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The *Cocheros* of American- occupied Manila Representations and Persistence

This article discusses colonial misrepresentations of a marginalized occupational group in the American Philippines. Colonial authorities had pinned their hopes on the transformative power of motorized transportation, which they introduced in Manila. They regarded *cocheros* or carriage drivers as relics of a backward past that the progress of modernity would render extinct. However, the *cocheros* were not easily eradicated, and frustrated colonial authorities tagged them as barriers to modernity. This article analyzes this colonial discourse and offers a nuanced characterization of a voiceless yet ubiquitous group.

KEYWORDS: URBAN TRANSPORTATION • WORKING CLASSES • AMERICAN COLONIALISM • MODERNITY • IMPERIALISM

The current trend toward social history in Philippine historiography has produced insightful works that provide nontraditional views of the past. The application of history from below has simultaneously analyzed social “forces” and peered into the lives of social “actors” whom traditional historiography had rendered nameless and obscure (McCoy 2000). Indeed, giving voice to the voiceless is often a study of the interaction between muted actors and silent forces. Even those who are considered dregs of society are topics worthy of attention, although their reputation has effectively marginalized them not just in their respective societies but even in historical literature. Fortunately Filipino and Philippine historians have made inroads into this kind of historiography, and urban history is one subfield where the application of this perspective has been a fruitful endeavor.

As if responding to James Warren’s (2008, 146) lament that “theoretically informed urban historical inquiry is virtually nonexistent in Southeast Asian modern history,” recent works have uncovered the dynamics between marginalized groups and their specific urban milieus. Historical studies on Manila prostitutes (Camagay 1995, 99–118), the *sanggano* (“village thug”) of Tondo (Gotiangco 2007), and the criminals of nineteenth-century Philippines (Bankoff 1996) are just a few examples. The subjects of these studies were once considered unwanted elements of urban society, and their reputations are largely products of how they have been misrepresented and recorded by the dominant actors—products that now largely define the written historical record. What makes these works important therefore is not just how they describe the personalities and narrate their experiences, but also and more importantly how they deconstruct the process of representation. Such is the approach attempted in this article, which focuses on another group of “urban undesirables”: the *cocheros* or carriage drivers of American-occupied Manila.

Following Warren’s (1986) analysis of the lives of Singapore rickshaw coolies, this essay attempts to view Manila’s history with the *cocheros* at the analytical center. Data are derived mainly from contemporary travel accounts, journalistic writings, and government reports. However, given the nature of these primary sources and the inherent process of misrepresentation in these documents, I focus less on the reconstruction of the “real” historical experiences of *cocheros* than on locating them within the socioeconomic terrain of urban Manila and the ideological domain of colonial modernity

during the latter decades of Western imperialist expansion in the early twentieth century.

Cocheros in the Advent of Motorized Mobility

At the turn of the twentieth century, Manila relied almost entirely on human and animal power for its urban transport system (Pante 2011, 113).¹ In the previous decades when Manila was still under Spanish rule, the city had already been rapidly urbanizing, and its street traffic was nothing short of bustling, as noted by two British visitors. John Bowring (1963, 15–16) in his visit in 1858 estimated that almost a thousand vehicles passed through Escolta, Plaza de San Gabriel, and Puente de España (Jones Bridge) daily. John Foreman (1985, 348) reported that, based on an official computation in 1885, the daily average number of conveyances had increased for Escolta and Puente de España, which tallied 5,000 and 6,000, respectively.

Horse-drawn, passenger-carrying carriages accounted for a large fraction of road traffic. These came in different forms, and were used as either private or public vehicles. These carriages also formed a hierarchy. On top were the *carruajes de primer clase*, four-wheeled vehicles pulled by two or more horses—the Spanish governor-general’s had four or even six white ones (Alvina 1998, 41; Lala 1899, 131; Sta. Maria 1977, 1738)—and reserved for the wealthy and powerful (Agoncillo 2003, 319). A special type of carruaje was the victoria or barouche, where passengers were seated facing one another (Hamm 1898, 30) and assisted by coachmen and footmen (Gilbert 1903, 34; Sta. Maria 1977, 1739). William Howard Taft, the first American civil governor-general, even had uniformed *cocheros* for his victoria (Taft 1914, 120). The two-wheeled and four-seater *quilez* (Alvina 1998, 41), which was pulled by one horse, formed the “middle class” of carriages.

Calesas and *carromatas*² comprised the lowest class (fig. 1), but were the principal land-based passenger vehicles (Sta. Maria 1977, 7:1739; Bellairs 1902, 205; Zaide 1973, 18; Agoncillo 2003, 322). According to American William Boyce (1914, 16), “The *carromata* is something like the *calesa*, except that it has a square, stationary top and often looks a bit run down at the heel.” The *carromata*, known as the commoner’s carriage (Hamm 1898, 30), was “a two-wheeled spring vehicle with a light roof” (Foreman 1985, 559n) pulled by one pony. Victor Clark (1905, 830) reported the presence of 2,118 licensed *carromatas* in Manila in the early twentieth century. Only one passenger at a time could ride inside the vehicle together with the



Fig. 1. *Carromatas* plying the Escolta in the late nineteenth century (Lala 1899, 63)

driver, although there were rigs that could handle more (Worcester 1899, 29; Boyce 1914, 16). Bureau of Health Director Victor Heiser (1936, 44) described it as “shaped much like the old-fashioned hansom, except that the driver was perched low between the shafts.” As the humblest of carriages it offered the barest of conveniences. A Dutch merchant described it as “a square box without pillows or whatever” (Muijzenberg 2008, 56; cf. Hamm 1898, 30). Thus, it was not surprising that in the early 1900s Americans, who in the absence of an alternative mode had no choice but to ride *carromatas*, complained of discomfort when they rode these vehicles (Gilbert 1903, 30).

Being the commoner’s carriage, for-hire *carromatas* charged the lowest rates. While *victorias* charged P0.25 per thirty minutes³ and were considered first-class public vehicles, *quilezes* and *calesas* charged P0.05 less than *victoria* rates, and in turn *carromata* rates were two to six times less than the *calesa*’s. Hence, *carromata* passengers were mainly from among the lower classes, especially Chinese and natives (Boyce 1914, 16; Hamm 1898, 30; Zaide 1973, 18; Sta. Maria 1977, 1738–40; Agoncillo 2003, 322; Worcester 1899, 29). Understandably Europeans were not likely to ride it (Foreman 1985, 558–59).

Carriages were driven by coachmen called *cocheros*. In 1903 there were 5,649 *cocheros* out of 219,928 Manila residents (US Bureau of the Census 1905a, 2:1004), or roughly 1 *cochero* for every 39 residents. They were overwhelmingly natives (LeRoy 1968, 54; Younghusband 1899, 58), a fact confirmed by the racial categories of the 1903 census. Of the total number of 5,649, *cocheros* 5,167 (91.5 percent) came from the “brown”

race; *cocheros* from other races numbered as follows: 294, “yellow”; 137, “white”; 46, “black”; and 5, “mixed” (US Bureau of the Census 1905a, 2:1004). Many were migrants from the provinces (Doeppers 1998, 256). But for one woman,⁴ men monopolized this occupation from the late nineteenth century up to the last years of the American colonial period (US Bureau of the Census 1905a, 2: 1004; Philippine Commission of the Census 1940, 32; PFP 1939, 17; Gealogo 2010, 48).

Most *cocheros* were wage workers,⁵ even those who operated public vehicles. There were also privately employed *cocheros*, and in late-nineteenth-century Manila the average monthly cost of hiring one was US\$12 (or P24) (Sawyer 1900, 185).⁶ The wage cost, along with the other expenses in acquiring and maintaining carriages—the estimated total investment in a complete carriage ranged from US\$100 to US\$500 (*ibid.*; Hannaford 1900, 88; Stevens 1968, 209)—made privately owned rigs a status symbol for the wealthy. *Cocheros* belonged to the lowest stratum of workers in terms of wages. Before 1898, the *cochero*’s average monthly salary was P15. Despite a wage hike that increased it to P30 (around P1 daily) by 1902, they still fared badly compared with other workers. Carpenters, painters, and cart builders were earning, on the average, somewhere between P1.50 to P2.50 daily (US Bureau of the Census 1905b, 4:442). It must be noted, however, that their wages varied widely “according to the caprice or inexperience of the employers.” (Clark 1905, 830) This was probably a result of the highly imperfect information in the labor market back then. Moreover, *cocheros* would have shared stories and found out about each other’s wages, leading conceivably to requests for better wages.

At the onset of American colonialism, the census figure on the number of *cocheros* highlighted the ubiquity of horse-drawn vehicles in Manila. A nonmotorized urban transport system, however, was not something the colonizers were cheerful about. Although they were “glad enough to ride in almost any kind of vehicle” (Gilbert 1903, 30), the Americans were frustrated with what they saw as an inadequate urban transport system (*ibid.*, 28, 44; Philippine Commission 1901, 29; Clark 1905, 830; Hannaford 1900, 62). The motorization of transportation was their response.

Motorized vehicles were introduced mainly through the initiative of the Americans. During this time, transport motorization in the United States was in its early stages, and the country’s automobile industry was still in its infancy. In the two decades prior to the popularity of automobile use

in the 1910s, the vehicle that exerted the most profound influence on American cities was the electric streetcar (Federal Housing Administration 1929, 101–2). Arguably it was also the electric streetcar that was the most influential of the motorized vehicles the Americans introduced in Manila. Its inauguration on 15 April 1905 was an event that the American-controlled newspaper *Manila Times* (1905b, 1) hailed as a “red letter day.” The *tranvia*, as the streetcar was popularly known during that time, was operated by the Manila Electric Railroad and Light Company (Meralco), an American company incorporated in New Jersey. The construction and maintenance of the *tranvia* required a huge capital outlay, and this could only be obtained from US-based corporations. Meralco’s investment paid off as it enjoyed considerable success in the early years of its operations (Pante 2011, 113). The automobile and the autobus also made their arrival in Manila during this period.

Transport motorization also meant the inevitable marginalization of nonmotorized modes. This seemed a “natural” outcome given the seeming technological superiority of the new modes. Moreover, motorized modes were also able to compete with nonmotorized vehicles in terms of fares, thereby undercutting the latter’s profits. In the early years of service, Meralco charged first-class and second-class passengers P0.12 and P0.10, respectively. In contrast, the minimum fare (half-hour trip) in a *carromata* would cost a solo passenger 30 centavos (Malcolm 1908, 286, 304). The *tranvia* became so popular that riding it became a Filipino pastime. Even patrons of cockfights, who used to ride *carromatas* to go to the cockpit arenas, followed suit (*MT* 1910, 25).

Marginalization was to a large extent also institutional. Ordinances prioritized the movement of motorized vehicles, such as their prior right of way over horse-drawn ones and their sole use of certain thoroughfares (e.g., Dewey Boulevard, Escolta) during peak hours to the exclusion of nonmotorized vehicles (Malcolm 1927, 588; Horn 1941, 27)—acts that ostensibly rationalized traffic flow but evidently favored motor vehicles. Changes in Manila’s traffic system to accommodate transport threatened the survival of carriages and *cocheros* in the early twentieth century.

Relics of the Past

Motorized vehicles were not simply indices of technological sophistication of intraurban mobility in early-twentieth-century Manila. The colonial

elite, composed of upper- and middle-class Americans and Filipinos, viewed them as symbols of civilization and modernity framed by a colonial discourse (Pante 2011; cf. Adas 2006). The Meralco *tranvia* was seen as a marker of Manila’s status as a progressive city, while automobiles replaced *carruajes* as the new status symbols (Sta. Maria 1977, 1741).

The flipside of such a colonial discourse of modernity was the perception that nonmotorized modes were traditional and incompatible with a modernizing city (Elliot 1968, 315). This characterization also applied to those who operated these vehicles. *Cocheros* were, in fact, the perennial targets of such condescending representations throughout the early twentieth century. The colonial elite constantly depicted them as the epitome of the ills of Manila society.

Integral to the colonial representation of *cocheros* was the American imperial narrative of presenting themselves as benevolent and progressive rulers in contrast to the autocratic Spaniards. Manila’s problems with its nonmotorized transport system were almost always blamed on Spanish inefficiency, which had left the city in a backward state (Hannaford 1900, 63). The *cochero* thus represented a transport mode seen as a relic from this medieval Spanish colonial past.⁷

However, not everyone loathed *cocheros*. Ramon Lala (1899, 131), a Filipino, regarded them as “civil in address as they are moderate in their charges.” Even foreign visitors in late-nineteenth-century Manila had similar views. Foreman (1985, 347–48) described them in a positive light: “Incivility of drivers was a thing almost unknown. Their patience was astonishing. They would, if required, wait for the fare for hours together in a drenching rain without a murmur.” American Margherita Hamm (1898, 30) found them polite, kind to animals, and reasonable in charging fares. However, the colonial elites’ general perception of *cocheros* was demeaning, and this was evident in a great number of contemporary travel accounts and newspaper articles, which will be discussed in the succeeding paragraphs.

The spate of travel and journalistic writing during the heyday of Western imperialism produced literature that exoticized the colonized Orient (cf. Pratt 1992; Spurr 1993). Writings that talked about Manila often included *cocheros* as a bizarre feature of the city. Ebenezer Hannaford’s (1900, 62) description of them is an example: “some of them costumed a la Americanos, except for their bare feet, with toes that can take hold of things like fingers and thumb.” A 1930s travel guide portrayed them as odd: “At times the

driver sits on the shafts for lack of room, with his feet dangling in mid-air, and, using the familiar cry of 'U-U-U-Y,' they are off!" (American Express [1933?], 11).

This exoticism created the stereotypical indolent cochero, arguably a byproduct of the "myth of the lazy native" (cf. Alatas 1977) that was widespread among Westerners in Southeast Asia. Such an image was implied in Paul Gilbert's (1903, 27) description of how a typical cochero looked in the morning: "in a white shirt, smoking a cigarette, and resting his bare feet upon the dashboard." Heiser's (1936, 44) description was more mocking: "As soon as the carromata stopped and the occupant alighted, the driver would leap into the passenger's seat, seize the reins with his toes, and sink into profound slumber. He was able to sleep under all circumstances and for an indeterminate period of time."

The portrayals of cocheros discussed in the preceding two paragraphs emphasized the "picturesque and the melodramatic" (Spurr 1993, 48). And these were definitely less offensive compared to what most contemporary accounts conveyed. Many Americans were simply irritated by the cocheros' mere presence. Even before colonization, American merchant Joseph Earle Stevens (1968, 193) had had enough: "some of these little beasts [horses], however, are possessed of great speed, and with a reckless *cochero* in charge, it is no uncommon sight to see three or four turn-outs come turning down the street abreast, full tilt, clearing the road, killing dogs and roosters, and making one's hair stand on end." Stevens (ibid., 209) also believed that cocheros were typically reckless: "The coachman seems to know how to drive, which is a rare attainment among the natives, and so far, though he has run over two boys, he has not taken off any wheels in the car-tracks."

Stevens's opinion was widely held among Americans in the early colonial period (Wilson 1903, 25; Taft 1914, 121). The cocheros' reputation for recklessness earned them the moniker the "Filipino Jehu" (MT 1902a, 6; cf. PFP 1939, 17), an allusion to a Biblical king of Israel who was known for riding his chariot furiously. Thus they became the subject of complaints from many Americans (Gilbert 1903, 30).

Recklessness was just one of the many negative traits tagged to cocheros. The American-controlled mainstream press and American travel accounts called them "dim-witted" (ibid., 29), "stubborn," "lazy," and "dishonest" (MT 1902b, 1). A 1908 Manila travel guide warned tourists that cocheros would "often demand excessive rates" (Kemlein 1908, 27; cf. Gilbert 1903, 31).

The cochero was seen as a menace, one who always disobeyed city rules, "the incorrigible who had shattered the nerves and ruined the reputations of so many aforetime officials who thought they could quell him as easily as they would an insurrection" (MT 1902a, 6). Police reports seemed to confirm this observation due to cocheros committing many traffic violations: driving from the rear seat of a carromata instead of the designated perch behind the horse; no signal or warning lights on vehicles that would alert other vehicles of the carriage's movement in the streets; driving carriages with no license plates; engaging customers outside designated public stations where cocheros were supposed to pick them up; reckless driving; cochero having no licenses and not being registered with the Municipal Board (Municipal Board of Manila 1903, 56–57). The number of unregistered cocheros even drastically increased from 2 to 672 between 1902 and 1903 (Municipal Board of Manila 1904, 137). Most probably, this increase in the number of cases was influenced by the complaints against unregistered cocheros that filled the pages of mainstream newspapers back then. Those caught were fined or imprisoned depending on the gravity of their offense. However, the huge number of offending cocheros also points to the reality that it was a thriving occupation, after all.

Similar to the accusations of indolence, the cocheros' supposed predisposition to causing trouble was given a racial spin:

It is jokingly maintained throughout the islands that the carromata appeared about the time that the Malay pirates disappeared, which gives rise to the popular assumption that the 'genus Cochero' did not change his piratical nature when he left his 'junks' and 'paraos' to take up the more lucrative occupation of fleecing the public in the capacity of a public driver. (Hart 1928, 10)

Cocheros were also often portrayed as abusive drivers who maltreated their overworked horses (Fee 1912, 47–48; Taft 1914, 121–22). An American army major narrated: "it is therefore not uncommon to see ponies badly galled still at work in the streets, or driven to a standstill, whilst the vehicles are habitually overloaded, four or five soldiers crowding into a carriage intended to hold two or three" (Younghusband 1899, 57). He then added that cocheros were "too prone to the whip" that the horse automatically stopped when the cochero ceased whipping (ibid., 58). Such a reputation

was contradicted, however, by Hamm's (1898, 30) observation that cocheros had "an odd habit of keeping up an extended conversation with their horses, and prefer to direct them by voice rather than by pressure upon the reins." Definitely, there were cocheros who maltreated horses, and there were those who did not; however, it seems that cocheros who owned horses treated their work animals more kindly than those who did not (*PFP* 1939, 17).

Colonial anxiety marked the Americans' contempt toward cocheros. Manila Americans, whose intraurban mobility was highly dependent on carriages prior to and in the early stages of motorization, had no choice but to deal with cocheros. There were many who were even forced to ride *carromatas* because there was simply no alternative. The native drivers, to an extent, controlled the movement of the colonizers. Hence, the carriage became a contact zone (Pratt 1992, 6) between the colonizer and the colonized, replicating and magnifying the frontier's threat to the displaced White man as he found himself quite literally rubbing elbows with the "non-civilized." The colonizers were anxious due to their vulnerability to the manipulations of an unfamiliar and potentially dangerous native cochero, made doubly threatening because of his control over the reins. Such vulnerability was revealed in John Devins's (1905, 50) narration of his experience in riding a public *carromata*:

There may be vehicles which jar one more than a *carromata*, a two-wheeled vehicle drawn by a small native pony, but they have not come under the writer's observation. Jehu would have been distanced had he driven his chariot through Manila. The driver, or cochero, takes no chances; he lets those in his carriage do that. He simply plans to get to his destination by the quickest route and in the shortest time; the fact that he is paid by the hour or the mile does not enter into his reckoning. He aims simply to get ahead of every one else, and he usually succeeds when he has an American passenger.

We had learned on the transport that there were excellent hospitals in Manila, and we had no doubt that within a half hour we should be in the accident ward, or more probably in the morgue. We did not communicate our fears to the cochero. We could not have done so if we had tried, and we were too busy holding on to the narrow seat even to talk to each other.

Even Helen Taft (1914, 122), wife of civil governor-general William Howard Taft, exhibited a similar sense of helplessness:

My children were driving with their governess to the Luneta one evening, when two *carromatas* came tearing down behind them, each driver hurling imprecations at the other and paying no attention to what was ahead of him. The result was a violent collision. The two *carromatas* went plunging on, the *cocheros* not stopping to see what damage they might have done—which was very characteristic—and the children narrowly escaped a serious accident. Charlie was hurled out and fell under the children's *calesa* and [children] Robert and Helen both declare they felt a sickening jolt as a wheel passed over him . . . [This incident] made us very much afraid to trust the children out alone.

These cases of vulnerability and helplessness informed the Manila Americans' sense of colonial anxiety toward the cochero. Such an anxiety manifested in their belief that owning private carriages was necessary (*ibid.*, 119; Bellairs 1902, 204; Sawyer 1900, 184)—despite the huge number of public *carromatas*—and in the prominence of American entrepreneurs in transport-related businesses (Gleeck 1977, 7, 79). Although Americans who either patronized American-owned public carriages or bought their own still had to "come in contact" with cocheros, the relations of power gave the American employer/customer the upper hand while decreasing the cochero's "autonomy." No wonder a strict registration of cocheros was an oft-repeated demand not just from the American community but also the middle- and upper-class Filipinos for almost the entire colonial period (*PFP* 1931a, 1). The elite felt that registration meant that the colonial state reduced the cocheros' potential for menace.

Reinforcing the negative attitude toward cocheros was their lowly socioeconomic status. In contrast to the chauffeurs and streetcar employees who got the more remunerative jobs that transport motorization created, most cocheros remained in the "lower circuit" of the occupational structure since only a few among them met the qualifications (such as workable literacy, knowledge of engines, and the like) required in the "upper circuit" of a dualistic economy (Doeppers 1984, 88–91). A chasm between transport

workers in the “modern” and the “traditional” sectors was thus created. Government reports on workers’ incomes and expenditures revealed this reality.

A 1909 Bureau of Labor (1911, 66–69, 95–96) survey⁸ compared the income and expenditure patterns of 32 cocheros and 16 streetcar employees, all Manila-based. Respondents from both categories worked for an average of nine hours a day, seven days a week. However, there were significant differences between the two in terms of income. Among cocheros only one was paid on a daily basis (P1/day), three had it weekly (P6/week), while the rest had monthly wages that averaged P15.80. If these reported incomes were projected for an entire year, the annual wage ranged from P120 to P360. Only three respondents earned profits from other businesses. In contrast, all streetcar employees were paid a uniform rate of P0.17 per hour (P1.53/day) except for an inspector who was paid a monthly salary of P51. Their wages totaled P612 if projected for an entire year, which would be 1.7 to 5.1 times the annual income of cocheros.

The contrast in the socioeconomic status of these two sets of transport workers becomes more apparent when viewed in terms of spending patterns. Annually the average cochero spent P141 on his basic living expenses, whereas the average streetcar employee spent more than thrice this amount. The expenditure gap is highlighted when items other than the cost of basic living expenses are considered. The average cochero spent P8 only over and above his annual cost of living, whereas the average streetcar employee allocated P28 for nonbasic expenses. The biggest spender among streetcar workers incurred P611 in yearly expenses, whereas one cochero did not even allocate a single centavo for nonbasic items.

The 1918 Census still spoke of the same reality for Manila transport workers. The cocheros’ average daily wage was P1.22, which was lower by 18 percent and 31 percent, respectively, than what cart drivers or drivers of horse-drawn freight vehicles (P1.50) and chauffeurs (P1.78) earned (Philippine Islands Census Office 1921, 74–76).

Other variables would provide a detailed portrait of the cocheros’ lowly status. Many cocheros did not own houses in Manila and could not afford to rent one, forcing them to live in their employers’ residences (Bureau of Labor 1911, 69) where they were given separate quarters (Muijzenberg 2008, 33)—a fact demonstrating their migrant character.⁹ In some cases, their

extended families lived together with them in their employer’s house (Taft 1914, 119). They also had low literacy rates and high unemployment rates compared to chauffeurs and streetcar employees (Doeppers 1984, 108).

Expectations of Extinction

The cochero’s poverty and ubiquity in the city helped create his image as the quintessential lower-class urban worker of early-twentieth-century Manila. The colonial discourse of modernity viewed him as the epitome of the unmodern and the uncivilized, a savage that needed salvation. That salvation, of course, was to come from the modernizing machine of colonialism.

The cochero became an object of the American civilizing mission early on. Reforming him was the implicit objective of transport-related ordinances: all drivers of any vehicle had to be registered; should be at least 16 years old, “of intelligence and good character, and free from infections or contagious disease” (Malcolm 1908, 283). Fares were standardized and waiting stations for getting passengers were designated (*ibid.*, 284–85) to minimize arbitrary actions. Colonial modernity necessitated the reform of native habits, and without these ordinances the “free” cochero remained an unreformed savage on the loose in Manila’s streets.

Leading the enforcement of these ordinances was the Metropolitan Police force, more popularly known as the Mets. The Mets, led by a corps of American officers, regulated street traffic in the early colonial period: “When balky Filipino ponies blocked the traffic in the crowded thoroughfare, it was this officer that straightened out the tangle” (Gilbert 1903, 25). Whereas cocheros saw the Mets as the embodiment of the state, the mainstream American press viewed them as vanguards of an orderly Manila. The *Manila Times* (1902a, 6) interpreted their work as acts “showing the cochero the error of his ways and leading him into the paths of righteousness.” Considering their “anti-cochero crusade” as “effective,” the newspaper concluded unequivocally: “The cochero is tamed.”

However, there were sections of the elite that felt that taming cocheros was useless. The onset of motorization led many Americans to predict the cocheros’ inevitable disappearance from the streets, a view shared by both state and nonstate actors (Elliot 1968, 279; *MT* 1905b, 1). Cocheros supposedly would be swept into the dustbin of history—helpless victims of an irreversible and modernizing onslaught of “creative destruction.” The *Manila Times* proclaimed that their “prosperous days” were over

once the “autocratic reign” of the electric streetcar began (MT 1905a, 1). Its editorial on the day of the tranvia’s inauguration proudly declared: “The day of the antiquated, dilapidated, ill-regulated and altogether execrated quilez and carromata is a thing of the past. It means that the seats of the mighty were his exalted highness THE COCHERO has so long held sway, spurning the worms who crossed his path, will soon be vacant” (MT 1905c, 4).

The *Manila Times* published similar articles in the succeeding two days. The day after the inauguration, it claimed:

The electric street car system for Manila is no longer a matter of hope and expectancy but an accomplished fact . . . the jangling bell rings out the final time act in the passing of the autocratic King Cochero . . . [as he] gazes with wondering eyes at the big swift running cars and as he remembers that the demand for their dilapidated vehicles is nearing its end, mutters strange and savage Tagalog oaths beneath his breath. (MT 1905d, 1)

The following day, it ran another editorial calling the Municipal Board to “arrest all those caballos [horses] that balk at the trolley cars and so imperil the lives of passengers” (MT 1905e, 4). These statements revealed the arrogant optimism of the mainstream press as it pinned its hopes on motorization to finally end the cochero quandary.

Meanwhile, the tranvia was becoming more popular. From 10,527,902 passengers in 1906, the number increased to 37,805,699 by 1920 (Meralco 1925, 30). Although less popular compared to the tranvia, automobile use was also gaining ground during the early twentieth century (Gleeck 1977, 79), slowly becoming an integral part of Manila’s public transport system. In 1906 there were only twenty passenger-carrying automobiles for public use, but by 1913 the number had risen to 170 (Municipal Board of Manila 1913, 44). In the late 1920s the city was already a jungle of different species of motorized transport modes as taxis and autobuses were introduced during this period (Anon. 1934, 75; Meralco 1945, appendix; *Philippines Herald* 1930, 3). However, the success of transport motorization was seen not only in the number of vehicles or passengers but also in its ideological value. Motorization seemed to not only signify progress and modernity but also validate the Americans’ claim to benevolent rule (Pante 2011).

Barriers to Modernity

Despite this sense of optimism and the increasing popularity of transport motorization, horse-drawn carriages persisted. In the early decades following motorization, there were many among the colonial elite who believed that cocheros and their “traditional” vehicles were on their way to extinction (Elliot 1968, 279; MT 1905b, 1). These apocalyptic visions were prevalent from the first decade of the century until the 1930s, as seen in an article in the *Philippines Herald* (1930, 3) describing Meralco’s launch of its autobus fleet as the “mortal dread” of the cocheros. Contrary to these doomsday visions, however, these “archaic” and “anachronistic” (Horn 1941, 26, 27) vehicles were still a significant part of Manila’s urban fabric in the last two decades of colonial rule. This persistence seemed absurd to those who patronized motorized transportation. The carromata remained, “much to the disgust of motor drivers” who were also aware that those carriages would remain on the streets for a long time (Anon. 1934, 75). The 1939 edition of *Manila and the Philippines*, a travel guide published by the American Express (1939, 24), put it succinctly: “Despite the fact that the Philippines boasts a great number of privately owned motor cars in comparison with other countries of its size, and there is an excellent street railway and bus system, the mode of transportation used by the masses is the horse (or pony) drawn vehicle called carretela, and carromata.”

Prior to the outbreak of the Pacific War, there were still about 7,000 carriages plying the streets of Manila (Simpich 1940, 409; Horn 1941, 26). The 1939 census revealed that 4,690 Manila residents (out of a total of 623,492 or seven percent) had occupations directly related to horse-drawn transportation, inclusive of 1,333 owners and 3,357 cocheros and other lines of work (Philippine Commission of the Census 1940, 32). There was an apparent decrease (40 percent) in the number of Manila-based cocheros from 1903 to 1939, but they were far from being an extinct species. As will be explained in the next paragraph, the supposed impending demise of the carromata and the cochero was widely exaggerated. Hence, frustration among the colonial elite toward this “eternal” problem (Horn 1941, 26) gradually set in.

The cocheros’ persistence transformed the Americans’ perception toward them: from condescension and anxiety to frustration and vilification. From being remnants of medievalism they were now seen as barriers to

modernity. Horn's (1941, 26) account written in the 1940s conveyed this frustration:

The *cochero*, who has a reputation for extreme brazenness, slips in and out among automobiles with chilling trepidation. In the hopeless traffic tangles on the bridges leading to the center of Manila, there is frequent destruction, and you often see a *cochero* loudly arguing with a driver of a car that has just nicked a wobbly vehicle.

Although there were middle-class Americans and Filipinos who vouched for the cocheros' honesty and dependability in the mainstream English-language press (*Philippine Magazine* 1932, 226), it still seemed that the majority of the dominant dailies were unwavering in their anti-cochero crusade. Newspapers and magazines often depicted the cocheros as Manila's rogue elements and petty criminals ruling over the city (*PFP* 1931a, 1; McCoy and Roces 1985, 84). They were tagged in editorials as "scheming," "irresponsible," "unreliable," and "rude" (*PFP* 1932a, 1; *PFP* 1932b, 32). Good cocheros were seen as a rarity and more an exception to rather than compliance with the rule (*PFP* 1931b, 25). An anti-cochero sentiment was apparent in a 1931 *Philippines Free Press* (1931a, 1) article that narrated how a chauffeur rose in anger in a traffic altercation and shot a cochero dead. This article blamed the cocheros for the incident and, instead of showing sympathy, stressed that almost all Manila newspapers called for stricter regulation of cocheros.

Contemporary editorial cartoons reflected and reinforced this negative perception. McCoy and Roces's (1985, 67, 72–73, 84) compilation of contemporary cartoons from the *Philippines Free Press* provides a good sample for analysis. For its 16 August 1930 issue, the editorial cartoon showed a cochero trampling over the public as members of the Municipal Council cheered him on. A similar cartoon was published on 21 February 1931, illustrating the cochero's rude behavior while public opinion was sacrificed in the name of politics. On 21 March 1931, the paper's cartoon lumped the cocheros together with all unwanted elements of Manila society such as gamblers, gangsters, and beggars, as they all rode a wagon driven by a member of the Municipal Council. In the background, the public—represented by a man tagged as "99% of us"—was adamant

about the situation and exclaimed, "Is this what we are paying for?" On 23 November 1940, the paper's editorial cartoon caricatured the cochero, along with the sidewalk peddler and the criminal, riding a carriage with a "cheap politician" pulling the vehicle. As the politician was thinking of the votes that he would get for the upcoming elections, he trampled on a man referred to as the "public."

These cartoons also spoke of a prevalent perception among the colonial elite that carriage owners and cocheros secured their interests through the Municipal Council (Simpich 1940, 411; McCoy and Roces 1985, 72). They speculated that the council failed to regulate carromatas and their drivers because its members needed the cocheros' support due to the capacity of this occupational group to turn in a huge number of votes during elections. The cochero's vote was referred to as the "calesa vote" (*ibid.*, 84). Although the number of cocheros had decreased through the years, Horn explained that the power of the calesa vote was multiplied through the related trades: the cocheros' survival was crucial for harness traders and repairmen, wheelwrights, and *zacate* (grass used as horse feed) traders. She lamented: "There are, in fact, too many poor people connected with the *calesa* . . . They and all their friends and all the allied 'industries' yell loudly" (Horn 1941, 26–27). Horn (*ibid.*, 27) then blamed the calesa vote for the "messy confusion" in Manila's streets: "Any rules or regulations aimed at the *calesa* become the most grievous antipoor discrimination—something a politician cannot afford to go through with, since the '*calesa* vote' can decide Manila's municipal elections." Although available primary sources cannot validate the existence of the cochero vote, the continuation of this belief among Americans underlines a deep frustration among them.

Mainstream vernacular newspapers also criticized cocheros (*PFP* 1931b, 44), and were just as vocal about their criticisms as the English-language press. Their articles even talked of cocheros as conniving with pickpockets and racketeers in petty crimes (*ibid.*, 44). *Lipang Kalabaw*, a satirical periodical known for its criticism of the colonial state, blasted cocheros for their supposed lack of street decorum (Anastasyo Salagubang 1923, 16). A more stinging rebuke from the said newspaper came in the form of a cartoon strip (Anon. 1923, 17) (fig. 2), which is presented below:

Fig. 2. A cartoon strip pitting the *cochero* against the tranvia (Anon. 1923, 17.)



[1st frame]

Ang Nakatayo: Wala ako kungdi iisang salapi. Kung sa karumata pa ako sumakay, sangpiseta na lang ang matitira; kung sa trambiya, dalawa pa . . .! Sa trambiya na nga!

[2nd frame]

Ang Sumasakay: Ayaw kayong magbaba, mga kutsero kayo, ng inyong taripa: marami pa kayong kasupladuhan . . . dito na nga ako sasakay! . . . Hanggang di kayo nagbabago, bagay sa inyo ay boykoteo.

[3rd frame]

Ang Kutsero: Tingnan mo! Tingnan mo ang Pilipino! Ibig pang ibigay ang kuwarta niya sa Dayuhang may-ari ng Trambiya, kaysa aming mga may-karumatang kapwa niya Pilipino . . .

[4th frame]

Ang Kutsero: Pareng Huwan: Hayun ang mga kababayan mong may-ibig daw ng independensiya! Walang nalalamang busugin kungdi ang tiyan ng mga Dayuhan.

Huwan: Mabuti naman sa iyo, at nang matuto kang magbago ng [unreadable] mong asal na kinamihasan!

[1st frame: A Filipino is deciding on which transport mode to take]

Person standing up: I only have one peso left. If I ride the carromata, only a peseta would be left; if I take the tranvia, there would be two left . . .! I'll take the tranvia!

[2nd frame: The same character, now referred to as "Ang Sumasakay" (Passenger), boards the streetcar]

Passenger: You cocheros don't want to lower your rates: and you are ill-mannered . . . I'll just take the [tranvia]! . . . Unless you change, you deserve a boycott.

[3rd frame: The cochero sees Passenger as he boards the tranvia and laments the situation]

Cochero: Look at that! Look at that Filipino! He wants to give his

money to the foreign owners of the tranvia rather than to carromata drivers who are his fellow Filipinos

[4th frame: A new character, Huwan, approaches the cochero]

Cochero: My friend, Huwan: There goes your fellow countryman who supposedly wants independence!! He satisfies nothing but the appetite of foreigners.

Huwan: Good for you, so that you'll learn to change your [unreadable] behavior you've been accustomed to!

These cartoon strips reveal that the contempt for the cochero was not only held by Americans but also by Filipinos: those who were involved in publishing the cartoon and those who were represented by the characters of the “Ang Sumasakay/Passenger” and “Huwan,” who were clearly made to stand for Filipinos. Even the cochero’s appeal to nationalism, as evinced in his juxtaposition of the tranvia as foreign/American and his carromata as local/Filipino as a way to explain to Huwan the supposed hypocrisy of Filipinos preferring to ride the former, was bluntly refuted by Huwan who pointed out his defects, which made it hard for fellow Filipinos to sympathize with him.

The campaign for the humane treatment of animals further tainted the cocheros’ image. The Philippine Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (1932), an organization supported by the office of the governor-general, waged a campaign to seek better treatment for carromata ponies. Felice Sta. Maria (1977, 1740) even asserts that the group was established “to protect horses from overwork and the cruelty of the *cochero’s whip* or *látigo* [sic].”¹⁰ That cocheros became a prime target of the society was not surprising given their reputation.

Amid all the censure and criticism, cocheros found it hard to have a voice in society and defend themselves given their socioeconomic position. If ever mainstream media offered them a voice, it was still a means to reinforce the prevalent perception. The *Lipang Kalabaw* cartoon strip illustrates this point. Although the cartoonist tried to depict the cochero as more than a stereotypical, one-dimensional villain, the whole point was still to criticize him. Another good example is a 1931 *Philippines Free Press* article, “Chivalry among cocheros,” which reported Juan Arriola’s kind act, “disprov[ing] the

maxim that a cochero is of necessity a thug, rogue, scoundrel, and blackguard” (PFP 1931b, 25, 44). In an incident that happened along Taft Avenue, Arriola confronted a fellow cochero who was harassing his female passenger because she could not pay the right fare. The article praised Arriola for saving the lady from the other cochero’s “Mephistophelian desires.” A significant detail in the article was that it allowed Arriola to “speak for himself.” He was quoted:

I have read about the activities of bad drivers in the vernacular newspapers . . . and how disparagingly the public speaks of men of my profession. My pride is hurt, of course. Poor as I am and though only a cochero, I feel that I am as much entitled to respect as persons who earn their living in other ways. My dealings with everyone have always been honest. That’s why for some time I have hoped that in some way I could win the good-will of the public.

Granting that the PFP was diligent in maintaining the integrity of Arriola’s statement (which was most probably a translation of a quote originally in Tagalog), this quote not only confirms the cocheros’ standing in society, but also shows how cocheros were themselves affected by how Manila society regarded them. It was a rare case of the mainstream press giving voice to the voiceless cochero, yet it only reinforced the prevailing anti-cochero sentiment. It was as if the cochero’s “voice” was used against him, that his “authentic” representation of himself validated the dominant representation of cocheros.

Resistance and Resilience

A question that begs to be answered at this point is how cocheros managed to resist the process of “creative destruction.” In order to understand how cocheros were able to assert themselves in a society highly biased against them, one must first look at how their means of livelihood survived transport motorization.

Firstly, carromatas and calesas filled a niche in Manila’s urban fabric, notwithstanding the popularity of the streetcars and the institutional bias against nonmotorized vehicles. People still rode carriages because of their “flexible” mobility: these were not tied to a fixed route unlike the tranvia, and they could enter narrow side streets that could not accommodate bulky cars. Carromatas were also more adapted than streetcars to taking sharp

turns (Gilbert 1903, 30), which was an important ability for vehicles plying the narrow streets and alleys of Manila. Commuters who wanted to ride the tranvia but were considerably far from the nearest station still had to take a carriage to bring them there. Meralco's decision to adopt an autobus fleet was meant precisely to address this need (*Philippines Herald* 1930, 3).

More crucial than its "flexibility" was that carromatas were still a cheap form of transportation for ordinary Filipinos (American Express [1933?], 12), especially when their destination was not covered by tranvia routes (*Philippine Magazine* 1932, 226). Meralco (1944, 6) officials themselves admitted that the company had been "badly harassed with competition" from "jitneys," which were horse-drawn vehicles that operated like buses, and small "horse-drawn taxis" (carromatas), which were able to operate at a very small cost. Ultimately, carriages outlived the tranvia, which was already on its way to its eventual demise in the last few years before the war broke out. Despite its success in its first two decades of operation, the rail-based tranvia had become less profitable than before. And compared to Meralco buses, the tranvia was more expensive to operate and less flexible in terms of routes. By the late 1930s company officials had already decided to stop improving its streetcar service by diverting funds to its bus fleet (*ibid.*, appendix).

The cocheros' resilience was due not only to the fact that carriage services remained viable, but also to their struggle in the streets. From dirty tactics and blatant violation of ordinances to collective action and labor politics, cocheros asserted their own space within the urban landscape.

Street space was a site that regularly witnessed the cocheros' fight for survival. In this light, one can reevaluate criticisms against cocheros' lack of discipline as they often blocked traffic and track lines instead of yielding to other vehicles, including the tranvia (*MT* 1905d, 2; *PFP* 1931a, 1). Many cocheros deliberately violated traffic regulations just to get more passengers. They also got more customers by refusing to wait in designated public stations for loading and unloading passengers. In this case, the commuting public was also partly responsible because many were halting carromatas in the middle of the streets and not in stations, which were few and far between in Manila (Malcolm 1908, 287) such that "one often walks the whole of the distance he may be going without being able to obtain [a carromata]" (Bellairs 1902, 205). Nevertheless, the cocheros' actions clearly violated state regulations and subverted the state objective of reforming them. However, one also has

to understand the sense of desperation that forced them to do so. Warren's (1986, 66) analysis of rickshaw pullers in colonial Singapore provides a crucial insight: "As mechanical progress began to impinge on their future, the risks rickshaw men were prepared to take on the streets increased." With their backs against the wall and under the pressure of Manila's increasingly competitive urban structure, many cocheros saw the necessity of competing against other road-users and outwitting fellow cocheros regardless of state regulations. They had to play the game, so to speak, or else run the risk of being outplayed.

Their notorious street decorum was just one factor behind the cocheros' reputation as troublesome characters; their interaction with passengers was another. Exemplifying this was American Paul Gilbert's (1903, 29) narration of his frustrating encounter with an ostensibly ignorant driver.

The driver never seems to know the town; even the post-office and the Bridge of Spain are *terra incognita* to him. And so you guide him . . . You must be careful when you stop, however, as while you are busy with your purchases, your man is liable to run away. While as a general rule, he shakes his head at the repeated inquiries of 'ocupato?' [*ocupado*, taken] even though the carriage may not be engaged, if someone more unscrupulous and desperate should step in, you would find yourself without a rig.

How could the cochero, who depended on his knowledge of the streets of Manila for his living, not know the ins and outs of the city? This incomprehensible detail, which obviously escaped Gilbert, only becomes logical when the last two sentences of the quote are understood as another paradox: the supposedly ignorant cocheros had the capacity to become scheming drivers. Apparently there were cocheros who were skilled in the art of feigning ignorance. The seemingly stupid cochero could use this facade, especially against foreigners (including Americans like Gilbert himself), for momentary monetary gain. Gilbert (*ibid.*, 31) himself supplied the evidence:

It is impossible to satisfy the driver on discharging him, unless by paying him three times the fee. The stranger in Manila, counting out

the unfamiliar *media pesos* and *pesetas*, never knows when he has paid enough. Whether to pay his fifteen cents, American or Mexican, for the first hour, and ten cents, or *centavos*, for the succeeding, and how many *media pesetas* make a quarter of a dollar in our currency—these are the questions that annoy or puzzle the newcomer, till he learns to learn to disregard expense, and order his livery from the hotels or private stables.

Gilbert (*ibid.*, 28) also related that cocheros who did not stay at public stations would initially ignore those who tried to engage them outside waiting stations unless certain conditions were met: “The driver will begin by making some objection. He will be asked to be discharged at noon, or he will make you promise not to turn him over to another *Americano*” (*ibid.*, 29). Gilbert’s experience gives an entirely new meaning to an American army major’s oxymoronic remark that cocheros were “a fairly intelligent and obliging lot” (Younghusband 1899, 58).

Cocheros feigning ignorance, however, was not just a threat to the American passenger’s purse. Ebenezer Hannaford, another American traveler in Manila, narrated an incident that demonstrated how underestimating the lowly cochero could somehow undermine the then nascent colonial state. He recounted the story of Sebastian Lopez (*fig. 3*), a Tagalog cochero

whose intelligence made him a great favorite of American officers. He understood English, but shrewdly gave out that he did not, and from the free and easy talk of his American patrons picked up a great deal of information, every bit of which was promptly sent to [Emilio] Aguinaldo. It was months before his double dealing was found out. (Hannaford 1900, 62)

The narrative seems exaggerated: how could the cochero have understood these conversations in English? Hannaford (*ibid.*, 62) explained that a number of cocheros “can jargon English considerably better than formerly.” Although many cocheros were illiterate as per census reports, census data only referred to formal literacy. Invisible in these records was the cocheros’ likely exposure to English prior to American colonialism due to the fact that Manila-based British merchants had been hiring them as private drivers



Fig. 3. Sebastian Lopez, a Tagalog cochero who feigned ignorance to gather intelligence for Aguinaldo’s army (Hannaford 1900, 100).

since the late nineteenth century. The British were the largest group of non-Spaniard European residents in Manila (Muijzenberg 2008, 69–70) and they came mainly from the large number of British commercial houses in late nineteenth-century Manila (Campbell 1993, 29). They were all over the place—forming the British-dominated Manila club in the outskirts of Nagtahan, Manila; participating in horse races in the suburbs of Santa Mesa; going on carromata excursions to the mountains of Antipolo; manning businesses in downtown Binondo (*ibid.*, 27–42)—and such an active social life made it necessary for them to constantly hire cocheros or employ them as permanent personal drivers.

Their “language skills” came in handy by the time the Americans established colonial rule. Cocheros, who had innumerable face-to-face contacts with Americans, probably understood and even used a few “important” English words to employ a sentence or two to their advantage. As Mary Fee (1912, 48) related: “Apart from swear words, which appear to fill a long-felt want for something emphatic, there are at least three phrases which every Filipino who has to do with horses seems to have made a part of his vocabulary. They are ‘Back!’ ‘Whoa, boy!’ and ‘Git up!’ Your cochero may groan at your horse or whine at it, but when the need arises he can draw upon that much of English.”

The dirty tactics so described may seem to be the “natural” recourse for cocheros, as opposed to overtly “political” modes of resistance against their marginalization in the city. Doeppers (1984, 124) explains: “Since they labored separately, often lived in the houses or compounds of their employers, and enjoyed very little autonomy, they also tended not to form

strong attachments to a sizeable primary work group or to take collective action.” Cocheros, nonetheless, showed their capacity for collective action during the colonial period. As early as 1902, cocheros formed a component section of the Union Obrera Democratica, the first labor federation in the country (Scott 1992, 32–33). They also used strikes as a weapon when the need arose (Doeppers 1984, 134). They employed collective action as a response to local measures that threatened the viability of horse-drawn transport, as Horn (1941, 27) was able to describe: “Or the city decides that calesas must be barred from one of the bridges leading to the commercial district of the city. But the cocheros set a day when they will stage a demonstration in defiance of the ruling. They descend in full force, thousands of them, at a certain time, and proceed together over that forbidden bridge.”

Despite differences between the motorized and horse-drawn transport sectors, there were instances when workers from both groups collaborated against a perceived common enemy. Solidarity among cocheros, Meralco workers, and organized labor was strategically forged in the face of what they saw in Meralco as American oppression. In a March 1909 strike of Meralco employees, strikers “called upon all Filipinos . . . to boycott the street cars and patronize the street rigs, the drivers of which . . . would make special rates to enemies of the street railway company” (MT 1909, 1). The same level of cooperation was seen in a bigger Meralco strike in 1919. Reports had it that cocheros and carromata owners from Pasay, a suburban municipality that borders Manila, would come to the aid of striking streetcar employees (MT 1919, 1, 3).

Acts of solidarity were also seen in workers’ propaganda. The pro-workers periodical *Ang Manggagawa* was one publication that threw its support behind carromata owners and cocheros. In an anti-Meralco article, the paper called on owners of public carromatas, viewed as victims of the company’s “imperialism,” to establish a cooperative and forge a business entity that would compete with Meralco autobuses (*Ang Manggagawa* 1928, 18, 20). A separate article reported on the opposition of the Congreso Obrero de Filipinas, a Manila-based labor federation in the early colonial period, to an ordinance requiring cocheros to pay a one-peso annual license fee and obtain an identification card. The federation asserted that cocheros were already part of society’s lower class, and that the largest monthly salary a cochero could earn was about P30 (*Ang Manggagawa* 1929, 16). These articles showed that there were organized groups that supported the cocheros’ cause. More importantly, these propaganda materials subverted the colonial

discourse: Filipino workers regarded the tranvia, which they might well have ridden, not as a symbol of America’s modernizing efforts but of its imperial designs.

The inversion of the act of representation seen in workers’ propaganda was not new to Filipinos. Using the testimony of William Howard Taft, then civil governor, before the US Senate in 1902, one may argue that the humble cochero already had something similar in mind upon the arrival of the new colonizers. Taft narrated a story told to him by a native elite, whom Taft referred to as an *ilustrado* from Batangas, whose personal cochero was anxious of the changes in the colonial regime. While on their way to Manila, the cochero was said to have told his employer:

When the American government is established here and the Americanos are in control . . . what kind of cart, wagon, or carromata shall I have to help pull, because I understand the Americans are buying up all the horses in the Philippines with a view to killing them, so that the Filipinos shall be made the beasts of burden. (US Senate 1902, 269–70)

Taft explained that the cochero’s apprehensions toward the Americans were a result of the Spaniards’ black propaganda against them. During the twilight years of their colonial regime, the Spaniards “issued caricatures showing Uncle Sam in a carromata with a Filipino between the shafts” that resembled the slave-like image of a rickshaw puller. The Philippine revolutionary government even “recycled” these caricatures in their own propaganda war against the Americans (ibid., 270). The symbols of unfreedom must have been a powerful one in the eyes of a cochero.¹¹ Cocheros were far from being an ignorant, anti-social, savage lot.

A Representation

In conclusion, it has to be stressed that none of what has been discussed regarding the cocheros’ resilience is to romanticize them as unsung heroes who deserve utmost recognition (although that may be applicable to Sebastian Lopez). The articles cited from *Ang Manggagawa* were written not by cocheros but by other organized workers and the sympathetic intelligentsia, while Taft’s testimony was anecdotal, if not apocryphal. These were, just like the travel accounts and journalistic pieces presented throughout the essay, representations of the voiceless cocheros.

However, given the cocheros' muted status in the historical literature, one has to face the reality that historicizing and giving agency to this occupational group will have to involve an analysis of such representations. The usual historical methodology of archival work is simply inadequate since the cocheros' socioeconomic status precluded the possibility of them leaving behind a body of documentary evidence for future historians. What is crucial, then, is the reexamination of the literature written by the elites in order to go beyond the entrenched stereotype. As shown in this article, a reinterpretation of the historical record toward an image of the cochero actively resisting both the pressure of Manila's rapidly urbanizing economy and the bias of colonial society offers a more nuanced way of viewing them.

In this light, the cocheros' unlawful acts noted in travel accounts, newspaper articles, and government reports, have to be understood in connection with the socioeconomic pressures of a rapidly changing Manila. Forced against the wall due to increased competition brought about by transport motorization, cocheros had to come up with unorthodox means to survive. These acts were not heroic, but at the same time these did not solely define the cocheros who were also open to more organized and overtly political forms of protest if given the chance. That members of the working class and the intelligentsia threw their support behind them belied the accusations that they were the scum of Manila society. That they could collaborate with labor unions and organize protest actions repudiated their reputation as ignorant. Just like the colonial elites, they were also intent on protecting their economic and political interests.

Given the available primary sources, it may take time before a detailed historical account of the lives of cocheros can be written, in a manner similar to what Warren (1986) has done for Singapore's rickshaw pullers. For now, one has to make do with representing these misrepresentations.

Notes

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- 1 The use of the term "urban transportation" in this article will be limited to the different means of moving passengers within the city. Therefore, the word "urban" must be understood in contrast to "regional" ways of traveling (e.g., trains, interisland shipping) and not as the opposite of "rural."
- 2 Wenceslao Retana (1921, 71–72) took note of the usage of the words *carromata* and *carromato* in the Philippine context. Retana's analysis of word usage, which was seconded by Muijzenburg (2008, 334), "distinguishes *carromata* as the more fashionable one-horse carriage from the *carromato* as the more primitive form with solid wooden wheels. The 'a' and 'o' were more often used interchangeably." Alvina (1998, 41), however, states that it was the *carromato*, "a canopied two-wheeled rig for one," which the common folk rode more often. The feminine *carromata* does not appear in today's standard Spanish dictionaries, but the masculine *carromato* does.

In this connection, although the words *calesa* and *quilez* seem to be etymologically related, Retana's (1921, 154) dictionary does not lend credence to this supposition. He traced the origin of the word *quilez* to its inventor Don Germán Quilez, a Spanish military official, who developed the vehicle from 1885 to 1886. Although Retana's dictionary does not have an entry for *calesa*, this word is often translated as "carriage" in today's Spanish dictionaries.
- 3 Although one interesting detail connected to this point is the manner with which cocheros kept track of time, I have not encountered a source that describes how they did so.
- 4 Diega Francisco, a resident of Caloocan, was the first woman *cochero* in Manila. Married and with three children, she was 24 years old when she got her license. Her husband, also a professional cochero, was then suffering from tuberculosis, a factor that led her to take over the reins, so to speak. The cochero as an occupation had long been a monopoly of men that, when Diega Francisco applied for a license, "At first police authorities were reluctant to approve the application, thinking it might contravene some old municipal ordinance" (PFP 1939, 17).
- 5 The primary sources I have consulted only have bits of information regarding the relations between owners of public carriages and their *cochero* employees. As much as I want to delve into employer-employee relations, nothing substantive could be written about it as of the moment.
- 6 The Spanish-Philippine (Mexican) peso was the currency used in the country in the years prior to the American occupation. At that time, its value in US\$ fluctuated between 49 and 37 cents (Foreman 1985, 635). The peso and dollar amounts used in this paragraph are based on this exchange value.
- 7 I am indebted to Dinah Sianturi for this point.
- 8 In this report *cocheros* were referred to as "drivers."
- 9 Privately hired *cocheros* were probably required to live in with their employers, but primary sources do not say so with regard to those who drove public carriages; most likely, they were forced to reside in the homes of their employers by the circumstances of their situation.
- 10 The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was founded in 1866 "primarily to improve the lot of the urban horse" (Morris 2007, 8).
- 11 Here, one is tempted to speculate (or overread?) that the *cochero*'s fear of being made a beast of burden wastied to the Tagalog longing for freedom from oppression. That yearning would supposedly end in a final act of liberation to be led by Bernardo Carpio, a mythical Tagalog folk hero, as articulated in fiction by a cochero in José Rizal's *El filibusterismo* (Ileto 1998, 10).

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