaena, vice-president, and Mariano Ponce, treasurer. Rizal, in London at the time, was named honorary president. Unfortunately, Apacible could not hold the wrangling reformists together. It took the prestige of Rizal and the political wisdom of del Pilar to unite the Filipinos in Spain and to coordinate their efforts.8

The Propaganda Movement

The early attempts to publish a propaganda organ were failures just as the associations had been and for the same reasons: lack of funds, lack of unity, differences of opinion, petty jealousies, and personal ambitions. The Revista del Círculo Hispano Filipino died after its second issue and the weekly España en Filipinas fared scarcely better. But finally, in February 1889, the Filipino propagandists were able to get together behind a new publication which they called La Solidaridad, and which for its more than five years of existence became the principal organ of the propaganda movement. It was founded on February 15, 1889 and existed up to November 15, 1895. Its first editor was Graciano Lopez Jaena but he was soon succeeded by Marcelo H. del Pilar. La Solidaridad was a political propaganda paper with a liberal, reformist orientation dedicated to the task of fighting reaction in all its forms.

The staff of La Solidaridad defined its objectives in the following words:

Modest, very modest indeed are our aspirations. Our program is of the utmost simplicity: to fight all forms of reaction, to impede all retrogression, to hail and to accept all liberal ideas, and to defend all progress; in a word, to be one more propagandist of all the ideals of democracy in the hope that these might hold sway over all nations here and across the seas.9

Through the pages of La Solidaridad, the propaganda movement demanded for the Filipinos freedom of the press, of speech and of assembly, equality before the law, participation in the affairs of government, social and political freedom. The propagandists also asked for reforms in all branches of government, the promotion of education, a stop to the abuses of the Guardia Civil, and an end to the arbitrary deportation of citizens. The writers of La Solidaridad directed their strongest invectives at the friars as the enemies of enlightenment and liberal reform.

Assimilation and Representation

But despite all their criticisms and complaints, the propagandists’ goal was still assimilation. That is why they were asking for Philippine representation in the Spanish Cortes. The preoccupation with education was also part of the drive for cultural Hispanization which would facilitate assimilation. Spain was still their “mother country”; they asked for reforms so that their countrymen would not be alienated from her. Rizal captured the essence of the reformists’ anxiety in an article published in La Solidaridad in which he appealed to the Spanish government to

Grant liberties so that no one may have the right to conspire; deputies so that their complaints and their grumblings may not accumulate in the bosom of the families to become the cause of future storms. Treat the people well, teach them the sweetness of peace so that they may love and sustain it. If you persist in your system of banishments, incarcerations, and assaults without cause, if you punish
A PAST REVISITED

them for your own faults, you make them despair, you remove their
aborrence for revolutions and tumults, you harden them and you
arouse them to struggle.\footnote{10}

Masonry was an integral part of the reform movement. The
masonic movement which in Spain was essentially anti-friar
attracted the Filipino propagandists who saw the friars as the
pillars of reaction. The Filipino masons in Spain were respon-
sible for the organization of masonic lodges in the Philippines
which echoed the reformist demands and declared their goal to
be that of seeing the Philippines become a province of Spain.
These lodges in turn helped to fund the work of propaganda in
Spain.\footnote{11}

Reformist Demands

The propaganda movement could not have been more than a
movement for reforms. Since most of its leaders belonged to the
generally wealthy clase ilustrada, their primary aim was to
secure for their class participation in political rule and a greater
share in economic benefits. Since their own social acceptability
was premised on their Hispanization, it was to be expected that
their cultural demand would be for Filipinos to be accorded the
right to Spanish culture. They were for cultural assimilation and
for the transformation of the Philippines into a province of
Spain provided that certain abuses were curtailed and certain
administrative reforms instituted, including representation for
the colony in the Spanish Cortes.

Although the demands of the ilustrado reformists were
necessarily delimited by their class position, at the time that
they were voicing them in Spain these demands were progres-
sive. It was only when the people had determined to wage a
revolution and had adopted a clearly separatist goal that
continued advocacy of reforms became reactionary.

The propagandists failed to achieve their principal objective:
that of prodding the Spanish government to reform the colonial
administration. It has been argued that since the propaganda
writers failed to reach the masses of their countrymen, their
influence may be regarded as minimal and for this reason there
was hardly any continuity between the Propaganda and the
Revolution. Several factors did undermine the effectiveness of
the propaganda movement, among them the perennial lack of
funds and the bickerings among the propagandists themselves.
For example, as a result of a misunderstanding between del Pilar

and Rizal, the latter stopped contributing to La Solidaridad
before it had completed two years of its existence. A few
months later, Antonio Luna, who was partial to Rizal, also quit.
The undependable Lopez Jaena who had alternated between
collaboration and indifference finally severed all his ties with
the propaganda movement when a promised pension from the
Manila supporters of the paper did not materialize. He even
went so far as to attack his former colleagues. Henceforth, he
devoted himself (but without success) to the fulfillment of his
ambition of being elected to the Cortes.\footnote{12}

Certainly an important factor limiting the influence of
the propagandists was the fact that they wrote in Spanish, a
language virtually unknown among the masses. Furthermore,
censorship seriously limited the inflow of such reading matter
and made possession of it very risky.

But despite all the foregoing, the influence of the Propaganda
on the Revolution cannot be discounted. True, La Solidari-
dad itself, Rizal's novels, and other propaganda material had
limited circulation but these reached the local ilustrados who
in most instances came to lead the revolutionary forces in their
provinces. The fund-raising efforts of local committees and
masonic lodges and the clandestine attempts to distribute these
materials involved more individuals in the campaign for reforms.
The very attempts of the government to stop the entry of La
Solidaridad and prevent its distribution highlighted the lack of
freedoms that the propagandists were condemning. If readership
was small, seepage of information to other groups certainly
occurred. And because what the propagandists wrote were
accurate reflections of reality, a feeling of empathy developed
whenever news of their work was heard. The articulation of
their own feelings of oppression heightened the ferment of the
people and herein lay the continuity between reformism and
revolution despite their diametrically opposed means and goals.

Rizal's Liga

When upon his return to the Philippines in July, 1892, Rizal
organized the Liga Filipina, this constituted a forward step in
the reformist ideas of the times in the sense that the new group
sought to involve the people directly in the reform movement.
Many elements of society who were anxious for change were
attracted to the Liga, among them, Andres Bonifacio who
became one of the founders of the organization.

As listed in the constitution Rizal prepared, the Liga's aims

156

157
were:

1. to unite the whole archipelago into one compact, vigorous, and homogenous body;
2. Mutual protection in every want and necessity;
3. Defense against all violence and injustice;
4. Encouragement of instruction, agriculture, and commerce; and
5. Study and application of reforms.

As Rizal envisioned it, the league was to be a sort of mutual aid and self-help society dispensing scholarship funds and legal aid, loaning capital and setting up cooperatives. These were innocent, even naive, objectives that could hardly alleviate the social ills of those times, but the Spanish authorities were so alarmed that they arrested Rizal on July 6, 1892, a scant four days after the Liga was organized.1 3

With Rizal deported to Dapitan, the Liga became inactive until, through the efforts of Domingo Franco and Andres Bonifacio, it was reorganized. Apolinario Mabini became the secretary of the Supreme Council. Upon his suggestion, the organization decided to declare its support for La Solidaridad and the reforms it advocated, raise funds for the paper, and defray the expenses of deputies advocating reforms for the country before the Spanish Cortes.1 4

The Split

At first the Liga was quite active. Bonifacio in particular exerted great efforts to organize chapters in various districts of Manila. A few months later, however, the Supreme Council of the Liga dissolved the society. The reformist leaders found out that most of the popular councils which Bonifacio had organized were no longer willing to send funds to the Madrid propagandists because, like Bonifacio, they had become convinced that peaceful agitation for reforms was futile. Afraid that the more radical rank and file members might capture the organization and unwilling to involve themselves in an enterprise which would surely invite reprisals from the authorities, the leaders of the Liga opted for dissolution. The Liga membership split into two groups: the conservatives formed the Cuerpo de Compromisarios which pledged to continue supporting La Solidaridad while the radicals led by Bonifacio devoted themselves to a new and secret society, the Katipunan, which Bonifacio had organized on the very day Rizal was deported to

Dapitan.1 5

With the shift from the Liga to the Katipunan, the goal was transformed from assimilation to separation. The means underwent a similarly drastic change: from peaceful agitation for reforms to armed revolution. The reformism of the ilustrados gave way to the revolution of the masses.

The desire for separation from Spain became more acute as the masses became convinced that the only solution to their problems was revolution. This revolutionary consciousness was the fruit of centuries of practice, but its ideological articulation came from the reformist ilustrados. The stage was set for an anti-colonial, national revolution whose ebb and flow would depend on which of the two currents was temporarily dominant, the revolutionary decisiveness of the masses or the temporizing and reformist nature of their allies.

Ambivalent Classes

Economic progress had brought into being in Philippine society a number of transitional economic and social groups composed of creoles, Chinese mestizos, and urbanized Filipinos. These formed a fairly broad petty bourgeois stratum which occupied a social and economic position between the peninsulares and the masses. Included therein were landowners, inquilinos, shopkeepers, merchants, employees, and professionals. They were joined by some who by Philippine standards were already considered affluent and by others who though quite poor, had economic and social aspirations akin to those of their better situated compatriots because of the nature of their employment, their education and their urbanization. Many ilustrados belonged to this stratum. This accounts for the see-saw attitudes they displayed during various phases of the revolution. They were ambivalent in their attitudes toward the colonizer. This explains the confused stand many of them took during this part of Philippine history. When we use the term ilustrado we refer to this broad stratum with uneven consciousness.

Since their orientation vacillated between the ruling and the lower classes, the ilustrados, like the rising classes from which they emerged, were both reformist and revolutionary. Their grievances impelled them to relate to the people, but because they regarded themselves as the social superiors of the masses they also related to the ruling power. They were willing to join the peninsulares if some of their political and economic