# NEGROS ORIENTAL IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PHILIPPINE REVOLUTION<sup>1</sup>

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AS THE NATION commemorated the centennial of the Philippine Revolution this year, many projects and activities were undertaken in order to make this event truly momentous and relevant. It is noteworthy to mention, that as we Filipinos try to reminisce and understand the deeds and actions of our ancestors in this important period of our nation, we should also endeavor to examine the history of our locality and its contributions to the making of our national history. In particular, there is a need to examine the discourses surrounding the Philippine Revolution and locate them in their regional, provincial, and local contexts so that their historical significance, specifically to the province of Negros Oriental, can be better understood. This present study proceeds from this critical framework.

The analysis of the events in Negros Oriental in this paper is based on the new historicism's perspective on the discourses of history and is framed on Michel Foucault's concept of power which views historical events as always shaped by the acquisition of and negotiations for power. These theoretical perspectives provide the framework for the investigation of three historical developments which I believe have bearing on the outcome of the Revolution in the province: (1) the process underlying the spread of Revolution throughout the province; (2) the response of the local government to it; and, (3) the language used to articulate the sentiments and ideals of the revolution and convey its ideologies.

One unique feature of this analysis is its sources such as those representing the scholarly efforts to reconstruct the history of Negros Oriental by Negros-based scholars. I refer to the pioneering four-volume work of Prof. Caridad Rodriguez on Negros Oriental and the Philippine Revolution and the article by Dr. T. Valentin Sitoy in the Kabilin: Legacies of a Hundred Years of Negros Oriental. Using these historical works, I will try to examine critically the events that surrounded the history of the province during the period spanning the twilight of the Spanish reign in 1898 and the dawning of the American rule.

## Negros Oriental at the Outbreak of the Revolution

It must be established that when the Revolution against Spain began in August 1896, Negros Oriental, by then a relatively new province (established January 1, 1890), did not immediately feel the impact of the revolution. The same situation had been observed in other areas of the Visayas and Mindanao which, like this province, did not play a very significant economic or political role in the Spanish government. This situation seems to suggest that the revolution against the Spaniards, notably in its early stage, was late, if not absent, in many parts of the country.

It is possible to speculate a number of reasons why the participation of the province in the revolution came rather late. First, the peculiar geographic condition of the country separated the province from the national capital. Physical distance and the poor state of transportation and communication facilities which connected the disparate islands of the archipelago at that time combined to isolate the province from the events unfolding in other parts of the country.

Second, the leadership profile of the province at that time was composed mostly, if not all, by political leaders who were generally mestizo—a mix breed of Filipino and Spanish or Filipino-Spanish and Chinese. The elite, as they have been called, had vested interests that somehow influenced their actions. As T. Valentin Sitoy contends "...the rest of the Negros elites [sic] were disinterested, if not in fact, hostile to the revolution."

Third, the inhabitants were widely perceived to be peace-loving people who preferred to stay out of trouble. The common expression "walay tay labot" has been pointed out as the verbal manifestation of such behavior. This view is supported by the comments of Negros Oriental Governor Ferrer included in a letter to the Governor General in which he described the inhabitants of this province as "...peaceful in character, that no association, whether authorized or secret, existed and that no person, who because of their [sic] past conduct, deserved to be watched." 4

Fourth, there was no revolutionary army in the province. The absence of this army in Negros Oriental is supported by the fact that Pantaleon Villegas, popularly known as "Leon Kilat," led the revolutionary forces in Cebu, although he himself was a native of Bacong (Sitoy 1990: 12). Nevertheless, Caridad Rodriguez in her

book, Negros Oriental and the Philippine Revolution, pointed out that about this time Pedro Baguio of Guihulngan and Diego de la Viña of Vallehermoso were already organizing some revolutionary activities. However, considering the distance of these two towns from Dumaguete and other towns, their activities were indeed an exception.

# The Language Barrier

During the outbreak of the revolution, Tagalog words like kapatid, kalayaan, lahi, and laban were part of the philosophical and ideological context of the revolution. However, it is possible to speculate that the people in Negros Oriental did not grasp the significance of the concepts because the meanings of these words in the Cebuano context were different. For instance, the word patid in Cebuano means "to kick," obviously a far cry from the notion of brotherhood embodied in kapatid. Similarly, the Cebuano word laya is an adjective describing a dry or withered state as in dried leaf. For Cebuano speakers, then, kalayaan evokes a condition of dryness rather than freedom as the Tagalog equivalent signifies. 6 As well, the word lahi in Cebuano literally means different while its Tagalog equivalent means race. Moreover, in Cebuano the word laban which means "to be with" or "to defend" or "to fight with," is a direct antonym of the Tagalog laban which means to "fight" or "fight against." The Tagalog equivalent of the Cebuano laban, however, is kampi. Given the varying semantic implications of these words in their specific linguistic contexts, it remains unclear whether the Cebuano speaking inhabitants of this province fully understood the meaning of these words or grasped the nationalistic sentiments with which they were endowed by the leaders of the Revolution. Predictably, this had an effect on the people's loyalty to the cause and sympathy with the struggle. Not surprising, even at the present time, the language issue remains a contentious problem in Philippine society especially as regional pride and politics have entered the picture.

## The "Revolution"

It is interesting to note that when Manila fell to the Americans in that "infamous" mock battle of Manila on August 13, 1898,

the province was peaceful and remained quite even two months after this event took place. It is apparent at this time that both the leaders of this province and the people were closely watching the developments in the national front and carefully calculating their next moves.

Surprisingly, when the revolutionary leaders of this province did decide to join the revolution, they took the cue from Negros Occidental. After the liberation of Bacolod by the forces of General Juan Araneta on the first week of November 1898, Don Diego de la Viña immediately dispatched his son, Jose, to see the General "for instructions on what actions to take in Negros Oriental." As a result, Diego de la Viña was commissioned as General de Brigada, Commandante del Ejercito Filipino, Provincia de Negros Oriental, by Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo who instructed him to "immediately rid Negros Oriental of Spanish forces garrisoned in said province, and hereafter, to organize a Provisional Revolutionary Government" (Rodriguez 1989: 84).

### The March for Liberation

A close examination of the events surrounding the march for the liberation of the province could shed light on the fundamental question whether driving the Spaniards away was indeed the core of the revolutionary events in the province. As recorded by historians, the march for the liberation of the province started on November 17, 1898 after Gen. Diego de la Viña informed all the capitanes municipales in the towns of the strategy to converge all forces from the northern and southern towns and join forces to attack the capital town of Dumaguete.8 Contrary to expectations, however, the march to Dumaguete9 turned out to be no more than a parade. Although imbued with the spirit to fight and the will to defend the province, the revolutionary forces which began their march from Vallehermoso in the north and from Siaton in the south found no opportunities for fighting on the way. As reported by Fr. Juan Lorenzo of Hiligaon and Fr. Lorenzo Cordon of Siaton, "there was no fighting nor any losses of lives and property. Neither were there any outrages nor retributions." 10 This is in reference to the southern towns liberated by forces headed by Major Felipe Tayko.

Apparently, at the time of the scheduled march, most of the Spanish civil guards, friars, and officials had already left the towns earlier for fear of their lives. With the declaration of independence by Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo on June 12, 1898, the Spaniards also saw their situation worsening. When the American reinforcements arrived after the defeat of the Spanish fleet by Commodore George Dewey's fleet on May 1, 1898, Spanish authorities realized that the Americans were now in control. On November 23, 1898, most of the Spaniards in the province left for Cebu. Gen. Diego de la Viña entered Dumaguete on November 24, 1989, the day after the departure of the Spaniards. As a result, the revolutionary forces entered the capital without the slightest resistance. November 24 was the bisperas 11 of the town fiesta and many people from the neighboring towns and places were in the capital to celebrate the feast of the patron saint of Dumaguete. Indeed the fiesta celebration on November 25, 1898 was a joyous occasion since, except for a few like Fray Pedro Bengoa who decided to join the rebels and who officiated the mass of the liberated Dumaguete, the Spaniards were no longer around.

As far as the timing for the siege of Dumaguete was concerned, the choice of the date, November 24, 1898 (Rodriguez 1989: 93), to enter the capital remains historically controversial. On the one hand, the deliberate avoidance of a military confrontation by the revolutionary forces pointed to a lack of guts or might and tended to becloud the revolutionary spirit. On the other hand, the manipulation was considered a brilliant idea for it averted the needless loss of lives and property. Moreover, from the perspective of Foucault's concept of negotiations for power, this deliberate avoidance of conflict assured the leaders of the revolution a certain number of advantages, foremost of which was keeping intact the structures of power over which they had vested interests. From the events that took place then, it would be difficult to insist that driving the Spaniards away was the core of the revolutionary events in the province.

# The Liberation

After the liberation of the province, the officials were faced with the task of organizing the local government, the most urgent of which was deciding the kind and form of government to estab-

lish. This was a tall order for a young province still trying to put its acts together. On the one hand, while Negros Oriental leaders still considered themselves under the Malolos government of President Emilio Aguinaldo, the leaders of the neighboring province of Negros Occidental, who all belonged to the "landed aristocracy" (Rodriguez 1989: 107) created on November 27, 1898 a Cantonal Government for the entire island of Negros.<sup>12</sup> Among others, this system proposed the independence of Negros from the rest of the islands (Rodriguez 1989: 107). As well, this proposal was aimed at winning the support of the United States in the event of a Spanish invasion. Interestingly, although Negros Oriental leaders were not represented when this system was introduced, they followed orders from their counterparts in the Occidental. As Prof. Rodriguez puts it, "there was no question about the loyalty of the Negros Oriental leaders to President Aguinaldo's government, but at the same time they found themselves following directives from Negros Occidental" (Rodriguez 1989: 107). From the outset, it was readily apparent that some conflicts of interest were bound to arise. This apprehension became a reality when the United States and Spain finally agreed to sign the Treaty of Paris on December 10, 1898 in which the Philippines, without the knowledge of the Filipinos, was ceded to the U.S. in the amount of \$20,000,000.

## The American Occupation

The Filipinos were not allowed to enter Manila after the surrender of the Spaniards. On February 4, 1899, an American sentry shot a Filipino soldier at San Juan Bridge. Known as the "San Juan bridge incident," this tragic event triggered the Filipino-American war. Without even attempting to determine the real cause of the incident, Gen. Arthur McArthur issued on the following day an order to advance against the Filipino troops (Agoncillo 1975: 217). While the war in Manila raged on, a different event was taking place in Negros Occidental. On February 12, 1899, the Occidental leaders raised the American flag with a 21 gun salute although no American was around at the time. The Occidental leaders explained that in taking this action, they were only trying to avert the same fate that befell Iloilo when it was bombarded by the Americans into surrender.

The day the Occidental leaders raised the American flag, a different scenario was unfolding in Negros Oriental. President Demetrio Larena circularized a letter to the local *presidentes* asking them to be vigilant and to tell the people not to be afraid of the Americans because, according to him, "even if they were powerful on sea because they have navies, [but] we are more powerful on land because of our sharp bolos and lances." <sup>14</sup> By February 18, 1899 Gen. De la Viña reiterated the instructions of Pres. Larena to the local military chiefs by telling them "to wait for the arrival of the Americans after which he will tell them what to do next" (Rodriguez 1989: 138). It is clear by their response that at the time they were closely monitoring the events, the leaders of Negros Oriental were still very loyal to the Malolos Republic.

While these developments were taking place, the province was busy preparing for the inauguration of the new government and the first meeting of the newly elected Congress of Deputies of Negros Oriental scheduled on Feb. 19, 1899. However, just a day before the celebration, a letter from the Negros Occidental Cantonal Government arrived which urged the Negros Oriental towns to raise the American flag. The letter was read by Chairman Vicente Ozoa before the Congress (Rodriguez 1989: 139) on February 19, 1899. The order to fly another foreign flag just as they were celebrating their newly-won independence outraged the people of the province. As Sitoy writes "...the initial reaction of eastern Negrenses to these events was—understandably enough—shock, consternation, and anger" (Sitoy 1990: 13).

Initially, this turn of events caught the leaders of the province in a dilemma. The Malolos Republic to whom they had remained loyal up to this time had just waged war with the Americans. To decide to support President Aguinaldo could bring Negros Oriental into open conflict with their comrades in Negros Occidental. Although short-lived, the decision of the Negros Oriental leaders not to raise the American flag and maintain the integrity and independence of the province was considered by many people in the province to be an admirable act. By February 25, 1899, Gen. De La Viña told his local military chiefs that the Negros Occidental and American troops "have no right to interfere in our province, much more to disturb the public order... If they enter our towns, we shall be obliged to throw them out by force." Thus

saying, he instructed his officers to be ready for war. Hence, Negros Oriental did not raise the American flag.

However, as the feeling of Anti-Americanism and Anti-Occidentalism worsened in the Oriental side, the Occidental leaders felt compelled to convince the Oriental leaders to join with them. This was necessary since a Congress of Deputies composed of representatives from both provinces had earlier been scheduled in order to draft a constitution. Consequently, General Araneta came to Dumaguete on April 9, 1899 purposely to convince the leaders to join them. After his private talks with Pres. Larena and Gen. De La Viña, he convened a general meeting of provincial and town officials on April 11, 1899 during which he emphasized to the officials the advantages of "being under the American protection and the futility of fighting against a far more superior power" (Rodriguez 1989: 142). The persuasive power of Gen. Araneta obviously worked since the Oriental leaders agreed to send a Commission to Bacolod headed by Pres. Larena to "discuss and revise the constitution for the Federal Republic of Negros."17

The next day, Pres. Larena and the other commissioners left for Bacolod with Gen. Araneta on board an American ship. The following day, April 13, Gen. De la Viña ordered his military chiefs not to raise any flag while the commissioners were still in Bacolod since, as he said: " our flag is not yet recognized by other nations."18 He further added that "if military chiefs from the other side [Occidental] accompanied by columns of native soldiers and Americans will come to our province by the order of Philippine authorities, you should treat them as real friends" (Rodriguez 1989: 142). This turn of events indicated that the loyalty of the leaders of Negros Oriental was slowly sliding in favor of the new colonizer. It is not surprising then that when Pres. Larena arrived on April 30, 1899, although the congress ended on May 3, the American flag was raised with the 21-gun salute (Rodriguez 1989: 142). The American flag was raised without the knowledge of the people that their leaders had by then accepted American rule.

By May 1st, Interim Pres. Herminigildo Villanueva sent letters to the towns enjoining them to raise the American flag as they did in the capital and convincing them that they really needed the protection of the Americans. In the same letter, he told them that with the Americans the "future will be brighter and stronger." It is not surprising that the other towns immediately

followed like in the previous times. With the exception of Bais and Tanjay in the north and Bayawan, Tolong, and Siaton in the south, the rest of the towns in Negros Oriental heeded Villanueva's letter. The refusal of the northern towns to raise the American flag was understandable because of their strong links to the Malolos government. The revolutionists headed by Serio Guzman Singco hauled down the American flags without any objection from the residents.20 Meanwhile, the uprising in the southern towns was spearheaded by the Babaylanes. 21 In vain, Pres. Larena dispatched a commission to convince the leaders of the advantages of being under the American rule. Failing to convince the leaders of the province, especially those in the northern towns, Pres. Larena went back to Bacolod to report the matter to Gen. James Smith. 22 In his absence, Gen. De la Viña, citing failing health as the reason, resigned and appointed Herminigildo Villanueva to replace him as the delegate of War.23

Following the president's trip, a battalion of American troops arrived in Dumaguete on May 27, 1899. The next day, the Americans, accompanied by some Filipino troops, proceeded to Bais and Tanjay. However, they found no form of resistance because the insurgents had left the towns earlier. Eventually, the rebels surrendered on June 5, 1899 and were given amnesty. Afterwards, the Americans proceeded to the southern towns which were under the influence of the *babaylanes*, but as in the northern towns, the rebels were nowhere to be found.

On July 22, 1899, the Americans issued Gen. Order no. 30 which installed a "military-civil government under an appointed American military Governor with absolute veto powers and a popularly elected native civil Governor and an advisory council." This order put to rest the struggles of the people of Negros Oriental. Unfortunately, the proposed federal constitution promised to them never materialized.

## **Concluding Notes**

Strictly speaking, revolution means to "revolve." Epistemologically, it implies that there is a change in the structure from below to the upper level and vice versa. In this sense, there is a power shift in the structure which could enable the people in the lower level to move up. Moreover, although revolution usually im-

plies a bitter and bloody struggle, some events have been "bloodless revolts or glorious ones."

The circumstances that shaped the history of the province from 1898 to 1899 could be considered a unique revolutionary event. As can be seen in the turn of events, the revolution in the province involved no kind of change or movement in the structure as the power spots remained filled either by the people from the same level or by the same people who were originally in the power structure. Despite the people's will to fight for the liberation of the province, they simply had no opportunity to dramatize this urge. The famous "march for the liberation" of Dumaguete in 1898 was no more than a parade26 and the American liberation in 1899 was simply like a pass in review. As mentioned earlier, it was clear that there was evidence of massive aggression or burning desire to fight the Spaniards. However, much of this sentiment remained at the level of the emotion rather than action since the planned attacks were timed after the Spaniards had already left.<sup>27</sup> Leaders of the revolution claimed that this move was designed to avert the loss of lives and possible destruction of the province. If this were so, it is possible to conclude then that the leaders had calculated their potential loss and opted to negotiate to their advantage. Similarly, the leaders of the province responded to the coming of the Americans in a pragmatic way. Realizing the grim scenario and effects of a Quixotic resistance, they opted to negotiate.

Consequently, what happened in the province exemplifies the postmodern theory which propounds that "historical events are marked by negotiations" (Hornedo 1996). This paper argues that Negros Oriental leaders negotiated and dealt with the Occidental leaders and the Americans in order to acquire power for their own interests. Although these deals and negotiations forced the leaders of the province to abandon the ideals of the Philippine Revolution, they created opportunities for power sharing which in turn gave birth to new forces and alliances. These negotiations clearly placed the province in a much better position than those places whose leaders resisted the American colonization. To illustrate, the establishment of Silliman Institute, later to become Silliman University, by American missionaries, in Dumaguete has continued to this day to exert a tremendous impact on the province and the nation in general.

Finally, as a general framework in the study of the Revolution, there is a need to subject to more critical scrutiny the supposed "Revolt of the Masses." As can be seen from the events mentioned earlier, the elite, who were mainly the landowners, occupied the leadership positions during the revolution. These positions of privilege assured not only the essential continuity of power established during the Spanish and the Revolutionary periods into the new order, but also allowed the elite to retain their power and influence in the new order (Guerrero 169-73). Meanwhile, their tenants constituted the mass of low ranking members of the revolutionary forces whose participation in the revolution took place in the context of patron-client relationship similar to that existing between tenants and their landlords, as well as between the principales and caciques and their subjects and followers.<sup>28</sup> In effect, this relationship suggests that as in normal life, the masses during the revolution remained in a subordinate position to their masterlandlords and took orders from them. That the revolution in the province involved no radical change or movement in the structure is, therefore, not at all surprising.

Revolution is the product of many circumstances, conditions, peoples, and personalities involving their actions and motivations, discourses, and finally the unforeseen consequences of intended actions. Therefore, there is a need to look at revolution from different perspectives and examine multiple discourses and textualities especially those focusing on class distinctions, as well as regional, provincial, and local versions. Because every perspective has something to contribute, it is no longer possible to claim a final narrative of the events. One must go beyond them to recreate a rich landscape and kaleidoscope of the historical fact.

#### Notes

1. This is a revised version of the paper delivered during the Conference on "The Revolution and the Southern Provinces" held last April 2-3, 1998 at the Social Hall of the Provincial Capitol of Cebu. The conference was sponsored by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts and the Historical Association of Cebu, Inc. This paper was also presented during the 7th Regional Seminar Workshop in Oral and Local History

sponsored by the National Historical Institute held last May 21-22, 1998 at the Multipurpose Hall of Silliman University.

2. T. Valentin Sitoy "The Making of Negros: A Brief History." Kabilin: Legacies of a Hundred Years of Negros Oriental, 12. On the contrary, Prof. Rodriguez commented that in her research, she found no evidence of hostility towards the revolution among the elite. (Interviewed Aug. 24, 1998).

3. Cebuano term for "none of our business." Perhaps due to the ignorance of the people about the revolution; believed to be an outgrowth of the Spanish policy of "divide et empera (Divide and rule tactic of the Spaniards).

- 4. Caridad A. Rodriguez. Negros Oriental and the Philippine Revolution, 81 as quoted in the report of Governor P. M. Antonio Ferrer on April 5, 1898 entitled Costa Oriental de las Isla de Negros.
- 5. They were supposed to be providing safe houses for the training of their men.
- 6. Although "laya" in the Tagalog context refers to the "elbow room" of the weavers, no Cebuano word exists with the same meaning.
- Caridad A. Rodriguez, 84 as quoted in A Brief Biography of Diego de la Vina by Woodrow Serion in 1954. (I had the opportunity to interview Mr. Serion).
- 8. Apparently, most of the marchers were farm laborers of Don Diego de la Viña. See Rodriguez, 86.
- 9. Prof. Rodriguez has a very vivid account of the march in her book on pp. 88 to 95.
- 10. Juan Gadiane. Pahayag (an unpublished manuscript in Cebuano, 1950).
- 11. The day before the fiesta celebration. But Prof. Rodriguez stressed that Dumaguete was a deserted town as peopled fled in fear of the shootings if de la Viña arrived. See Rodriguez, 94.
- 12. Rodriguez, 106 and Sitoy, 13 as quoted in S.D., P.I.R., 77.3, Box 256-9, Microfilm section, Filipiniana Division, National Library.
- 13. Rodriguez, 137 and Sitoy, 13. as quoted from Ma. Fe H. Romeros's Negros Occidental Between two Foreign powers, 134; and the Noble Collection, vol. xxv p. 4201 of the P.R. Collections at the National Library.

- 14. Rodriguez, 138 as quoted from P.R. 91. Letter of Pres. D. Larena to the local presidents.
- 15. Rodriguez, 139. As quoted in Romero.
- 16. Rodriguez, 140 and Sitoy, 13 as quoted from P.R. 91. Feb. 25, 1899 order.
- 17. Rodriguez, 142. Also found in Sitoy, 14. as quoted from the James Smith Report to the Adjutant of the Visayan Military District. p. 34.
- 18. Rodriquez, 142 as quoted from P.R. 91. Gen. De la Vina's order of April 13, 1899.
- 19. Rodriguez, 147 as quoted from P.R. 91. Letter of Interim Pres. H. Villanueva. Dumaguete, May 1, 1899 in Spanish.
- 20. A letter of Sergio Singco to Gen. Vicente Lukban. June 12, 1899 taken from the United States National Archives, Military Reference Branch (NNRM), R. G. 395, entry 2943, 2937, 2940 on "Philippine Islands, Bacolod, Negros," Box no. 1, through the kindness of Fr. Roman Sagun who did his research on Sept. 1992 at Washington D.C.
- 21. A pseudo-religious group with nationalistic aspirations. See Evelyn Cullamar, *Babaylanism in Negros*, 1896-1907 (Manila: New Day Publishers, 1986).
- 22. James Smith Report, 342.
- 23. For the exact details see Rodriguez, 148-154.
- 24. Rodriguez, 56 as quoted from S.D. Box 2 Folder 29. Document no. S.D. 29.8 pp.6-9.
- 25. Rodriguez, 158 as quoted in Marion Wilcox (ed.) Harper's History of the War in the Philippines, 232-236.
- 26. This is similar with the observation of Francisco Varona regarding the Revolution in Negros Occidental on November 6–7, 1998. See Francisco Varona, Negros historia anecdotica de su riqueza y de sus hombres (Manila: General Printing Press, 1921), 162.
- 27. This is understandable because General Diego de Los Rios ordered all troops under his command in Mindanao and the Visayas to Iloilo where he established the seat of Government obviously to protect him.
- 28. Schumacher, John. *The making of a nation* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press,1991), 184. In this sense, Cornelio Fuentes also pointed out that from the haciendas were recruited the men who made up the revolutionary army. See

Fuentes, Cornelio R., Apuntes documentados de la revolucion en toda la isla de Negros. Primera Parte. Iloilo: El Centinela Inc., 1919, 18.

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