

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

The Roots of Agrarian Unrest in Negros, 1850-90

Violeta Lopez-Gonzaga

Philippine Studies vol. 36, no. 2 (1988) 151–165

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>
Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

The Roots of Agrarian Unrest in Negros, 1850-90

VIOLETA LOPEZ-GONZAGA

Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay . . .

Oliver Goldsmith,
"The Desserted Village," 1770

The history of Negros since 1850 is largely an account of the problems, the benefits and costs created by the upsurge of economic activity in the Philippines starting that period. It is one that cannot be divorced from the broader realm of international economic relations in the middle of the nineteenth century—a period marked by an unprecedented level of technological achievement of Western Europe which ushered in a new international economic order. As James Thomas Peck described the economic growth of the western countries of the time,

Destroying traditional industries and creating new, the new technology, machinery and chemistry in industry and agriculture, increased specialization in production between nations and thereby boosted trade flows. Better communications, steam-ships, railways, the electric telegraph, stimulated the movement of capital, labour and technology.¹

International economic development in the midnineteenth century meant among other things a relatively steady increase in the consumption of sugar—a commodity previously consumed only by the elites. With the trickling-down of the benefits of the technological

1. James Thomas Peck, *A History of the World Economic International Economic Relations*. New Jersey: Barnes and Noble Books, 1983), p. 1.

revolution to the working class especially in the United Kingdom, sugar became accessible to a wider number of people. As Sidney Mintz documented it in his work, between 1750 and 1850 sugar ceased to be a luxury and became a necessity.² Thus, from the 1850s to the first half of the twentieth century, sugar became an important commodity in international trading.

BRITISH TRADE IN WESTERN VISAYAS

The upsurge and expansion of international trade in the 1850s had its immediate repercussions in Western Visayas, south-central Philippines. In 1855, the port of Iloilo, "queen city" of southern Philippines was opened to direct foreign commerce, an event which contemporary Philippine historians commonly hold as a watershed in the economic and social history of the country. That the chief agent of socioeconomic change in Western Visayas was British in the person of Nicholas Loney was not surprising at all. Owning one-third of total fixed steam power installed in the world's factories in the 1850s, Great Britain achieved the highest national income per head and disproportionately engaged in international trade:

... one-fifth of this trade by European measurements originated in, was destined for, or passed through Britain even though those islands were occupied by less than 2 percent of the world's population in the middle of the nineteenth century. French trade, although the second largest national total, was little more than half of the British trade.³

Significantly, a major part of British international trading was transacted with the Philippines. Sir John Bowring, governor of Hong Kong who visited the Philippine islands in 1859, cited in his account of his official visit to the country a report of W. Farren, British consul in Manila, which noted that in 1855

2. Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power, the Place of Sugar in Modern History* (Virginia: Conneley and Sons, Col. 1983), p. 197.

3. John Foreman, *The Philippine Islands* (London: Simpon, Law Marston and Company, 1892); Peck, *A History of the World Economy*, p. 3.

the British trade with the Philippines exceeded in value that of Great Britain with several of the States of Europe, with that of any one State or port in Africa, was greater than the British trade with Mexico, Columbia, or Guatemala, and nearly ranked in the second-class division of the national trade with Asia, the total value of exports and imports approaching three million sterling.⁴

In 1868, 73 percent of the total Philippine exports (amounting to \$859,382) went to England.⁵ Of the total export to England, sugar, amounting to \$481,127 comprised 56 percent of the trade value.⁶ Conscious of his nation's great demand for sugar, Loney actively pursued its increased production in Western Visayas, particularly Negros. In his dual role as an agent for the British firm Ker & Company, and as British Vice- Consul, Loney paved the way for the extension of the vast British trading network in the Visayas. He achieved this end mainly through the establishment of the British Vice-Consulate in Iloilo.

Described as an "archetypal agent of change," Loney and the mighty British trading empire he represented, initiated changes in Western Visayas which transformed the region's export economy from one rooted on tertiary cloth manufacture to primary production of sugar.⁸ This was ingeniously carried out according to McCoy, by Loney's dedicated promotion of cheap British cottons as a substitute for Visayan textile products and the encouragement of sugar production in Negros Occidental. McCoy argues that the transition to primary sugar production initiated three major social changes in Western Visayas:

... deprived of their cloth industry the major weaving centers of Jaro and Molo (i.e., major Iloilo towns) went into a permanent decline, shifting the center of urban commercial activity to the site of the foreign trading community at the mouth of the Iloilo River; the loss of the cloth trade weakened the economic viability of Panay's coastal weaving towns and

4. John Bowring, *A Visit to the Philippine Islands* (London: Smith Len and Co., 1859), p. 333.

5. Fredor Jagor, *Travels in the Philippines* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1875), p. 332.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Alfred William McCoy, "Iloilo: Factional Conflict in a Colonial Economy, Iloilo Province, Philippines, 1937-1955" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1977), p. 17.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

interisland sailcraft trade, and, finally, the clearing of haciendas from the virgin forests of neighboring Negros Occidental absorbed the population, capital, entrepreneurial skills, and sailcraft displaced by the precipitous decline of the weaving industry.⁹

In effect, the opening of Iloilo to international trade unravelled a new social-economic process in Western Visayas—the massive influx of speculators and entrepreneurs to the new frontiers of Negros and the annexation of the island as one of the peripheral enclaves of a new international economic order dominated by the British.

RECOLLECT FRONTIER MISSIONS

The expansion of Western capital and trading in Negros would not have taken such a rapid pace without the ground-breaking work of the Recollect Fathers. The Recollect provincial council's acceptance of the pastoral supervision of Negros on 26 June 1848 ushered in unprecedented aggressive frontier missions. Under the leadership of Padre Fernando Cuenca, the Recollects penetrated deep into the unevanglized upland settlements of Negros. Starting from the mountains of Minuluan (in what today is Talisay) continuing toward the south, he took a census of 6,000 families totalling to 20,000 persons whom Echaus identified as *monteses*.¹⁰ According to Varona, Fr. Cuenca managed to convince these *monteses* or mountain people to be baptized through his diplomatic move of appointing as *teniente* (petty governor), the more prominent leader of this group, Calalas, son of Cauntao, the most venerable datu on the slopes of Canlaon.¹¹ To solemnize this grand achievement which also meant the conversion of thousands of his followers (Varona cited 120,000 souls, Echaus 20,000), Padre Eusebio Locsin, one of the few Filipino priests who could then be found in Negros, was appointed godfather to the new Christian.¹² The priest, the first of the elite mestizo Chinese Locsin family to migrate to Negros, paved the way for the migration en masse of members of this family.

9. Ibid., pp. 18-19.

10. Robustiano Echaus, *Apuntes de la Isla de Negros* (Manila: Tipo- Litografia de Chofre y Comp., 1894), p. 17.

11. Francisco Varona, *Negros, Its History and People*, trans. Raul L. Locsin, serialized in the *Western Visayas Chronicle*, 1965, ch. II.

12. Ibid.

They soon established their enclave in Silay.

Owing to their effective evangelization of the *naturales*—a people described by Echaus as Malay pagans—Father Cuenca and his colleagues easily established congregated settlements or *reducciones* from the Kanlaon mountain range through its foothills and valleys of La Carlota and present-day La Castellana.¹³ With the Recollect's successful expedition, the benefits accrued not only to the Catholic church but the Spanish government which gained new sources of tax revenue. Led by the provincial governor Emilio Saravia, each group of peoples baptized by Cuenca and his conferees were immediately reduced into tributaries of the island's colonial government. For some natives however, especially the so-called Carolans, their contact with the Spaniards and consequent domination, eventually led to "ethnocide." All three extant Spanish documents which made references to the Carolans, and their great leader, Manyabog, lament the sad end to efforts by the Recollects to evangelize these people.¹⁴ Described as an act of treason, the tragic encounter of the Carolans with the Spanish-led expedition of "450 deputized soldiers, reserves of ammunition and 70 members of the police force, armed with guns and two cannons"¹⁵ was graphically described by Varona as follows:

It was an unequal battle. The cannon fire of the invaders was not answered by the Natives. Manyabog fell dead at one shot. His subjects, finding themselves without a leader, fled in an orderly manner as if by pre-arranged signal, to three huge shelters situated within their fortifications. They fled there with their armaments and their families . . . Despite their superior weapons, the invaders hesitated to rush to the fortress so as to avoid hand to hand combat with that warlike tribe known far and wide to be deadly in the use of the lance and the *siantong* (a weapon similar to the Moro kris). But when they saw that the fort appeared lifeless, they ventured to assault. Great was their astonishment when they saw nothing but corpses and the near-dead within the ramparts. Refusing to believe that the whole tribe had perished, the soldiers scoured the area in search of the others. Then they saw rising into the heavens three great columns of smoke of fire coming

13. Echaus, *Apuntes de la Isla de Negros*, p. 19.

14. Echaus, *Apuntes*. Jose Genova. *El Archipelago Filipino*, (1896) trans. Sylvia M. Moreno (Negrense Studies Centre, 1987); Varona, *Negros* (Original text, 1938).

15. Echaus, *Apuntes*, p. 95.

from the three shelters which had now been converted into abodes of horror. The poor mountain folk committed mass suicide rather than live through the insulting infamy of which they were unwary victims.¹⁶

When what Varona graphically described as a "holocaust of an aboriginal people" occurred, there remained only a few and remote pagan communities in Negros. Notwithstanding his ethnocentric perspective of the history of Negros (laudatory of the contributions of the Spaniards and mestizos to the development of the island), Varona had an incisive view of the far-ranging consequence of the tragic decimation of the native peoples:

It could be said that in the infamous and fatal end of the best organized aboriginal settlement of Negros, dealt a sure blow of death, without possible resurrection, of a native population in a province which destiny had prepared for greatness and fortune. It is true that there were some left and that thousands of Negros native families continued living in the hidden or isolated outskirts of towns . . . but little by little they were absorbed by the Christian population leaving neither footprints of their personality nor vestiges of their nature.¹⁷

ETHNIC STRATIFICATION

As may be inferred from the existing Spanish documents, evangelization became a convenient mechanism for Spanish extension of their control among the interior peoples of Negros. An immediate consequence of this process of internal domination which was facilitated by the creation of *reducciones*— i.e., the practice of gathering the natives from scattered hamlets into agglomerated settlements within the sphere of influence of the friars, is the emergence of ethnic stratification. Don Robustiano Echaus, who served as the judge of the court of first instance of Negros from 1881 to 1884, described the emergent ethnic differentiation in the island as follows:

The *peninsulares* belong to the white race or caucasian, the *naturales* of

16. Varona, *Negros*.

17. *Ibid.*

of Malayan origin, differentiated only by customs and practices, and the negritos belong to the race of the same name, completely separated from the others by their manner of living, lack of habit of work and confinement to their traditional habitat.¹⁸

Based on Echaus' description, one is able to construct the nature of interethnic differences and relations between the agricultural Malays and hunting and gathering Negritos. Clearly, the infieles described by Echaus are Malays who refused conversion and assimilation into Hispanic, Catholic culture. In other parts of his work, Echaus used the generic term *naturales* for Malay natives in general, i.e., inclusive of the Christianized ones. The *naturales* are described as of robust health, physically well-developed, and excellent agricultural producers. From his description of the Carolans it is possible to infer the nature of the pre-Hispanic Bisayan culture as it continued to be manifested during the late nineteenth century:

In contrast to the fierce infieles of northern Luzon, the Carolans are neither warlike nor aggressive. They are quite autonomous and do not submit themselves to an absolute chief. They are peaceful if treated honorably but bravely heroic if shamed. They possess no idols or unique beliefs other than customs they share with the Bisayans who are adherents to the cult of *babaylanismo*. Like no one else, the infieles of Carolan maintain the custom of *balos* or practice of taking vengeance, using the spear or *siantong* (jungle knife), against anyone who has caused them personal injury or killed a member of their family. In spite of their relative isolation, the people of Carolan are known among the infieles by their hospitality, bravery and excellent conduct.¹⁹

Obviously impressed with the Carolans, Echaus further described them as excellent workers who produced a variety of crops ranging from basic staples of rice and corn, and a wide range of tubers and other root crops. Based on Echaus account, it is possible to construe that the Carolans and other upland Malay dwellers were peasants with relative autonomy. From pre-Hispanic times, the Carolans engaged in internal trading—bartering, buying commodities from the coastal

18. Echaus, *Apuntes*, p. 8.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

towns and selling them in the uplands. Such exchanges with other peoples took place in a secure atmosphere, with no outsiders having "a tint of fear or worry going into their territory, sleeping, or trading with them." As a whole, the social system of the Carolans was one that met the basic needs of its members. Echaus noted the absence of crimes like robbery, and personal assaults; neither did they permit criminal elements to seek refuge within their community. People however who needed refuge from potential harm were given safe passages in their territory. Safely ensconced in the uplands, the Carolans served in fact as a refuge for the beleaguered Christianized natives and their priest who were victims of a Moro piratical attack in 1727.²⁰ Neither Islamized nor Hispanized and subjugated in spirit, the Carolans bore a nobility of spirit which impressed even the Dominican priest and town authorities who found safety in their midst, and led them to issue a special certificate of commendation.²¹

In contrast to the agricultural Malay native, the Negrito hunters and gatherers are portrayed as being free of spirit, unencumbered by accumulated material property or even a fixed dwelling. Echaus accurately perceived that though mobile, the Negritos moved within an established domain. Echaus wrote that they exercised the right over their domain by preventing the naturales from cutting wood in the forest without their permission. The sound symbiotic relationship of the Negritos with their natural habitat and the living organisms around them may be further inferred from the following account:

Being led by their natural instincts the Negritos roam through the forest taking their direction from some creatures which look for flowers and fruits of plants. Where darkness overtakes them, they spend the night, keeping themselves warm and protected from annoying insects with tended fires. They hang their dead in trees which they wrap in mats.²²

As was true with other native peoples colonized by the Europeans, the Negritos were gravely affected by the white man's diseases of smallpox and cholera, "horrible sicknesses" which led them to throw

20. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*

those who died from these diseases into the river.²³

While Spanish accounts²⁴ cited the existence of traditional chieftains (datus) as late as the 1850s in Negros, there is no suggestion in their work of a marked social stratification among the natives. Both referred to the existence of prosperous settlements inhabited by industrious Malays and thriving bands of Negrito hunters and gatherers with informal leaders. As previously cited, the idyllic existence of the pioneer settlers in Negros who enjoyed relative autonomy from the deeply entrenched Spanish colonial government in Manila was marred by the onset of aggressive evangelization by the Recollects in the early 1850s.

CAPITAL EXPANSION

The opening of the frontiers of Negros flung the island into an unprecedented state of economic activity. Prior to this new era, the island had remained largely peripheral to the center of trading and commerce in Western Visayas. However, though not a center of trading, based on the description of eighteenth and nineteenth century European documents which made references to Negros, the islands appear to have had a thriving diversified economy. The noted nineteenth century Spanish historian, Fray Joaquin Martinez de Zuñiga writing about the status of the Philippines in 1800, made specific references to abundant rice grown in Negros "for its consumption and export to Cebu and other places."²⁵ In fact, the acclaimed Italian traveler of the seventeenth century Gemelli Careri, made mention of the same fact in his earlier work, *A Voyage to the Philippines*.²⁶ Other than abundant rice production, de Zuñiga's account also shows the diversity of trade and skills in Negros:

The island has an abundance of a palm called *cabo negro* (grown) locally whose stems are made into cables for boats. Plenty of fish is caught and sold

23. Ibid., p. 9.

24. Echaus, *Apuntes and Varona, Negros*.

25. De Zuñiga, *Status of the Philippines in 1800*, trans. Vicente del Carmen (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1893), p. 452.

26. Gemelli Careri, *A Voyage to the Philippines* (Manila: Publications of the Filipiniana Book Guild, 1963), p. 55.

in Iloilo. Some coconut oil is obtained while wax and cocoa are traded by the natives . . . The people are engaged in the manufacture of cotton fabrics and such abaca products as *sinamay* or *guimaras*. The natives earn their livelihood with these manufactures and the natural fruits of the soil. They practice the same frugality as the other natives.²⁷

As noted in other extant Spanish archival materials, production in Negros like many other facets of its way of life was in the second half of the nineteenth century still completely traditional. In Spanish colonial documents cited in Cuesta's work, the common impression given is that of the immense majority of the people of Negros dependent on the practice of subsistence agriculture.²⁸ Rice, their staple diet, was the focal point of agricultural production based on slash-and-burn technology:

To clear the land, they set fire to the field to burn the fallen trees and underbrush (sic). During the rainy season, they scatter rice by hand and after reaping, they dig the land which they flatten by pounding and plowing. To thresh the rice, they place it in a sort of threshing place and make the carabaos pound it until the straws are separated; they then use a cart with or without wheels pulled by a carabao that can carry two cavares of palay or rice . . .²⁹

From other sources as *Estadística de los productos de las provincias de Filipinas*,³⁰ one gets a picture of a relatively self-sufficient people who though using what in European terms was primitive technology managed to produce not only other staples as corn and edible root crops, but also buri and textile fibers which they used in home manufacture of their clothing, baskets, hats and slippers. In addition, they produced cacao, tobacco, and wax, not only to meet their finer needs but also to trade. With the leaves of buri grown abundantly in the area of Dumaguete, they made *bayong* (bags for packing) which were sold in Manila.³¹ While most Spanish and European accounts which make reference to Negros put down the island for its "backwardness," the reports and documents

27. De Zuñiga, *Status of the Philippines*, p. 56.

28. Angel M. Cuesta, *History of Negros* (Manila: R.P. Garcia Publishing Co., Inc., 1980), p. 361.

29. MAS, *Informe* 1855 as cited in *ibid.*, p. 416.

30. See Cuesta, *History of Negros*.

31. J. Mallat, *Les Philippines: Histoire, Géographie, Moers, Agriculture, Industrie et Commerce des Colonies Espagnoles dan l'Océanie* (Paris: Arthur Bertrand, 1846), pp. 319-20.

generally reflect a picture of the inhabitants of Negros having a healthy economy which met their basic needs.

Several contiguous factors worked to hasten the phenomenal growth of a market-oriented agriculture in Negros. The one factor already described relates to the coming of the Augustinian Recollects who provided the initial impetus for large-scale agricultural production in the island. As Echaus pointed out, the "inspirer" of the movement toward increased and systematic production of sugar was the Recollect Father Fernando Cuenca. Fr. Cuenca, who was assigned to his parish in Talisay in January 1850, dedicated his time not only to winning souls but also to the improvement of communications, the cultivation of sugarcane, and the semi-mechanized production of sugar. Other than the Recollect priests, the Spanish writer Echaus credits Don Pedro de Beaumont, governor of Negros from 1857 to 1860 with providing the right incentive and administrative support to the mission campaigns and modernizing efforts of the Recollects.

Yet the more influential factor which contributed to the commercialization of agriculture in Negros may be traced to the broader movement of capital in the metropolis of Iloilo. McCoy has substantively documented how the clever British reproduction of Iloilo's textile designs, and flooding of the Western Visayan market with their cheap cotton led to the permanent decline of the island's major weaving centers. This development had the immediate effect of shifting the urban trading center to the site of the foreign trading community, weakening the traditional inter-island sailcraft trade. With the drastic decline of the native textile industry, displacing not only traders but a whole group of skilled Bisayan workers, the stage was set for the expansion of both local and foreign capital to the new frontier—Negros island. Thus began the massive movement of capital, entrepreneur and labor which had a far-ranging effect on the development of the economy of Negros—i.e., the formation of a monocrop economy based on sugar.

Other than the Recollects therefore, the other key actors in the phenomenal growth of the sugar industry in Negros were individuals closely linked to the regional, national and international trading—a handful of Spaniards, the British trade agent Nicholas Loney, and the Chinese mestizos. The unifying element in this racially diverse aggrupa-tion of people was their common pursuit of profit. Yet their unified object

to develop a new industry based on the clearing of Negros' frontiers was in the words of Robustiano Echaus, endowed with rare ethnographic sense, "without plan or agreement." It developed largely in the spirit of each man to his maximum gain, and assumed risks.

As a factor in the development of market-oriented agriculture in Negros, Nicholas Loney acted mainly in terms of making capital available to the sugarcane planters in the form of crop loans. He made cash loans available at eight percent interest; tools of production as mills and caldrons on long-term payments without interest. In his entrepreneurial venture to Negros, Loney collaborated closely with the Recollects who in Echaus' words served as the inspiration in the over-all thrust towards commercialized agriculture. The other factors cited by Echaus in the development and growth of Negros as an export commodity producing region were the increasing number of Spanish personnel (from two to fourteen), the immigration of Chinese mestizo traders from Iloilo with families coming from Jaro, Molo and Miagao, and the high price of sugar. An earlier document³² written by a group of sugarcane planters from southern Negros, described the period from 1860 through 1877 as a period of rapid growth due mainly to the action of foreign commercial banks. Due to foreign capital, farm machineries and tools especially needed for larger sugarcane production, became accessible to agricultural entrepreneurs.³³ From this document we also learn that more people went into agriculture largely because with good prices of agricultural commodities (particularly sugar) they could pay creditors for the machinery and engines needed to maximize their farm production. With the encouragement of the foreign banks, the document which chronicles the development in Negros for nearly two decades from 1860, noted the near frantic entry of *peninsulares* (Iberian peninsula-born Spaniards), *insulares* (Philippine-born Spaniards) and *naturales* (Malay and Chinese mestizos) into commercial production of sugarcane.³⁴

From this document, the work of Echaus and the letters and consular reports of Nicholas Loney himself, it may be inferred that the ethos of those who played a key role in the actual opening of the frontiers of

32. Miguel Perez, et al, *Cronica-semihistoria de Filipinas y en especial de las Yslas Bisayas* (Manila, 1887).

33. *Ibid.*, p. 1-2.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Negros to large-scale agriculture was basically capitalistic. Land and agriculture was basically viewed as a form of investment, a means of generating profit and generating more capital. Loney, writing specifically of the Chinese mestizos described them as a "remarkable commercial and speculative race" who

invested in the large tracts of fertile and well-situated land on the coast of Negros, each taking with them several families from Molo, Jaro, Miagao and other pueblos of the province to settle in their estates and work on the usual system of proportionate share of profits. Most of these mestizos have hitherto been engaged in the piece of goods trade in this province, but finding that the importation of goods at Iloilo from first hands at Manila interfered with their usual practice of obtaining them from the Manila shops for subsequent sale here, and that the increasing number of Chinese shopkeepers rendered their retail sale of goods at the different markets much more difficult, precarious and unremunerative, they have directed their attention to agriculture in preference. The new tendency thus given to their capital and industry will by increasing the area of cultivation and amount of production, be much more beneficial than their former employment in a branch of commerce where they had become superfluous.³⁵

Forced out of retail trading by the Chinese, the mestizos turned to agricultural production as an alternative form of entrepreneurship. Along with the handful of Spanish hacendados, their active pursuit of profit from the production of a greatly in-demand world commodity, sugar, led to the establishment of an agrarian-based wage laborers—the "proletarianization" of displaced shifting agriculturists and former handloom weavers from Panay. Undaunted by the fall of their former trade, the entrepreneurial mestizo Chinese class conveniently transferred their capital, commercial skills and labor to the expanding market economy of Negros.

Cheap land, and the security provided by the Spanish navy against the Moro pirates which once terrorized the coastal settlements of Negros, encouraged further growth of the hacienda system in the island. The accelerated growth of Negros Occidental resulting from the increasing concentration of the province's economy into sugar production is captured by the following account of Echaus:

35. Nicholas Loney, *A Britisher in the Philippines or the Letters of Nicholas Loney* (Manila: The National Library, 1860).

From the years 1860 to 1861, the construction of important haciendas began. For the first time, the whistle of a steam engine is heard . . . in the midst of rejoicing Spaniards and some Filipinos at Hacienda San Ildefonso de Minuluan. At that impressive moment, the enterprising planter was surrounded by government authorities who presided over the work festivities, and the Recollect priests who blessed the machinery . . . progress and construction once started did not stop. The first European plows came into use . . . naturales from Jaro and Molo moved to Negros . . . Urged by the Recollects other Spaniards settled. . . They broke the ground and started difficult agricultural production aided by native workers . . . *land is surveyed, the borders set, and the land is bought.* As if by a miracle, haciendas and villages emerged.³⁶

Towards 1855 the rapid influx of migrants from other islands introduced new mechanisms for gaining land control in Negros. Migrants commonly came from the provinces of Iloilo, Capiz, Antique and Cebu,³⁷ a majority of whom were either peasants from the northern part of Iloilo, or fishermen from Cebu. They were largely propelled by hopes of finding a better life in the frontiers of Negros. Having no capital but their labor, their common means of land acquisition was the clearing of forest land for small-scale swidden agriculture. As may be inferred from the records of the colonial government (i.e., the *Protocolo de Negros* and *Varias Provincias*) the average size of such clearings produced four to five cavans of rice.³⁸ However, the widespread infusion of new capital in Negros—largely brought in by the Iloilo based entrepreneurs soon confined land acquisition to those with cash, knowledge of Spanish law, and might. Thus, most of the island's fertile and rich lands became consolidated in hacienda holdings. As such, lands south of Negros were divided into large plantations controlled by metropolitan-based Iloilo elite. Only a small part of the southern part of Negros—i.e., the more interior portions of Hinigaran and Cauyan were colonized by small holders coming largely from the former weaving districts of Iloilo.³⁹

The fencing of land which came with the establishment of the hacienda system led to widespread displacement of the original settlers in Negros. Hungry for land, new settlers both naturales and Spaniards, employed various means to acquire as much landed property as possible.

36. Echaus, *Apuntes*.

37. *Estadística de los Terrenos Agrícolas de Propiedad*—Philippine National Archives, 2 bundles, 1896; McCoy, *Iloilo*, p. 72.

38. *Protocolo de Negros* 1872 #1737, nos. 24, 32.

39. *Estadística de los Terrenos Agrícolas de Propiedad*.

One devious means as reflected in the case of the Carolans, was the sending of military and police expeditions to recalcitrant native settlements. As Varona noted in his work, "it was expected that the tribes would transfer to other regions and continue their nomadic life outside of civilized society and at the constant mercy of exploiters."

Among the new migrants, many small peasant holders who acquired lands from their forest clearing, fell prey to agricultural capitalists desirous to expand their hacienda borders. A convenient means by which the metropolitan Ilongo elite acquired lands was through provision of crop loans in the form of *cesion de pago*—a lease-mortgage, often forcibly imposed by money-lenders upon hardpressed debtors. This forced acquisition of land was facilitated by the adroit machinations of the law by the elite. A common step taken was the quick application for costly court litigation which put smaller landholders in a disadvantageous position. Without funds for payment of lawyers, and virtually ignorant of the language and proceedings of the Spanish courts, many illiterate settlers lost their lands with the execution of terms in contracts drawn by the moneylenders and certified by interpreters coming from the same social class.⁴⁰ The abuses of usurers who so easily foreclosed lands are one of the key causes cited by a group of planters from southern Negros for the ruin of agriculture in the island.⁴¹ Due to the high interest rates charged on the crop loans (as high as 25 percent as reported by Perez and his fellow planters), not a few lost their lands within a year after entering contract loans.

CONCLUSION

With the penetration of Western capitalism into the traditional sphere of peasant production and economy in Negros, new opportunities were created. However, it also produced new norms, new demands, new needs which undermined the foundations of the traditional society in the island and led to landlordism and a landless proletariat, rural indebtedness, widespread poverty, seasonal scarcity of food, and an increasingly low level of nutrition and serious health conditions.

40. Protocolo de Negros, 1872 #1737, nos. 27, 38, 56.

41. Perez, et al., *Cronica-semihistoria*, pp. 2-3.