

THE LEVELING OF HIERARCHIES: THE SPANISH
PRISONERS OF WAR IN THE HANDS OF
THE FILIPINO REVOLUTIONISTS

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ABSTRACT

In the hands of the Filipino revolutionaries, the Spanish prisoners of war were pawns in an intricate political plot involving the Americans, the Filipinos, and the Spanish. A large number of these prisoners were peninsular troops who were not too fortunate to be repatriated. A smaller percentage comprised of religious or friars who remained in the country either because of their religious vows or attachment to their holdings. These prisoners were caught at a fateful moment when strong conflicting interests interplayed among the three "actors": the Spanish, the Americans, and the Filipinos. These prisoners were treated well not only by the native population but also by the Aguinaldo government which was concerned with presenting to the world a newly-born nation with civilized manners, as well as with using the prisoners as a convenient leverage for bargaining to achieve its desire for independence. Although, the Spanish showed their tendency to bungle negotiations and ignore the desires of the colony they were just about to give up, they were tenacious in their efforts to release their compatriots. This paper examines another dimension of the Philippine-Spanish revolution.

Introduction

Shortly before the outbreak of the hostilities between the Filipinos and the Americans on February 4, 1899, an estimated 9,000 Spanish prisoners of war were believed to be in the hands of the Filipino insurgents. Of these, as recorded by the Spanish author Luis Moreno Jerez, 8,200 were Generals, chiefs, officers, and soldiers; 250 were an assortment of employees; 310 were private citizens; and about 399 were Bishops and friars. Altogether, this brought the total of Spanish captives to 9,159.¹

The number of the civilians was small partly because many of them, seeing the seriousness of the situation, had returned home to Spain shortly after the outbreak of the revolution. Others took advantage of the terms of the capitulation of Manila on August

13, 1898 between Spain and the United States which provided for, among other things, the expatriation of civilians at their own convenient time.² As for the ecclesiastics, the number was small and accounted for by the friars who themselves were prisoners of war. Fr. Ulpiano Herrero, OP, ex-cura of Orion, Bataan, accounted for 116 Dominicans, Franciscans, Augustinians, and Recollects in Ilocos Sur. Meanwhile, another prisoner, Fr. Graciano Martinez, OSA claimed that 117 friars were made prisoners in different provinces of Cagayan Valley. Unaccounted number of religious in Southern Tagalog and some parts of the Visayas and Mindanao brought the total number of ecclesiastic prisoners to about 300.³

The military comprised the largest number of prisoners constituting approximately 30% of the estimated 24,000 peninsular troops sent to the Philippines between October 1896 to January 1897. Believing that the revolution was over with the signing of the Pact of Biak na Bato, Governor Primo de Rivera sent home thousands of troops. This was confirmed in a report to the French Government on December 14, 1898 by Consul G. de Bérard who wrote that thousands of sick and wounded as well as able-bodied Spanish soldiers were sent home in conjunction with the provision of Article 5, Paragraph 1 of the Treaty of Paris.⁴

The switching of roles of the colonizers now turned captives and the colonized now the captors presents only a small dimension of a bigger story known as the Philippine-Spanish Revolution. One of the consequences of the take over by the marginalized Filipinos of the once Spanish-centric world in the Philippines was the leveling of hierarchies. The turn of events which dominated *fin de siècle* Philippine history, however, peripheralized many of the events accounting for this reversal of roles. One of these accounts describes the attempts of the Spanish to liberate their compatriots from the Filipino revolutionists. This, along with the stance of the revolutionists and their motives for keeping the prisoners, are the central topic of this paper. In discussing this topic the paper will also examine the experiences of the prisoners in the hands of their

captors and the treatment they received from the Filipinos. As well, this paper will also focus on how and when the prisoners regained their freedom.

Circumstances Leading to the Captivity of the Spanish

Spain's belief that the Philippines was still "salvageable" did not wane easily. The debacle at Manila Bay was followed by the failed bid of Admiral Manuel Camara to recoup Spanish defeat when his fleet was denied passage along the Suez Canal by the British and the Egyptians. Again, Spain failed to recognize this failure as another "defeat." In a last bid to save the integrity of the nation, Spain appointed General Diego de los Rios as new governor of the Philippines on September 1898 with Iloilo as the new capital. This move only made the fate of the Spanish in Luzon and other parts of the colony even more uncertain. Thus, when the hostilities between the Filipinos and the Spanish, and later on between the Filipinos and the Americans erupted, the remaining unrepatriated Spanish were caught in the crossfire.

Moreno, an officer in the Aguinaldo army during the second phase of the revolution, blamed the capture of the Spanish to Governor Basilio Agustin who, before the coming of the Americans, ignored the advice of the military hierarchy to evacuate all the Spanish civilians and troops to Manila where they were safer. This move was the result of an assessment by the military that the Spanish troops did not possess arms and were thus not ready to face hostile resistance from Filipinos. It was only between 28 and 30 of May that Agustin realized the seriousness of his *faux pas*. However, his order to evacuate came late as many Spanish had either surrendered to the insurgents or fallen captive. Reacting to Agustin's lethargy, Moreno contended that the capture of the Spanish would not have taken place had Agustin heeded the advice of the military rather than attended first to the safety of his own family.⁵

Contrary to expectations, the invasion of Manila by the Americans proved Moreno wrong. The hardships suffered by the Spanish civilians and troops trapped in Intramuros showed that it would have been worse had Agustin heeded the advice to evacuate the Spanish to Manila. In the end, what had been thought of as Agustin's lack of vision had averted the capture and consequently prevented the sufferings of a greater number of Spanish.

The Otis Intercession

Both the Spanish civilian and military assailed their government for having abandoned them to their captors. Their collective resentments can be gleaned from the letter of an anonymous prisoner from Dagupan dated December, 1898. He wrote:

"...Because I believe it is my duty, I am writing Your Excellency about these sad happenings of our abandonment. I do not know of any measures that are being taken for our freedom... Your Excellency can judge how painful and hateful it is to see privileges enjoyed by Manila officials, in addition to their receiving their salaries, while the unfortunate who have given their lives and blood, and sacrificed for their country languish in prison."⁶

Indignant over the alleged lack of concern by their government, the prisoners were, however, unaware of the predicament faced by their government. Much as it wanted to intervene on their behalf, it was constrained by the position it maintained towards the Aguinaldo government which it considered to be vulnerable and shaky. For his part, Aguinaldo considered this show of indifference as a "strange behavior of the Spanish government which avoided all contact with the Tagalogs..." Aguinaldo remarked that all that the Spanish needed to do was open lines of communication and begin negotiations.

For their part, the Spanish decided that any negotiation for the release of the prisoners should be settled through indirect channels such as the intervention of General Elwell S. Otis, newly appointed military governor of the Philippine. Otis agreed on August 29 to work for the release of the civilians and religious only, excluding the soldiers whose case he considered to be political in nature. Based on the content of Aguinaldo's November 3 reply to Otis' letter of November 2, it appeared that Otis tactfully asked for the release of the civilians and friars on the grounds that they were non-combatants and therefore should be exempted from being taken as prisoners of war by virtue of the Geneva Convention.⁷ Aguinaldo disagreed contending that the civilians and the friars actively participated in the conflict in many capacities.

Aguinaldo's position can be gleaned from a report published in the newspaper *La Vanguardia* describing Spanish government officials and professionals like Antonio Fuset, president of *Casino Espanol*, and the *Escuadron de Leales Voluntarios* as "fully equipped and armed" during the early days of the revolution.⁸ The involvement of these civilians was a response to a directive made by General Agustin on April 23, 1896 calling for all government employees and their sons to join the forces of the government. Heeding this appeal, the civilians "formed corps of armed volunteers that stood guard in towns, made arrests, tortured the prisoners... or joined the regular soldiers to fight against the revolutionists".⁹

Otis managed only to annoy Aguinaldo with ill-informed allegations why the Filipinos imprisoned the Spanish. One such serious charge against Aguinaldo was the imprisonment of Spanish women, children, and nuns. Aguinaldo, in the same letter dated November 3, assured Otis that it was the women themselves who requested that they, along with their children, be allowed to stay with their husbands.¹⁰ Despite the initial exchange of acrimonious notes, Otis continued communicating with Aguinaldo. Whether Otis ignored the cue, or simply failed to sense Aguinaldo's unwillingness to set the prisoners free is a matter of speculation.

Aguinaldo's Reasons for Keeping the Prisoners

In the same letter dated November 3, Aguinaldo told Otis that the imprisonment of the Spanish was due to "political purposes".¹¹ But exactly what Aguinaldo meant by "political purposes" seemed to have escaped Otis' notice although it is also possible that he simply ignored these cryptic terms as he continued sending letters to Aguinaldo. A possible explanation behind Aguinaldo's position might be his interpretation of the "law of reciprocity". From Aguinaldo's perspective, since the Spanish were not treating the Filipino prisoners justly or humanely, then the Filipinos would do the same to the Spanish they held in prison. As later events showed, the Aguinaldo government adopted this law of reciprocity as a bargaining leverage for the release of the Filipino prisoners exiled to Spain and other parts of the Spanish dominion, to exact demands such as ransom money in exchange for the release of the prisoners, as well as to press for the "recognition of the secular rights of the Filipino clergy by the Vatican".¹²

Although it might appear that Aguinaldo only wanted to address the Vatican and Spain to get even, his real intention was to bring the cause of the Philippines, then besieged by American expansionism, to the attention of the international community of nations. For this purpose, Aguinaldo launched successive propaganda blitz beginning on August 7 with his "Manifesto to Foreign Governments" in Hong Kong. These propaganda campaigns did not only seek for world recognition of the Philippine government but also inform foreign governments about its legitimacy. To win the sympathy of the international community, Aguinaldo issued a decree on May 24, 1898 ordering humane treatment of prisoners. This exhortation was zealously heeded by Aguinaldo's men who prided themselves for respecting what they called "*derecho internacional*," or the human rights of the prisoners.

While Aguinaldo did not categorically admit to having used the prisoners to call the attention of the world and expose the treachery of America and Spain at the Treaty of Paris, Jose Genova

Iturbide, a Spanish resident of Manila hinted, although vaguely, that this was what Aguinaldo had wanted. Genova said that had Aguinaldo released the prisoners early enough, he could have gotten what he wanted—not only a good image before the eyes of the world but also its support.¹³

But far greater than Aguinaldo's "political purposes" and his quest for world support was his fear of a civil war. The Filipinos were divided on the subject of revolution and many of them were still loyal to Spain. Aguinaldo feared that once they were set free, the friars could still sway a large following of friar loyalists which he considered as "fanatics" to launch a counterrevolution. Ferdinand Blumentritt concurred with Aguinaldo's fear when he wrote Rizal that the revolution was bound to fail because there were still many Filipinos who professed loyalty to the friars.¹⁴ One of the groups alluded to by Blumentritt was the *Guardia de Honor*. Organized by the natives to protect the Church against the onslaught of the revolutionaries, these dissidents fought against the revolutionists in Zambales, La Union, and Tarlak.

Aguinaldo expressed fear of a civil war because he realized that the country would brace for a war of attrition. His fear was not without basis. As the friars were still in possession of boundless wealth—the so-called friar lands—Aguinaldo knew that the friars could use this inexhaustible wealth to finance a war. Writing to Otis about his misgivings, Aguinaldo said:

"...The Archbishop, as well as the Spanish bishops in the Philippines, belong to the regular Spanish clergy and it is not licit for them to continue predominating in the Islands because they can promote a counter revolt helped by their gold...."¹⁵

Wishing to avert a counterrevolution by the friars, he decreed on January 23, 1899 the expulsion from the Philippines of all members of the Spanish clergy including those affiliated with them either as priests or secular

employees. However, due to the outbreak of the hostilities between the Filipinos and the Americans, the expulsion did not take place.

The Reaney Intercession

The move to free the religious began on July 1898, three months before efforts to liberate the civil and military prisoners began. Luck for the ecclesiastics took a new turn when the Dominican father, Cándido García Valles, found an ally in Fr. W. H. I. Reaney, the American Catholic chaplain of the USS *Olympia*, who promised the Dominicans to do his best for the release of the religious.

Father Garcia's argument revolved around two issues—that the case of the friars was not political in nature and that they were imprisoned because the Katipuneros and the Freemasons hated them. Fr. Garcia insisted that the friars engaged themselves in purely spiritual affairs and were never involved in the revolution in any way. As mentioned earlier, Aguinaldo, however, indirectly rebutted the Dominican's claim by presenting Otis with reports documenting the friars' participation in the revolution. In his letter to Otis on May 18, 1898, Aguinaldo wrote:

"...Some of them, as for example, the parish priest of Lipa, province of Batangas, placed themselves as head of volunteer corps. In Manila, during its siege by many forces, all the priests organized and armed as a military group that formed part of the municipal corps for the defense of the city and all that can be assured, gave the Spanish forces direct and effective cooperation in fighting against the Filipinos either by maintaining armies at their expense, accompanying them in their expeditions, or inciting them to fight."¹⁶

Interestingly, Fr. Garcia's other claim regarding the alleged "hatred" of the revolutionaries against the friars was contradicted by the Spanish religious themselves who did not share the sentiment. Although the friars admitted that torture, verbal abuse,

threats, and forced labor were committed against some of them, the religious themselves attested that these violations of their human rights were isolated cases and were perpetrated only by a few such as Gen. Gregorio del Pilar and Col. Daniel Tirona. The affection toward the priests of many Filipinos like Vito Belarmino, Jose Leyva, Emilio Aguinaldo, and the people of northern Luzon provinces, some parts of the Visayas, and even where the revolution and anti-friar sentiments were markedly stronger continues to this day to defy explanations. Extracts from Fr. Herrero's account belied Fr. Garcia's claim on the inhumanity of the native:

"...despite our imprisonment by the insurgents, the masses accorded us with due respect and kind attention with the exception of the few who succumbed to the pressure of the Katipuneros. Any calumnies against us went to naught since the people, with their resolute Christian faith, did not believe in them. Now and more than ever, there is no doubt that the natives, as proofs would show, indeed loved the religious."¹⁷

Reaney took his role as negotiator with enthusiasm. He replied assiduously to Fr. Garcia's letters, visited and comforted the ecclesiastics in their detention cells in Cavite, and talked to Dewey and Aguinaldo for the release of the prisoners. The chaplain was convinced that the release of the prisoners was only a matter of time. This optimism sprung from his belief that the Filipinos would soften their stance because they were beholden to the Spanish for bequeathing the Catholic faith. But more encouraging for Fr. Reaney was the willingness of Aguinaldo to release some of the friars in order to ease the cash-strapped republic from the burden of maintaining the prisoners. On his second visit to the ecclesiastics on July 14, Fr. Reaney reported that Dewey and Aguinaldo had agreed that the Spanish clergy would be allowed to go to Hong Kong on two conditions: that they travel on their own account and that no one should be inconvenienced by their departure.¹⁸

But Fr. Reaney's optimism was short-lived when he witnessed on his visit to the ecclesiastics in Cavite what he described as "unchristian" treatment of the prisoners by the revolutionists. Fr. Reaney began to doubt the release of the Spanish fathers especially after confirming Aguinaldo's half-hearted gesture to release the prisoners. In a breach of propriety, Fr. Reaney opened the letter which Aguinaldo handed him for delivery to Gen. Emiliano Riego de Dios, chief of the Filipino commanding forces in Cavite. As translated from Tagalog to English by the friars for Fr. Reaney, the letter revealed that Aguinaldo had ordered Riego de Dios not to grant the chaplain permission to visit the prisoners and to spy on him and the friars by listening to their conversations or censoring their communication.

In the end, Fr. Reaney conceded that the release of the prisoners was a remote possibility especially that there were some quarters which obstructed the efforts for the release of the friars. Fr. Reaney categorically identified these quarters as the European Freemasons but did not mention who the other sources were. It can be theorized however that he was referring to Pedro Paterno and Felipe Buencamino whose role in the negotiation will be discussed later in this paper. Although the rupture of the relations of the Filipinos and the Americans at the onset of the revolution on February 4, 1899 prevented Fr. Reaney from accomplishing his mission, it was Aguinaldo's order to move the friars in the interiors of Luzon that dealt the final blow to Reaney's plan.

The Foreign Nationals as Mediators

While yet in Iloilo, then capital of the besieged Spanish government, General de los Rios asked the Filipino, Spanish, and other foreign friends of Aguinaldo to request the president for the release of the prisoners. Thus, on December 27, 1898, de los Rios instructed Octaviano Romeo, auditor of the army, to request his friend, Joaquin Gonzalez, delegate to the Malolos Congress, to deliver his letter bringing the plight of the prisoners to Aguinaldo's

attention.¹⁹ Although Romeo's letter to Aguinaldo was civil in language and tone, it was deemed tactless by Aguinaldo who was insulted by the comment insinuating that the prisoners were being kept in exchange for gold and other concessions: "I do not mind whatever aspiration the Filipino government has but I hope it doesn't keep the prisoners in exchange for some US concessions or for gold."²⁰ More provocative was Romeo's statement that despite the existence of the Revolutionary Government, the unfolding events had already presaged a take-over by the United States of the Philippines. Romeo's candidness infuriated Aguinaldo. Feeling betrayed in the Treaty of Paris and then pressured by the outbreak of the Fil-Am War, Aguinaldo rejected Gonzalez' intercession.

Nevertheless, de los Rios refused to give up as he shifted to soliciting the influence of the foreigners as another strategy. On March 29, 1899, he gathered the businessmen, the press, and the foreign consuls in Manila not only to move Aguinaldo but also apply a semblance of international pressure on him. Deeming such "pressure" inappropriate and might only alienate Aguinaldo, de los Rios abandoned the plan. Instead, a letter of appeal to Aguinaldo was prepared by the Manila-based foreign firms only such as Smith, Bell & Co., Levy Brothers, E. Andred & Co., Tillson Hermann & Co., and others.²¹ Their letter talked about justice and compassion – language incomprehensible to the Aguinaldo camp. Like the previous appeals, Aguinaldo turned down the request of the foreign businessmen.

Despite this setback, de los Rios was unrelenting when he sent a personal letter to Aguinaldo threatening the latter that he had no alternative but to release the prisoners by virtue of the Treaty of Paris. In brief, de los Rios' message was for Aguinaldo to accept reality, however grim it was, that the Americans had already taken over the Philippines. But the more the Spanish became insensitive by talking about American sovereignty in the

Philippines — a view offensive to Aguinaldo— the more the Spanish botched the case of the prisoners and jeopardized their freedom.

The Filipinos Set the Demands

When negotiation through private sectors failed, the Spanish changed strategies by dealing directly with Aguinaldo through government-recognized commissions. De los Rios then commissioned Octaviano Romeo, accompanied by Las Heras, the commandant of engineers, Armando Alvarez, an employee of Tabacalera, and the Spanish Manila-resident Jose Gomez Centurion to meet with Mabini. At this meeting the Romeo Commission was told that since negotiations were already underway between the Americans and the Filipinos, the latter had ceased to have any more business with Spain. De los Rios was pleased with Mabini's remarks because it meant the cessation of Spanish negotiations with the recalcitrant and arbitrary Filipinos. The Spanish felt it wiser to negotiate directly with the Americans. But the question now was what if the Filipino negotiators set unreasonable demands on the Americans thus delaying the release of the prisoners?

In reality, this development was far from good because the statements of Mabini virtually obstructed the release of the prisoners. Mabini remained adamant in his "rather [a] strange theory"²² that since the United States had succeeded Spain in acquiring sovereignty over the Philippines, the prisoners were now under the Americans." Whatever the meaning of this position was, it implied only one thing—that the Filipinos were determined not to set their prisoners free.

Negotiations After De los Rios

On June 3, 1899, de los Rios left for Spain without resolving the issue of the Spanish prisoners. The Madrid government appointed Brigadier General Nicolas Jaramillo as the head of a new commission together with Antonio del Rio, former provincial

governor of Laguna, and Enrique Toral.

In a gesture to settle the issue on the prisoners, the Aguinaldo government created a special commission composed of Leon Ma. Guerrero as head, with Ambrosio Flores and Alberto Barreto as members. At the meeting with the Del Rio-Toral Commission on June 25, 1899 in Tarlac, the Filipino commissioners presented Aguinaldo's decree of January 23, 1899 which provided for the release of the sick prisoners. The session was momentarily suspended, however, when the Spanish commissioners protested against the Filipino commissioners' position that able-bodied Spanish friars would not be freed.

On June 26 the two commissions met again with the Filipinos now changing their former hard-line stance. This time it had already become too clear that the prisoners were being held for political and other considerations. One of these was the Filipino demand for Spain to recognize the independence of the Philippines. In exchange, the Aguinaldo government committed itself to repatriate the prisoners to Spain at its own expense. But should this condition prove unfeasible, the Aguinaldo government proposed to Spain that, as a gesture of generosity, it was willing to accept "arms, ammunitions, provisions, etc., or their equivalent in cash". Appalled by this proposal, the Spanish negotiators refused to commit their government to such conditions. Nonetheless, to avoid a stalemate, the Spanish commissioners enquired how much the "equivalent cash" was. The Filipino commissioners shrewdly refused to give a categorical answer as they bounced the question back to their counterpart. They knew that Spain was in a position to pay and once they named the price, the Spanish might grab the offer. Therefore, they wanted the Spanish themselves to name the price which would give the Filipinos a bargaining advantage if the proposed sum was unacceptable. In brief, the Filipinos wanted to measure up to how much the Spanish were willing to pay.

Although the Spanish expressed willingness to pay one million pesos, the Filipino negotiators rejected the amount and the meeting was thus adjourned. It reopened on June 29 when the

Filipino commissioners informed the Spanish that the "equivalent cash" was 7,000,000 pesos – a sum that took the Spanish by surprise. Nevertheless, the Spanish commissioners were cordial in requesting for more time to consult their government.

Hitches on the Release of the Prisoners

The negotiators appeared to have struck a fair deal. While Moreno did not specify why both parties concluded the negotiations happily despite the seemingly noncommittal stance of the Spanish, Genova's account revealed that the sum of seven million pesos demanded by the Filipino commissioners was reduced to four million pesos. According to accounts, Aguinaldo found this amount reasonable and ordered the implementation on July 5, 1899 in Tarlac of the January 23 Decree releasing the sick prisoners on July 31. As prescribed in this order, duly-authorized Spanish representatives were to pick up the prisoners in designated stations namely San Fernando, La Union for those imprisoned in Northern Luzon; Dagupan for those held in most Central Luzon area; Daet, Camarines Norte for those imprisoned in Bicol Region, and Sta. Cruz or Calamba for those held in most Tagalog provinces.²³

Unfortunately, the release of the sick prisoners was suspended because Aguinaldo was forced back by heavy fighting between the Americans and the Filipinos especially in the port of La Union. More disheartening was the "mysterious order" from Madrid to Jaramillo to suspend negotiations with the Filipinos "due to some problems of international nature." Much to his consternation, Jaramillo could only surmise that the United States must have suspected that the money Spain was supposed to pay the Filipinos might be used to improve their military capability against the American forces. It is likely that Jaramillo arrived at this conclusion as a result of the United States pressure reminding Madrid that the Philippines had already been ceded to the United States via the Treaty of Paris.

Jaramillo now turned to Otis for help to fetch the prisoners for humanitarian reasons. Though he received a favorable reply from Otis, his elation was short-lived as Otis set the condition that the ships bearing prisoners would fly the American flag and not those of Spain and the Red Cross. Jaramillo found the condition outrageous because he knew that the Aguinaldo camp would reject it especially since it would make Aguinaldo's decree of January 23 irrelevant and the "boarding of the Spaniards not only humiliating but also ridiculous."

Otis' position can be gleaned from Jaramillo's letter which stated that the problem of the prisoners had already been turned into a sensitive political issue²⁴ such as the US sovereignty over the Philippines. Otis was firm on the US position that any negotiation with the Aguinaldo government was illegal or unacceptable to the Americans because the sovereignty of the United States in the Philippines was *de facto* by virtue of the Treaty of Paris. The United States maintained that it was going to consider any country which contested this reality as hostile toward it.

Jaramillo recognized Otis' position and Spain's commitment to the Treaty of Paris and acceded to Otis' condition although doubting the prospect of its success. Jaramillo was therefore not surprised when the Aguinaldo camp vehemently rejected the Otis proposition. But what took Jaramillo by surprise was the new motion from the Aguinaldo government demanding that "the authority or power vested in the Spanish commissions be adequate". In the past negotiations the legitimacy, degree of representation, or qualifications of the negotiators or commissioners, whether on a private capacity such as that of Fr. Reaney, or the foreign businessmen, or that of the fully-authorized Del Rio-Toral Commission, were never an issue. In fact, during the earlier negotiations Aguinaldo avoided being too legalistic and flatly did away with the credentials of the Spanish negotiators although he declared such negotiations on a semi-official level.

Equally disheartening was the resolution of the Aguinaldo government which demanded that the settlement of the issue on

the prisoners be done through a bilateral agreement basis. This meant that a foreign country would act as a mediator between the Philippines and Spain within the framework drawn by the international community of nations. This move thus made it difficult, if not impossible, for Aguinaldo and the Spanish to come to terms as no country then had yet recognized the Philippines as a sovereign state. Questioning the logic behind Filipino desire to raise the issue of the prisoners to the international level, Moreno argued:

"The reason behind this is that every internal treaty, as its name implies, is made between nation and nation or state and state. Has any power recognized the independence of the Philippines? No, is the only reply. Thus, which power can enter into an international treaty with the Philippines, between nation and nation and state and state? Not one, evidently. For any power to do it would mean a prior recognition of the Philippines, which the U.S. would consider *casus belli*."²⁵

At this point, an important question arises on who was responsible for advising Aguinaldo to turn down the Otis proposal and require fully-authorized credentials for the Spanish negotiators at top-level negotiations for the prisoners within the parameters of international law. Genova and Moreno suspected that Pedro Paterno, Chief Minister of the Cabinet, and Felipe Buencamino, Minister of Foreign Affairs were behind the Aguinaldo decision. This suspicion was not without basis since first, Paterno and Buencamino held the most sensitive cabinet portfolio which had direct bearing on the case of the prisoners; and second, both Paterno and Buencamino held Aguinaldo in fear of losing the support of the conservative²⁶ which they represented. Genova and Moreno maintained that even if Paterno and Buencamino had accepted the Otis proposal, they were known to disapprove "previously done" agreements, and to paraphrase Moreno, disregard the following day whatever was already approved.²⁷ For Moreno, the insistence of Paterno and Buencamino to elevate the case of the prisoners before the world was plain and simple

obstructionism and sabotage. Meanwhile, Paterno and Buencamino were aware of the impossibility of their proposal given the unsettled political status of the Philippines, but this was precisely the reason why they wanted the issue on the prisoners unresolved. Mabini added credence to Moreno's view of Paterno and Buencamino when he said that Paterno and Buencamino "represented the plutocrats bent on destroying or nullifying whatever the Revolution had achieved so far".²⁸

Understandably, the exasperation of the Spanish like Genova over the failed negotiations led them to entertain nasty notions about Paterno and Buencamino. Genova believed that since the agreement forged between the Del Rio-Toral and the Guerrero Commissions was suspended due to circumstances beyond the commissions' control, the ransom money of 4,000,000 pesos was never going to be forthcoming.²⁹ Convinced that that Paterno and Buencamino were after the ransom money which could have "enriched them in no short time at all"³⁰, Genova and Moreno concluded that this turn of events could have only disappointed the two Filipino officials. Mabini himself corroborated Genova's allegation of Paterno and Buencamino's corruption when he denounced them as being interested in controlling the finances of the Aguinaldo government.³¹

Unwittingly, when Genova and Moreno made Paterno and Buencamino appear as obstructionists, they had only succeeded in making the latter appear heroic in the people's eyes for having acted in the interest of the republic. However, Mabini vehemently objected and publicly exposed Paterno as a man who was "after honors...and want to appear the idol of the people."³² Also, Genova and Moreno unwittingly projected Paterno and Buencamino as firebrand nationalists and staunch republicans when, in reality both men had shifted from independence to "autonomy under the American sovereignty." Antonio Luna decried the annexationist stance of these "autonomists" when he imprisoned some of them as traitors to the republic.³³ Because of the ambiguous stance of Paterno and Buencamino, negotiations

on the issue of the prisoners failed and all previous efforts came to naught. Meanwhile, the prisoners waited in vain for their rescue.

As a final note for this particular section, one question to ask is whether Genova, Moreno, and Mabini were right in their assessment of Paterno and Buencamino or were the latter just victims of personal prejudices. The Postmodernist approach advises everyone to be wary about hidden narratives as each individual has his or her own way of perceiving or looking at things which in turn gives way to biases. Following this perspective, it would be difficult to render fair judgment on Genova, Moreno, or Mabini, as well as on Paterno and Buencamino. In the end, history itself will be the judge whether they acted accordingly and appropriately given the particular circumstances which provided the backdrop for their actions.

The Prisoners in the Hands of the Revolutionaries

Stories of torture, verbal abuse, threats, and forced labor committed by the revolutionists against the prisoners occupy a central position in some Spanish post-revolution historical literature. Biases of course often take the blame for providing the backdrop for such topics. For their part, some Filipino historians have tried to justify the violations of the dignity of the prisoners as the consequences of three centuries of Spanish repressions.

As discussed earlier, the friars claimed that, while abuses were not lacking, the violations were isolated cases and should not be taken as collective resentments of Filipinos against the Spanish rule specifically toward the friars. Stories of reverence of the natives toward the friars while in captivity refuted the alleged general Filipino animosity against the friars. Based on their own accounts, the friars conceded that the civilian and military prisoners were treated more generously than the friars themselves.³⁴ In Camarines, for instance, the prisoners reported that the revolutionists left them milling freely around the town unharmed. Even in provinces such as Bulacan, Batangas and Laguna which were the hub of the revolution, the revolutionists treated the

prisoners with respect. A certain Enrique Hidalgo reported that in Bulacan and Tarlak, the Spanish soldiers were treated with much "consideration that any civilized nation is supposed to accord". Meanwhile, the prisoner and former Judge of the Court of First Instance of Batangas, Manuel Rodriguez de Vera, belied stories of cruelty when he reiterated the kindness of the Batangueños towards the prisoners. Meanwhile, the story of the Extremaduran Deogracias Gonzalez and other *cazadores* in Ilocos was perhaps unprecedented if not unequalled. According to this account, the Spanish prisoners were feted to local *bailes* and fiestas, allowed to take *paseos* in the towns and beaches, served with good food, lodged in private homes, and offered to marry available local women, thus making observers wonder whether they were prisoners or guests.³⁵

Hidden behind the stories of the prisoners was their condemnation of their own government whom they believed abandoned them. Writing from Tarlak on November 10, 1898, a prisoner named Manuel del Valle assailed the insensitivity of his government towards their plight. He wrote:

"...a great number of soldiers walk around here barefoot, in underwear, without anything to eat. They had to work as house helps or *cocheros* in Filipino homes in exchange for food... In Dagupan, the situation of the officials is worse: they have no luggage, surviving only with a handful of rice; they have no money except the one-half peseta given to them by the Revolutionary government and they wash their clothing in the river without soap. All these, the government officials do not know up to now...."³⁶

From the testimonies of the prisoners, it would appear that although they did not totally exculpate their captors for violating their fundamental human rights, the bulk of their complaint lay heavily on their government especially as Spanish officials had been reportedly living privileged life in Manila while pocketing the money intended for the prisoners.

The Case of the Prisoners Before the World

While informal negotiations were going on between Aguinaldo and Otis, Antonio Fuset embarked on a fund-raising campaign in Manila, Spain, and South America for the benefit of the prisoners. This move had thus brought the plight of the prisoners to the attention of the Iberian world which contributed 26,000 pesos to the campaign.³⁷ But the fate of the prisoners reached international proportions when the Queen Regent Maria Cristina herself brought the case to Rome. Acceding to her request, the Archbishop Nava di Bontife, Papal Nuncio to Madrid, communicated to Cardinal Rampolla, the Secretary of Papal State, the queen's desire for Pope Leo XIII to intercede in the liberation of the prisoners.³⁸ However, the Nuncio, in a caveat to cardinal Rampolla, wrote that the failure of the Americans to contain the hostility of the Filipinos and the absence of a well-established legitimate government posed serious obstacles. The Nuncio also intimated that "religious interests not compatible with some of the known conditions that Aguinaldo and his followers intend to demand"³⁹ might be in conflict with the views of the Pope. Whatever views the Pope maintained in relation to the Spanish prisoners were however, not disclosed but it can be surmised that the primary concerns of the Nuncio was the unpleasant prospect of dragging the name of the Pontiff into the issue of the prisoners. Or, perhaps trivializing it, or compromising it with what was a purely political affair. But of absolute cause for concern for the Nuncio was his discovery of Aguinaldo's scheme to deal directly with the Pope:

"...Aguinaldo and his adepts will insist on the demands, already manifested, of wanting to deal about the liberation of these religious, directly with the Head of the Church, in their evil intention of drawing for themselves a certain moral prestige...."⁴⁰

To spare the Pope from the complications of direct

involvement in the case, the Nuncio directed Cardinal Rampolla to consider three options or “indirect means” which would not be detrimental to the Pontifical dignity.⁴¹ The first of these three “indirect means” was to send an apostolic delegate who would negotiate with Aguinaldo but on condition that the prisoners be released first. The absence of records on this matter hinted at the lack of interest on the part of Aguinaldo given his arbitrary position on the prisoners.

The second indirect means was to request the local clergy to exhort the Aguinaldo government to release the prisoners.

a letter addressed to Aguinaldo pleading with him in the name of humanity to liberate the prisoners. Yet, the letter was not without warning, stating that if the prisoners were not released, something calamitous would befall the country. Since no prisoners were liberated, it was obvious that Aguinaldo was unmoved by the warning.

The third means was to offer the Aguinaldo government some money in exchange for the freedom of the prisoners. The Nuncio had earlier gotten wind of the fact that Aguinaldo was amenable to an agreed ransom. But before some of the Nuncio’s plans could be laid down before the revolutionists, the Americans had already overrun the Philippines, sending the Aguinaldo government on the run.

The Road to Freedom

In the end, the credit for the liberation of the prisoners went to the American forces. As they advanced after capturing one province after another, they threw the revolutionary movement in disarray and forced the revolutionists, who lost grip of their prisoners, to run for their safety. According to the Spanish military officer and prisoner Matías Viló, the prisoners escaped while heavy fighting was going on in Sabang, Salitran, Dasmariñas, and Malagasang in Cavite. It appeared that the escape of the prisoners from Cavite to their final destination in Northern Luzon did not

happen in one go but in daily batches. This was the same scenario in other parts of the Philippines. The crux of the matter was that the prisoners owed their liberation to the Spanish themselves. Genova who served as captain in the Aguinaldo army and later on as aide de camp to the president, facilitated the escape of many prisoners such as those from Parañaque and Bacoor. Genova also managed to convince the military hierarchy such as Mariano Trias and Baldomero Aguinaldo to release many prisoners and to grant them safety conduct passes. Ultimately, the Filipinos, perhaps seeing the futility of keeping the prisoners, or out of humanitarian reasons, set the prisoners such as the friars held in Ambos, Camarines and Catanduanes free.⁴² When the American forces finally subdued the resisting provinces, they found the prisoners already on the run but free finally. All that the US forces did was to rescue them and bring them to Manila. By the end of December 1899, most of the prisoners had been repatriated to Spain.

Conclusion

The Filipinos wanted their country to be treated as equal with any other nation, but Spain was in no position to grant that wish since it had already bound itself to the Treaty of Paris and to its position that the political status of the Philippines was unsettled. Mainly for this reason that the task of releasing the prisoners dragged on interminably leaving the Spanish with fewer and fewer options but to appeal to the Filipinos’ sense of compassion. Given the peculiar conditions of the time, however, the Filipinos failed to respond. Compassion for the prisoners was sidelined in the face of a more compelling agenda of the fledgling republic – survival.

Historical records show that the Spanish applied all means, conventional and otherwise, to resolve the prisoner issue, but with little effect. They bungled the negotiations and jeopardized the speedy release of the prisoners. Some of the reasons included their insensitivity by recklessly touching on the issue of the legitimacy of the Aguinaldo government. Also, the Spanish tendency to adhere strictly to the law in the resolution of the issue delayed the

negotiations and prevented the achievement of positive results. In most cases, the Spanish were too straightforward and too outright, sometimes to the point of provoking the sensitive Aguinaldo. The Spanish negotiators, like the Aguinaldo men, did not have any guiding principles, at least initially, in the resolution of the issue and for this reason shifted from one strategy to another or followed a trial-and-error formula.

Despite diplomatic efforts of intermediaries, the Spanish attempts to move Aguinaldo failed because he was firmly resolved to use the prisoners for political reasons. In time it became obvious that no rhetoric could convince the Aguinaldo government to release the prisoners. Yet, as he wanted the world to see that the leader of a civilized nation was capable of compassion, Aguinaldo treated the prisoners kindly. Wanting to court the world's sympathy and support, Aguinaldo was well aware that any adverse action against the prisoners could provoke the international community of nations and cost him their support. To his credit, Aguinaldo was at least honest with one thing and that is in insisting that the prisoners were not being kept to avenge the 300 years of Spanish cruel domination of the Filipinos. If this were otherwise, there was little to prevent the revolutionary government from ordering the massacre of all the prisoners.

Nevertheless, Aguinaldo found that keeping the prisoners brought certain advantages that allowed him first, to uphold the integrity a newly-born nation; second, to show to the world that the Filipinos could not be intimidated; third, to demonstrate that the Filipinos were already a force to reckon with; and fourth, to prove to the world that by applying skill and talent in the rudiments of governance and by treating the prisoners humanely, the Filipinos were civilized people fit to become members of a civilized world. On the other hand, Aguinaldo also learned soon enough that keeping the prisoners brought a number of disadvantages, most serious of which was the draining of the government treasury. At the same time, holding the prisoners sorely obstructed the revolutionists' mobility, especially during the war with the

Americans, as they were forced to haul their prisoners along wherever they went. Finally, the prisoners had become an issue of morality. It was believed that these disadvantages had almost swayed Aguinaldo to consider setting the prisoners free if not for the presence of influential men around him who prevented him from doing so.

If there was something remarkable about the Spanish attempts to liberate the prisoners, it was their unyielding efforts to release their compatriots. History can not therefore condemn them for not doing anything. Their efforts contradicted the accusation of some Spanish that their government had abandoned the prisoners. Unknown to the prisoners, the Spanish government had sought help from all sectors including people close to Aguinaldo, the Church – from Filipino priests to American chaplains, cardinals, bishops, even the Pope of Rome. Indeed, the Spanish moved heaven and earth to help their compatriots in distress.

In the final analysis, the lesson learned from the experience of Spanish prisoners in the hands of the Filipino revolutionist is Postmodern in nature. When the Filipinos won the revolution and imprisoned the colonizers, they seized the exclusive centric world of their former masters. The reversal of the positions of the colonizer and the colonized finally brought the two face to face before the negotiating table as equals. That it had to take 300 years for this to happen was a supreme irony but history had a way of leveling all fields.

NOTES

¹Luis Moreno Jerez, *Los Prisioneros Españoles en el poder de los Tagalos* (Manila: Establecimiento Tipografico del "Diario de Manila," 1900), 6. Spanish to English sources used in this article is this writer's. This present research is indebted to Moreno's work, both in Spanish and English entitled *The Spanish Prisoners Held by the Tagalogs*. Trans. into English by the NHI. (Manila:

- NHI, 1998). Notes culled from these works will not be cited anymore but will be enclosed in quotation marks.
- ²Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *Malolos Crisis of the Republic* (QC: University of the Philippines Press, 1960), 208.
- ³"The Dominicans and the Philippine Revolution." Compiled and Annotated by Fr. Fidel Villaroel, OP. (Manila: UST Publishing House, 1999), 326.
- ⁴See *French Consular Dispatches on the Philippine Revolution*. Trans. by Ma. Luisa Camagay. (QC: University of the Philippines Press, 1997), 81.
- ⁵Carlos Ria-Baja, *El Desastre Filipino* (Barcelona: Tipografia la Academia, 1899), 65.
- ⁶Moreno, *The Spanish Prisoners*, 25-26. See Chapter III of this book for more details on the complaints of the prisoners against their government.
- ⁷See Otis-Aguinaldo records of correspondence in Pedro S. de Achutegui and Miguel Bernad, *Religious Revolution in the Philippines*, Vol. II (QC: The University Press, 1971), 35-42.
- ⁸*La Vanguardia*, Oct. 4, '96.
- ⁹*The Dominicans*, 356.
- ¹⁰Achutegui and Bernad, *Religious Revolution*, 34.
- ¹¹*The Dominicans*, 354.
- ¹²See the letter of Aguinaldo to Otis, Nov. 10, 1898 in Moreno, *The Spanish Prisoners*, 43.
- ¹³Jose Genova Iturbide, *Los Prisioneros Memoria de la Comision desempeñada en el Campo Filipino* (Madrid: Establec. Tipografico de C. Juste, 1900), 29.
- ¹⁴Leon Ma. Guerrero, *The First Filipino* (Manila: National Heroes Commission, 1963), 311-312.
- ¹⁵*The Dominicans*, 353.
- ¹⁶*Ibid.*
- ¹⁷See Fr. Ulpiano Herrero Sampedro, *Nuestra Prision* (Manila: Imprenta del Colegio de Sto. Tomas, 1900), 131.
- ¹⁸*Ibid.*, 152. Aguinaldo confided to Consul Rounceville Wildman about his difficulty in maintaining the prisoners for

economic reasons and his willingness to set some of the friars free.

¹⁹See de los Rios and Romeo's efforts for the release of the prisoners in Genova, *Los Prisioneros*, 7-11.

²⁰Genova, 28.

²¹See signatories in *The Letters of Mabini*. Compiled and trans. by the National Heroes Commission. (Manila: National Heroes Commission, 1965), 125-126.

²²*Ibid.*

²³Data from this particular section are culled from Moreno, *The Spanish Prisoners*.

²⁴See Jaramillo's letter, *ibid.*, 67-68.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 76.

²⁶Agoncillo, *Malolos Crisis of the Republic*, 400.

²⁷Moreno, *The Spanish Prisoners*, 73.

²⁸Agoncillo, *Malolos Crisis of the Republic*, 392-393.

²⁹There was no mention about the delivery of the money in the course of any negotiations.

³⁰Genova, *Los Prisioneros*, 11-12.

³¹Agoncillo, *Malolos Crisis of the Republic*, 393-394 and 405.

³²*Ibid.*, 396.

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴Fr. Herrero, 130.

³⁵Read Deogracias Gonzalez story in Juan Chavez Palacios, *La Perdida de Filipinas* (Badajoz: Editorial Regional de Extremadura, 1998).

³⁶Moreno, *Los Prisioneros*, 52-53.

³⁷*The Dominicans*, 32. The succeeding section is culled from the same book, pages 360-366 and 369-373.

³⁸See the letters of Nava di Pontifice to Cardinal Rampolla in *The Dominicans*, 360-366, 369-373.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 370.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 370-371.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²Achutegui and Bernad, *The Religious Revolution*, 72.