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Prostitution in Nineteenth Century Manila

MARIA LUISA T. CAMAGAY

Concern over the activities of the prostitutes during the Spanish period in the Philippines came in the wake of the growing peril of venereal diseases during the nineteenth century. Syphilis, together with alcoholism and tuberculosis, was considered one of the social ills of the period. The worldwide concern over the spread of venereal diseases was evident when the International Medical Congress which met in Paris in 1867 declared venereal diseases as the "new cholera" of the century.¹ This concern was translated into closer surveillance of the activities of prostitutes.

In the Philippines, this concern was manifested when colonial authorities in the nineteenth century imposed punitive measures against prostitutes in an attempt to combat the spread of venereal diseases. Understandably, the colonial government adopted such police measures because of the increasing incidence of syphilis, a disease which was not fatal but had irreversible effects such as blindness of newly-born babies, sterility of women and high infant mortality.² In short the effects of syphilis had serious effects on population growth.

There is evidence that the naval station at Cavite suffered an epidemic of syphilis in December of 1895, which prompted the *Jefe de Sanidad* to alert the authorities of the naval station of the fact that a number of the sailors infected with syphilis were confined in the

1. A. Corbin, "Le peril veneri en su debut du siecle: prophylaxis sanitaire et prophylaxis morale" *L'Holeine des Faubourgs* (Fontenay-sous- Bois: Recherches, 1978), p. 245.

2. Ibid., p. 247.

hospital in Cañacao.³

Public awareness of the deleterious effects of venereal diseases was apparent in the colony as advertisements of drugs for gonorrhea and syphilis appeared in the major dailies. The *Boletín Oficial de Filipinas* for the year 1859 contained advertisements of such drugs. Pildoras Holloway, for example, was announced as a cure for *enfermedades venereas*. The Vino de Zarzaparilla of Dr. Albert and the Rob Antisifilitico de Boyveau Laffecteau were advertised as effective medicines against venereal diseases. The newspaper *El Comercio* likewise contained advertisements of medicines which were said to be effective against gonorrhea and syphilis.⁴ It is noteworthy that all these medicines or drugs were manufactured in France, and were locally available in the drug store of Don Jacobo Zobel.

THE ARREST OF PROSTITUTES

Sources attesting to arrests of prostitutes go as far back as 1849. This does not mean, however, that arrests were made only after that time. Arrests were certainly made earlier than this date but we have no written evidence to that effect. Since venereal diseases became common only in the nineteenth century, widespread police measures on prostitutes came only at that time.

Evidence from 1849 reveals the arrest made by the *seguridad publica* of prostitutes in a densely populated area of Manila.⁵ The report about the incident was made by the *alcalde mayor* of Tondo. Seventeen women were rounded up and declared vagabonds and prostitutes. The recommendation of the *alcalde mayor* to the governor-general was deportation of these women to a sparsely populated place like Nueva Quipuzcua (Davao). The merit of deporting the women to places like Davao was to spare them from being infected with venereal diseases. Later in the 1860s, the Isla de Balabac in Palawan replaced Davao as the place of deportation for prostitutes.

3. Philippine National Archives, *Prostitucion* 1887-97.

4. These advertisements appeared in the following issues of *El Comercio*: 13 de Julio 1876, 20 de Julio 1876, 24 de Julio 1876, 9 de Diciembre 1876.

5. Asian Center, University of the Philippines, *Manila Complex Microfilm Collection*, Reel 4, Item 1, Document 4.

Towards the second half of the nineteenth century, arrests of prostitutes were effected in the name of the Comisaria de Vigilancia. Upon the arrest of the prostitute and her incarceration in the Carcel de Bilibid, an inquiry was held to shed light on her background. The gobernadorcillo, together with the *principales* of the town where the alleged prostitute lived, were given forty-eight hours to furnish information on matters like whether she was included in the list of taxpayers of the town, whether she had had previous brushes with the law, whether she had the reputation of being a prostitute, as well as to determine her civil status, her profession and the names of her parents. The friar-curate of the town was likewise asked to shed light on the antecedents of the prostitute. This procedure required a thorough acquaintance by the gobernadorcillo of his constituents and by the friar-curate of his parishioners. A search of the records of the Carcel de Bilibid was also made to verify whether the accused had been previously detained and on what charges. Significant, too, was the verification of whether the prostitute was affected with syphilis or not. If the prostitute was infected, she was confined in the Hospital de San Juan de Dios, instead of being incarcerated in the Carcel de Bilibid.

The *expedientes* of these apprehended women show that the punitive measures took the form of imprisonment of ten, fifteen and thirty days and also of deportation. It is significant that some of the prostitutes apprehended had served previous prison sentences on charges of illegal gambling, estafa, public disorder and prostitution.

The prison terms of the prostitutes were served at the Carcel de Bilibid. When they had served the term meted out to them, the prison authorities gave them a certificate attesting that they had indeed served the prison term. Upon their release from prison, some prostitutes would visit the Carcel de Bilibid (or would return to the Carcel de Bilibid) in order to ply their trade.⁶ These women, according to the prison superintendent, took advantage of the Thursday and Sunday visiting days at the prison to exercise their profession. These women pretended to be relatives of the detainees in order to obtain entrance inside the prison.

Inside prison, the prostitutes were subjected to hard labor appropriate to their sex. What this hard labor was, what activities constituted

6. Philippine National Archives, *Prostitucion* 1881-86.

hard labor, we do not know. If a prostitute was discovered to be infected with syphilis, she was confined in the Hospital de San Juan de Dios and was not allowed to leave until cured of the disease.

DEPORTATION OF PROSTITUTES

Of the punishments imposed on the prostitutes, expulsion from her province and deportation to either Davao or Balabac were considered extremely severe. In the early part of the nineteenth century deportation to the southern Philippines often constituted the first punishment given by the colonial authorities to arrested prostitutes. Deportation was imposed even on first-time offenders. Evidence points to the fact that exile to far-off Davao or Balabac was a much dreaded punishment among the prostitutes. Efforts were exerted by their families to spare them from undergoing this punishment. Petitions of mothers and fathers of prostitutes to the governor-general attest to this fact. They invoked reasons like ill health, the fact that the daughter was the sole breadwinner of the family, or even an outright denial of her activities as a prostitute, and spared no effort to prevent the daughter from being deported to Davao or Balabac.

Deportation to the southern Philippines, though readily resorted to in the mid-nineteenth century, was used sparingly towards the end of the century. The severity of this punishment may have made authorities hesitate in adopting it as a punishment. By the end of the century deportation was reserved for habitual offenders.

I have discovered two lists in the archives of women deported. The first list contains names of women to be deported to Davao, while the second list contains the deportees destined for Balabac. The first list of 1842 includes the following names:⁷

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Remigia Sebastian | 10. Eustacia Francisca |
| 2. Eustaquia Zaballa | 11. Romana Pablo |
| 3. Remigia Zaballa | 12. Sotera Almario |
| 4. Romana Espinosa | 13. Melchora de los Santos |

7. Asian Center, University of the Philippines. *Manila Complex Microfilm Collection*, Reel 14, Item 1, Document 4.

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------|
| 5. Januaria Balverde | 14. Aristona de los Santos |
| 6. Anselma Busta | 15. Juliana Pasion |
| 7. Josefa Carballo | 16. Felipa Guevara |
| 8. Juana Legaspi | 17. Maria Josefa |
| 9. Justa Gonzalez | |

The list of 1872 contains twenty-six names of women to be deported to Palawan. It includes the following:

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Juana del Rosario | 14. Elena Gabriel |
| 2. Rafaela Mesa | 15. Maria Castañeda |
| 3. Alejandra Salmiento | 16. Roberta Zamora |
| 4. Juana Rodriguez | 17. Graciana Marzano |
| 5. Emeteria Borja | 18. Eulogia Buson |
| 6. Lorenza Casimiro | 19. Victoriana Javier |
| 7. Maria Quinto | 20. Eusebia Mamangon |
| 8. Petrona Trinidad | 21. Maria Evangelista |
| 9. Vicenta Rosario | 22. Eduvigis Dumasig |
| 10. Dominga Crisostomo | 23. Tomasa Diwa |
| 11. Dionicia de la Cruz | 24. Vicenta de la Cruz |
| 12. Antonia Cierca | 25. Dolores Avila |
| 13. Francisca Garcia | 26. Aniceta Chaves |

There were other prostitutes who were arrested and deported to Palawan. This is revealed in their individual dossiers but they are not included in a list like that of 1849 and 1872.

MARRIAGE

Marriage or the offer of marriage apparently served to circumvent or avert the deportation of a prostitute. In 1849 Romana Pablo, who was on the list of those to be deported to Davao, was spared from exile because of Gilberto Escueta's proposal to marry her. Sotera Almario was likewise spared from deportation when Don Jose Maria Medina, a Spanish mestizo requested her release from prison because he wished to marry her. Sotera Almario in her statement confirmed the fact that Don Jose Maria Medina was a suitor and that they were engaged to be married. Don Jose, on his part, confirmed that he intended to

contract marriage with Sotera Almario. One wonders how in the world Sotera Almario ended up among those accused of prostitution. Her testimony does not shed light on why she was being accused of prostitution. The testimony of Don Jose Maria Medina is likewise silent on the matter and does not deny the fact that Sotera Almario was indeed a prostitute.⁸ What was important was that Sotera was spared from being deported to Davao.

Sometimes marriage plans came when the deportee was already serving her sentence. The marriage plans of Remigia Sebastian, who was exiled to Davao in 1842, are found in a petition of her mother requesting a return of Remigia to Manila in order to contract marriage with Jose Espinosa, a musician of the first expeditionary regiment. Vicente Aleja filed her petition in June of 1849, and the orders of the governor-general to release Remigia Sebastian came in January 1850. What is clear in this particular case was the fact that marriage shortened the period of exile of Remigia.⁹

On the other hand exile to Balabac might be made pleasant when the deportee was accompanied by a loved one. Such was the case of Eusebia Miguel.¹⁰ She was a native of Bulacan, Bulacan, a twenty-one year-old *cigarrera* who was arrested in August 1871 for getting involved in a fight in which she threatened the life of a soldier, Ventura Fabula, who apparently was her lover. Prison records show that Eusebia Miguel was imprisoned in 1866 on the charge of theft. At that time she was sixteen years old. The *gobernadorcillo* and the *principalia* of Binondo testified that Eusebia did not pay her *cedula personal* for the years 1869 and 1870, making her a *vagamunda*. The Chief of Police of the District affirmed that she was a *mujer publica* and had lived with different men in the past. The recommendation of the Governor of the Province of Tondo was deportation to the south of the Islands, preferably to an agricultural colony, which referred apparently to the Isla de Balabac. This recommendation was approved by Governor General Izquierdo. Eusebia Miguel however did not go

8. Philippine National Archives, *Prostitucion* 1862-79.

9. The petitions of Romana Pablo, Sotera Almario, and Remigia Sebastian are found in Reel 14, Item 1 and Document 4 of the *Manila Complex Microfilm Collection* found in the Asian Center, University of the Philippines.

10. Philippine National Archives, *Prostitucion* 1862-79.

into exile alone. Antonio Bonifacio, a fellow prisoner of Eusebia at the Carcel de Bilibid who was serving a sentence for estafa, asked permission from the authorities to marry Eusebia and serve his sentence with Eusebia wherever she was to be deported. Since there were no objections to this proposition, Antonio Bonifacio joined Eusebia Miguel in Balabac.

Marriage was also viewed as a means of reforming prostitutes. This was the sentiment of the colonial authorities. Considering that the majority of the prostitutes were single, marriage was thought to be a means of helping them to settle down. The native population seemed amenable to the idea since there were many petitions of parents asking for the release of their daughters who were to be married. One is tempted to ask whether the marriage offers mentioned in the petitions were true, or were the Filipinos using this argument because they knew that the Spanish authorities were sympathetic to this request. We also get the impression that ostracism of prostitutes by the native population did not exist. Why did Filipino males consent to marry Filipinas who were known to be prostitutes? Why did the parents not deny the fact that their daughter was a prostitute? The laboring class did not seem to attach any significant stigma to prostitution.

We have no idea as to the number of years a deportee had to serve as her sentence. After three years, however, a deportee might petition the governor-general to end her deportation. Josefa Carballo, a deportee in Davao, wrote to the governor-general that she was sent to Davao in 1849 and since then had been leading an exemplary life.¹¹ She would like to return to her family and start a new life. The same was true of Elena Gabriel,¹² a *labandera* from Mariguina who left her husband and children to go to Manila. In the city, she had no regular source of income and lived with a certain Jose Pinggol who eventually landed in prison, accused of assault and theft. We see her name in a list of twenty-six women who boarded the steamer "Marquesa de la Victoria" for Palawan in 1872. In 1875, Elena Gabriel asked for a commutation of her stay in Palawan. Before the petition was approved,

11. Asian Center, University of the Philippines. *Manila Complex Microfilm Collection*, Reel 14, Item 1, Document 5.

12. Philippine National Archives, *Prostitucion 1862-79*.

a recommendation from the *alcalde mayor* of the province where she had been deported, together with a certification from the friar-curate of the town were required. The two had to certify that the deportee had truly reformed during her exile. If a favorable word was given by both the *alcalde mayor* and the friar-curate, then the petition of the deportee was approved. Elena Gabriel's petition was approved.

We see in the administrative processes which went with supervising the activities of the prostitutes the involvement of many entities like the *gobernadorcillo*, the friar-curate, the *celador* of the district, the superintendent of the Carcel de Bilibid and the head of the Hospital de San Juan de Dios, as well as the authorities of the Seguridad Publica and the Comisaria de Vigilancia.

SOCIAL PROFILE OF PROSTITUTES

Most of the prostitutes apprehended were in their late teens and early twenties. Older prostitutes who were in their thirties or forties were either married or widowed. The provinces where they came from varied for prostitutes hailed from as far north as Vigan, Ilocos Sur and as far south as Antique. All the apprehended prostitutes apparently had legitimate occupations. The occupations which usually appeared in their expediente or dossier, were *costurera*, *labandera*, *cigarrera*, and *tendera*. It was not uncommon to find sisters plying the same trade. Elena and Placida Gabriel, Eustaquia and Remigia Zaballa, and Melchora and Aristona de los Santos were just a few of them.

What would make women turn to prostitution? Were their earnings from their legitimate occupations not enough? Or were these occupations mentioned to deny their activities as prostitutes? Or were these women pursuing a legitimate occupation in the daytime and indulging in prostitution in the nighttime?

We suspect that women turned to prostitution for economic reasons. Evidence abounds of women in the provinces who ventured to the city to improve their economic status. The documents reveal that a number of prostitutes arrested did come from the provinces. Was this indicative of the hard times in the countryside? From the population sampling we have of 160 prostitutes, 105 came from the provinces. The nearby province of Bulacan provided the most number of prostitutes working in Manila. Elena Gabriel is a case in point. Her expediente or dossier

reveals that she left Mariquina and her life as a labandera in order to try her luck in Manila. Not finding a suitable job which would enable her to earn her keep while in the city, she turned to prostitution. Telesfora Villegas and Basilia Garcia both from Orani, Bataan were recruited by a woman who promised them jobs as househelp in Manila with a salary of ₱3 a month.¹³ The two joined the woman who lived in front of the Divisoria Market. Telesfora and Basilia, however, went to the police authorities because they suspected that they were being recruited to become prostitutes instead of *criadas* or domestic help.

There were apparently four categories of prostitutes. The categories depended upon the way they plied their trade. One category of prostitutes were those who were kept in a house of prostitution under the supervision of an *ama* (mistress) or *amo* (master).¹⁴ The *ama* were more common. *Amo* were few but I came across a Filipino male and two Chinese males. A few *amas* stated their profession as that of *cigarillera* or *costurera*. The Filipino *amo* identified himself as a *sastre* (tailor). It would not be a surprise that this tailor would act as an *amo* considering that he did have access to the male population who might desire the services of a prostitute. San Jose de Trozo was an area where the prostitution houses abounded. When a prostitution house was raided by authorities, the *ama* and the prostitutes were all rounded up. It seems that there was public knowledge of some houses serving as prostitution houses but it was only when brawls occurred that the houses were finally raided.

Another category of prostitutes were those who plied their trade by posting themselves in certain streets. These streets were Calle Iris of Quiapo, Paseo de Azcarraga, Meisic, and Santa Elena in Tondo; Ar-ranque, Lacoste, Gandara in Santa Cruz; Camba, Barcelona, Elcano, Plaza de Calderon and Ylang-ylang in Binondo; and Singalon, Bang-bang, Herran, San Marcelino in Paco Dilao.¹⁵ These women were also under the supervision of an *ama* or *amo*.

Another category of prostitutes plied their trade by going to the home of the client. These were the prostitutes who rendered service

13. Philippine National Archives, *Prostitution* 1887-97.

14. These were individuals who had a group of girls under their supervision.

15. The names of these streets are derived from a document making a listing of prostitutes and the areas where they station themselves. This document is found in the Philippine National Archives, *Prostitution* 1887-97.

to the Chinese males. We know that the Chinese men who came to the Philippines during the Spanish period were either single or married, but if married did not bring their wives with them. That these young and robust Chinese would seek the services of prostitutes would not be surprising. Paula Prim, Andrea Austria and Serapia Roncal were arrested in a soap store owned by a Chinese with the name of Sy Jaco.¹⁶ This evidence reveals that the Chinese themselves were involved in prostitution. Serapia Roncal acted as a pimp or a *corredora*.¹⁷ Margarita San Pedro was also one prostitute who frequented the homes of Chinese men. She was mentioned to have been the concubine of a soldier. She was arrested on orders of the gobernadorcillo of Tondo, based on reports that in the barrio of Tutuban she would go out every night and spend the night in the homes of the Chinese. Placida Gabriel, a resident of Mariquina and a thirty-year old widow was said to have many clients. Among them were Chinese men, according to the *Alferez Comandante* of the Guardia Civil of Mariquina. Other prostitutes were arrested inside the opium dens of the Chinese, making one pose the question whether the opium dens were functioning as prostitution houses too. In 1900, the American acting president of the Board of Health commented that an opium joint was also a house of prostitution "so that those patronizing may 'hit the pipe' in connection with other pleasures."¹⁸

Finally the last category of prostitutes were those who serviced clients in their own homes. Belonging to this category were Trinidad Sanchez, a Spaniard who lived in number 6 Calle Uliuli in San Miguel, Antonelle Dusand, an American who lived in number 16 Calle Labasan in Sampaloc, and Lorenza Ida, an Englishwoman, who lived in number 20 Calle Balmes in Quiapo. Presumably these women catered to men who belonged to the higher bracket of society.

What were their chances of leaving their lives as prostitutes? Once released from prison did these women turn over a new leaf? A number of prostitutes who had been earlier arrested and detained at the Carcel

16. Philippine National Archives. *Prostitucion* 1881-86.

17. United States National Archives, Bureau of Insular Affairs Records, *Prostitution General Record 2039*. Letter of Major Ira Brown, Acting President (Board of Health) to the Acting Adjutant General, Manila, Philippines, 16 May 1900.

18. Philippine National Archives, *Prostitucion* 1887-94.

de Bilibid were rearrested for their activities as prostitutes. However, deportation to either Davao or Balabac or banishment from one's province was so cruel a punishment that it often deterred a prostitute from returning to this profession. Marriage may have also reformed the prostitute making her turn her back on her previous profession. A startling discovery however was a report made of a husband who forced his wife into prostitution and lived by the earnings of his wife. Ceferino Fernandez,¹⁹ a tailor, ceased practising his profession and spent his days gambling while his wife prostituted herself. The gobernadorcillo and the principales of Tondo recommended his deportation to Mindanao, a punishment which was carried out.

It is difficult to capture how these women felt about their profession, their aspirations in life or even how they appeared in public. Did their manner of dressing or acting reveal their true identity? The dearth of information on their views about themselves forces us to content ourselves with what the public perception was of these women.

POPULAR PERCEPTION OF PROSTITUTES

From the various terms they were called a value judgment by society was already evident. The prostitutes were called by various names—*prostituta*, *mujer publica*, *vagamunda*, and *indocumentada*. The term *vagamunda* reflected the roving lifestyle of the prostitute. Her inability to be registered in a particular locality earned for her the title *indocumentada*. When arrested therefore, the prostitute was not only penalized for her activity as a prostitute but also penalized for not having a *cedula* which was the document which qualified her as not being a *vagamunda* and an *indocumentada*. This wandering lifestyle is alluded to in works which touch on the life of prostitutes.

You ask me, how my life was? It was like that of the others of my kind. Days of bonanza, tempestuous nights, caresses and fortune, and the floggings by fate. This, in a nutshell, is my history. I went through towns dispensing smiles never thinking of the mothers, wives, sisters, daughters who perhaps were to cry because of them. . . .²⁰

19. Philippine National Archives, *Prostitucion* 1862-79.

20. Teofilo del Castillo and Buenaventura S. Medina, *Philippine Literature: From Ancient Times to the Present* (Quezon City: Del Castillo, 1964), p. 248.

Literary works alluding to the life of prostitutes are rare in the nineteenth century. This is due to the fact that religious literature pervaded the period. However, by the beginning of the twentieth century there were allusions to prostitutes but they were few and far between. There is mention of prostitutes in a novel of Faustino Aguilar entitled *Pinaglahuan* published in 1907 and reprinted by the Ateneo de Manila University Press in 1986. They are pictured in this novel as women who call attention to themselves because of their loud laughter, gaudy manner of dressing, and the smell of cheap perfume. The novel refers to the prostitutes in this manner:

At sa alaala ni Roman ay binasa ang isang mahabang talaan ng mga babaying kung araw ay makikinang, datapwa't kung gabi'y nangagbibili ng pag-ibig sa bawa't makaabot sa halaga ng isang halik, ng isa nilang yakap. Marami sa mga babaying ito'y nangapalulong sa gayong buhay sapagka't ibig magsikislap ay wala namang kaya, marami ang dahil sa talagang nagmamasarap sa buhay na pagayong punong puno ng aliw, nguni't may ilan din namang kaya nagsisama ay sa kasalanan ng lahat, sa mga huling ito'y kabilang ang mga ulilang kulang sa mag-ampon, ang nilinlang ng mga walang pusong mangangalakal ng laman, ang mga dukhang sa kakulangan ng mag-akay, ay nangapilit sa pagbibili ng katawan upang may ikabuhay.²¹

(And in his own memory Roman read a long list of women who glittered in the daytime, but who, in the night, vended love to anyone who could afford the price of a kiss, of an embrace. Many of these women have been trapped in that kind of life because they desire to glitter but have not the means; many because they find fulfillment of their desires in that kind of life of pleasures; but there are some, however, who have become bad because of everyone's fault. Among these last are the orphans whom none has adopted, the dupes of heartless flesh merchants, the poor who because of the lack of people who care have been forced to sell their bodies in order to survive.)

From this short literary passage we gather the many reasons why women enter prostitution. These reasons range from a desire for sexual pleasure to outright deception by people engaged in the flesh trade.

21. Faustino Aguilar, *Pinaglahuan*, Unang Pagkalimbag (Manila: Manila Filatelico, 1907; reprint ed., Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1986), p. 117.

With regard to the last reason, there are instances wherein women hired as *criadas* or domestics ended up being prostitutes. Such was the case of Florentina Canlas, a sixteen-year old native of San Fernando, Pampanga. Florentina Canlas was hired as a domestic by Gregorio Sarmiento with a monthly salary of two pesos. According to Canlas, after a week in the employ of Sarmiento, she was brought by the latter to a prostitution house owned by Gregorio Betong. She escaped from the prostitution house since she could no longer stomach the shame and exploitation she was being subjected to. When questioned, Gregorio Sarmiento asserted that Florentina Canlas became a prostitute of her own free will ("esta lo hace de su propia voluntad por ser de profesion.") Sarmiento stated that Canlas bought clothes from him amounting to ₱94.20 and that when he wanted to collect this amount from her, she left the house. One doubts the allegations made by Gregorio Sarmiento. The testimony of Canlas seems more credible. For how could Canlas in a week's stay in the house of Gregorio Sarmiento incur a debt of ₱94 against her ₱2 monthly salary? If Canlas did enter prostitution of her own volition to be able to pay back Gregorio Sarmiento, why did she leave the prostitution house?

Stories of women who were hired as domestics and who later were turned over to prostitution houses by the mistress of the house seem to be a common occurrence during the nineteenth century. One suspects that some of the masters of these domestics may have been in connivance with women who ran prostitution houses. The charges of debts incurred while in their employ may have been fabricated to cover up their being turned over to prostitution houses.

The case of Faustina Trias is also interesting. Faustina Trias was sixteen years old, a native of Orani, Bataan and married to Candido Ramos, twenty-four years old and a native of Calumpit, Bulacan. Candido Ramos was a domestic by profession. According to the testimony of Candido Ramos his wife owed their master Doña Ladislawa ₱23. Martina Rafael volunteered to lend Faustina ₱23, but she was to work for her as a domestic. Candido Ramos meanwhile worked as a *cochero* of Don Catalino Sevilla. Martina Rafael, after a month, reported to Candido Ramos that Faustina left her household and was now working as a domestic of Doña Gabriela Ventura. When Candido went to the house of Doña Ventura and confronted Faustina, she revealed that Martina Rafael brought her to a prostitution house

owned by Alejandra Umali. Upon interrogation Martina Rafael denied the accusation.²²

GOVERNMENT ACTIONS

The alarming incidence of syphilis in the colony by the late nineteenth century signaled a closer supervision of the activities of prostitutes. After the early punitive measures adopted by the colonial authorities in the middle of the nineteenth century, we notice the formulation by the late nineteenth century of rules and regulations aimed at preventing the spread of communicable diseases contracted through prostitution and breastfeeding.

This concern over the spread of venereal diseases, especially syphilis, led to the creation of a Bureau of Public Health. The *Reglamento* of 1897 which guided the operation of the Bureau was greatly inspired by a *Reglamento* which had earlier been formulated in Spain.²³ A *mujer publica* is defined in the document as one who regularly engages in the flesh trade. The *Reglamento* mentions three categories of *mujeres publicas*. One category were women who stayed in prostitution houses. Another were women who stayed in their own homes and engaged in prostitution. The third category were women who went to the homes of their clients.

To keep tab on those engaged in the trade, the new Bureau of Public Health undertook a licensing of prostitutes in Manila. The licensing of prostitutes not only allowed a sort of census of prostitutes in Manila, but more significantly it checked the spread of syphilis in the city. The licensed prostitutes were required to undergo medical examination twice a week. This examination was done by medical authorities who made the rounds of prostitution houses. Ama or owners of prostitution houses who prevented the hospitalization of women infected with syphilis were punished by imprisonment. The San Juan de Dios Hospital appeared to be the hospital designed to take charge of women afflicted with syphilis.

Soliciting of clients in public was strictly prohibited. Prostitutes were prohibited from soliciting clients on streets or street corners and

22. Philippine National Archives, *Prostitucion* 1887-97

23. Philippine National Archives, *Prostitucion* 1887-97.

likewise forbidden to station themselves in the entrances and balconies of homes. Furthermore, they were not allowed to converse with men in the streets and use any sort of provocation which would offend public morals.

CONCLUSION

It appears that for the colonial authorities of the period, prostitution was to be tolerated but should be regulated. The regulation of the activities of the prostitutes was intended not only to check the spread of venereal diseases, but also to respect public morals as well. This was evident not only in the interdiction imposed on the public solicitation of clients but also in the insistence that prostitution houses should not be located in places where there was much human traffic. The Reglamento also forbade the prostitution houses from revealing their real purpose through billboards.

From the point of view of the colonial authorities, the regulation of the activities of the prostitutes assumed the orientation of a sanitary precaution. However, from the point of view of the native population, the regulation of prostitution constituted a dissuasive strategy against a means of livelihood. For the Filipina woman during the nineteenth century, the flesh trade was a source of livelihood, whether it was decent or not was immaterial. What counted was that it was an occupation engaged in by the Filipino woman of the nineteenth century.