Was the Philippine Revolution compromised by the Ilustrados' need to maintain their positions of power?

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Essay

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Introduction

The Philippine Revolution ended on June 12, 1898, with President Emilio Aguinaldo standing in his home in Kawit, Cavite, to announce the independence of the Filipino people. This was the end of the several century old Spanish rule, which culminated with three years of violent feuding between the Filipino and Spanish people. Despite this, there was still suspicion with motives behind this so called "independence". Was Aguinaldo declaring independence because he truly believed in the Filipino people and wanted them to be free? Or was Aguinaldo declaring independence so that the higher-class Filipinos, also known as the "Ilustrados", would be able to preserve their place within the socio-economic ladder? This leads to the main discussion question: **Was the Philippine Revolution compromised by the Ilustrados' need to maintain their primary position of power?** Looking at the evidence to be presented in this paper, the ilustrados did compromise the revolution and is seen through their inaction during the initial outbreak of the war, their controversial actions to get their leader into power, and what they did when the leadership of the country rested mostly on the ilustrados.

Section A: Pre-revolution

Intermittently throughout the 300 year Spanish colonial era, starting in 1565 and ending in 1898, the Filipinos resisted and fought the Spanish, with the aim of liberating themselves from their colonizer's clutches. These revolts gave birth to and were the earliest signs of the rise of Filipino nationalism that would ultimately lead to the Philippine Revolution in 1896. These revolts were motivated by a plethora of things but personal motives and resistance to Spanish oppression stand out as main causes.

When the Spanish first arrived, they represented a very small minority of population in the Philippines. They needed a way to control the opposing vast majority, one of these being the encomiendas, "which was a system where a Spanish encomendero was in charge with a number of natives living within a specific demographic and whom he was supposed to instruct in the Catholic faith and the Castilian tongue." (Francia 65) Despite this, in actuality the encomenderos treated the natives like "delinquent military units rather than a community of human beings, abusing them" (Francia 65) As time passed, the encomenderos passed on their cruelties and abuses to future Filipino government officials but the resentment the Filipino masses had stayed the same all throughout the revolution. This social structure was the start of and contributed to the feud between the Filipino elite, who had more privilege and power due to their positions as encomenderos, and the Filipino masses.

The increasing nationalism, finally boomed in the nineteenth century, with the progression of political ideology and the passing of technology to the Philippines from liberal-minded men from Europe and America. This acted as a catalyst for the rise of Filipino nationalism especially apparent in the nineteenth century. "Tired of being 'only an individual... and not a member of one nation', the Filipino, particularly the social elite, finally woke up to the realization that he must change" (Agoncillo 116) The opening of the Philippines to world commerce and the increase in popularity of the clase media, commenced the change needed. Furthermore, the impact of European liberalism and the administration of Carlos Maria de la Torre, racial discrimination, the effects of the secular conflicts and the Cavite mutiny of 1872, all contributed to the rise and acceleration of Filipino nationalism to the tipping point of the Philippine Revolution.

The failure of the reform movement in the 1890's, led by the writers of the propaganda found in La Solidaridad (José Rizal, Marcelo H. del Pilar, Graciano López Jaena), a publication in Barcelona in 1889, led to the arrest and deportation of José Rizal, convicted of sedition, rebellion and conspiracy. This was the event that initiated the creation of the association, led by Andres Bonifacio, Valentin Diaz, Teodoro Plata, Ladislao Diwa, Deodato Arellano and a few others, called the Kataastaasan Kagalanggalang na Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan (Highest and Most Venerated Association of the Sons and Daughters of the Land) or Katipunan for short. From its inception, Katipunan was forged by blood, with all its members enacting the traditional

blood compact and signing their names with their own blood. (Agoncillo 149) The foremost goal of the Katipunan was political, the separation of the Philippines from Spain. The Katipuneros (members of the Katipunan) were the main figureheads in the revolution against the Spaniards. The Katipuneros under Bonifacio also mostly represented the masses as compared to the elite because its aims revolved around the "defense of the poor" (Agoncillo 150) and Bonifacio and the high ranking officers themselves were not part of the elite Filipinos. What this portrays is that it was the masses who initially wanted the separation of the Spanish while the elite didn't want to originally join the revolution.

Another important aspect of the revolution that needs to be introduced and is the main focal point of this paper is the class struggle between the Filipino masses and the elite. Despite being the inspiration for the Katipunan's revolt, Rizal and other ilustrados deemed the revolution as a negative action, with some ilustrados thinking that the revolution was an irrational action brought about by the uneducated masses, possibly to show their allegiance to their Spanish rulers. Other ilustrados, like Rizal, stated that the revolution was an "ill-timed and unprepared struggle" (TOMSSUH). Ilustrado literally means the "enlightened ones". This was used to describe the higher class and more well-off Filipinos who were educated in Spain and were exposed to Spanish liberal and European nationalist ideals. When it seemed that the Katipunan had in fact, been able to fight and retaliate successfully, some ilustrados shifted opinions and joined the revolution. Here is where the debate comes into play. Some argue that the ilustrados, who shifted sides did so not because they gained the nationalism that the masses had but to preserve their

position of power, their social class, economic wealth, and their influence. Their agenda and aims varied greatly from that of the Katipuneros. This class struggle is, furthermore, greatly symbolized by the leadership struggle within the Katipunan, between Andres Bonifacio, representing the masses with his working class background and Emilio Aguinaldo, who was an ilustrado and formerly held a high government position in the town of Cavite. The struggle for leadership is an important aspect of the argument because it is a crucial piece of evidence to show how the ilustrados compromised the revolution.

Section B: The Radical Revolutionaries

The working class Filipinos were represented by the revolutionaries heavily linked with the Katipunan under Andres Bonifacio. The Katipunan were the main anti-Spanish revolutionary association, which was organized in July 7, 1892 by Andres Bonifacio, Valentin Diaz, Teodoro Plata, Ladislao Diwa, Deodato Arellano who would later comprise the first Supreme Council. "Under the leadership of Bonifacio, the Katipunan laid down three fundamental objectives or aims: political, moral, and civic." (Agoncillo 150)

The name Andres Bonifacio is highly connected to the Katipunan, with him playing a part in its inception and, eventually, its leadership. Bonifacio was born in Tondo, Manila on November 30, 1863. "He grew up in the slums and never knew the benefits of a prosperous life" (Agoncillo 157) The death of his parents at a young age forced Bonifacio to drop schooling, which left him with little educational background and no money. As a leader, he was respected enough that his decisions were rarely questioned, yet he was not dictatorial. But when his fellow countrymen were at stake he was not shy to take drastic action against anyone who went against the beliefs and aims of the Katipunan. In the eyes of the higher class, Bonifacio was seen as ignorant but he did one thing correct where the high class did not. He did not trust the Spanish with acting on the reforms that the Filipino people were desperately calling for. With that mentality in mind, Bonifacio built the Katipunan, and was forever known as the "Father of the Revolution, and without him it would be extremely doubtful whether the Philippine Revolution could have become a reality." (Agoncillo 159)

Bonifacio is an important figure to examine with regards to this topic because Bonifacio represented the Filipino masses. He was their figurehead and their leader. That being said, his eventual arguments and disagreements with Aguinaldo represented the class struggle between the elite and the masses. Bonifacio did not trust the elite "ilustrados" to actually act and help his mission of Filipino independence because of their inaction and indifference possibly due to their aims to keep their positions of influence and how much Spanish ideals had affected the elite. Furthermore, the eventual call for his execution can be seen as a dubious ploy by Aguinaldo and his ilustrados to take the power away from him for their own benefit.

Another important figure in the Katipunan was Emilio Jacinto, who was known as the "Brains of the Katipunan". Like Bonifacio, Jacinto was not born in the most well-off and wealthy environments. Despite being poor, Jacinto always had a fondness for learning and school so he went to school in local universities. Because of Jacinto's highly intelligent and honest articles that he wrote for the Kalayaan (Freedom), the Katipunan's newspaper, Bonifacio started to respect Jacinto and he eventually made Jacinto one of his most trusted advisers. Furthermore, through his writing, he was able to propagandize the Katipunan's ideologies and aims. He was very successful in portraying the hopes and dreams of the people. This can be mainly attributed to the simplicity of his style, which appealed to the masses specifically because they were able to understand his words and more easily connected to his writing. Another product of his writing was the primer used to "indoctrinate the members of the society in its ideals" (Agoncillo 161). The primer or the

Kartilya, introduced to new members thirteen basic teachings that all members were to follow religiously. The Kartilya shows that the Katipuneros aimed for equality between the Fllipinos and aimed to create noble and good citizens. This could be the reason why members of the ilustrado class did not initially join the revolution. They knew that equality was one of their aims which meant that they their socio-economic class and influence could be in jeopardy.

Bonifacio

The examination of Aguinaldo and Jacinto make evident the fact that the radical revolutionaries like them, aimed for the total independence from Spain. This was seen as a radical objective, mainly by the ilustrados, because it would mean that their positions of power would be reduced and their influence over the masses would be diminished as their connection to Spanish heritage and government would be rendered useless.

Section C: The Ilustrado Revolutionaries

What is an ilustrado? Directly translating from Spanish, ilustrado means "erudite", "learned" or "the enlightened ones". (Thomas) Within the Filipino context in the Spanish colonial time, being called an ilustrado meant that the person was part of the select few Filipinos that were able to go abroad, usually in Spain, to study. During their time abroad, they were influenced and exposed by European liberalism and nationalism. With their newfound knowledge on Western politics and ideals, the ilustrados wanted to return to the Philippines and educate the masses and aid in their aim for equality through reform. Furthermore, the ilustrados also consisted of both native Filipinos and mestizos, who were a racial mix between Filipino and European. The ilustrados were also described as the higher-class elite because they were part of the more wealthy social class as a lot of the ilustrados were land owners or held high positions of power within the political system, holding positions like "gobernadorcillo" (municipal judge/governor) or "cabeza de barangay" (head of the barangay). The ilustrados played a pivotal role in the revolution and were key figures in the rise of Filipino nationalism.

Within the government, ilustrados held significantly higher positions than that of the masses. The mestizos, who were the offspring of Spanish people interbreeding with Filipinos. (Random House Dictionaries) The mestizos were more privileged than the natives because of the fact that their lineage allows for connections and leverage with Spanish society, which was integral to achieving power. They may have better relations

with the local governors or with the church as they are favored more compared to the common man. The highest position a Filipino could have was the gobernadorcillo and a precursor to being a gobernadorcillo was being "literate in oral or written Spanish." (Agoncillo 77) These requirements immediately favor the elite mestizos and the more wealthy Filipino natives as only a small percentage of the population were able to actually go to school and learn Spanish. In fact, "in 1866, the total population of the Philippines was only 4,411,261. The total public schools was 841 for boys and 833 for girls and the total number of children attending these schools was 135,098 boys and 95,260 girls. In 1892, the number of schools had increased to 2,137, 1,087 of which were for boys and 1,050 for girls." (Quezon 35) This class structure, which favored the ones born of Spanish descent and subjugated the pure-Filipino indios, is the main factor in the creation of the Ilustrado class and the eventual class struggle. This gives evidence to the fact that the elite in fact held incomparable amounts of power as compared to the masses.

As for the rise of Filipino nationalism, a man who contributed greatly to the cause was Jose Rizal, the Philippines' national hero. Unlike Bonifacio and Jacinto, Rizal "was brought up in circumstances that even in the Philippines of our day would be considered privileged." (Guerrero 19) Because of his circumstance Rizal was able to receive a higher education in Spain. While in Spain in 1889, "sensing the necessity of a newspaper to promote the interests of the Philippine and the Filipinos, the Filipino reformists founded the newspaper La Solidaridad." (Agoncillo 133) Through La Solidaridad, Rizal and other ilustrados like him were able to shine a light upon the inequality and the oppression that

was occurring between the Spanish and the Filipinos, within the Philippines. Arguably, Rizal's most influential pieces were *Noli Me Tangere*, and *El Filibusterismo*, aimed to expose the wrongdoings of the early colonial Spaniards and to rally the people to revolt.

Alongside Rizal, Antonio Luna was one of the Filipinos who mounted the Propaganda Movement in Spain and wrote for La Solidaridad. When Luna first learned of the underground societies that were planning a revolution, they asked Luna to join their movement but Luna scoffed at the idea and turned down the offer, a reaction that many of the other emigrated ilustrados had. "He considered an armed uprising a premature adventure which would deteriorate into an armed riot because you cannot get two Filipino to agree on one opinion." (Nakpil) This would be something that he would deeply regret all his life. After the actions of the Katipunan were discovered, Luna, his brother Juan and Rizal were imprisoned, which limited his influence on the revolution. In an act of repentance, when Luna was released, he studied field fortifications, guerrilla warfare, organization, and other aspects of military science and would later become one of the most feared Filipino generals.

The analysis of these two key ilustrado figures gives emphasis to the fact that not all the ilustrados had the intention of joining and fighting for the revolution with the sole purpose of maintaining their power after the war was over. For Rizal and Luna, the whole purpose for fighting in the revolution was to give what they thought the Filipino people deserved: an equal and free Philippines.

On the other hand, Emilio Aguinaldo was an ilustrado figure who has faced controversy until the present. Aguinaldo was a Filipino revolutionary, politician, and a military leader who is officially recognized as the First President of the Philippines. He led Philippine forces first against Spain in the latter part of the Philippine Revolution, and then in the Spanish–American War, and finally against the United States during the Philippine–American War. Similar to Rizal, Aguinaldo was born into a well to do family as his father was a gobernadorcillo. At 17, Aguinaldo would be the Cabeza de Barangay of Binakayan to avoid conscription, which emphasizes the influence the elite had on the political system. Allowing a 17 year old boy to lead a community on the basis of him not having to enlist clearly shows the power the elite had over the political system. He would later be the leader of the Katipunan after the controversial execution of Bonifacio and is the figurehead representing the ilustrados in the class struggle between the elite and the masses. (Biography.com) As leader of the Katipunan, the intentions behind the actions he would take have been scrutinized as these actions showed that he did not the same full commitment Bonifacio had to the complete independence of the Philippines.

Section D: Struggle for Leadership

Now the argument on the intentions of the ilustrados is most clearly evident in the struggle for leadership between the radical revolutionaries and the ilustrado revolutionaries. One of the most clear pieces of evidence of this struggle is the internal conflict within the KKK itself. There were two main factions or councils that comprised the KKK: The Magdalo, which was comprised mainly of the elite and the ilustrados and was represented by Aguinaldo, and the Magdiwang, which was composed by members of the masses and was headed by Bonifacio. Thanks to a string of victories by the Magdiwang and defeats by the Magdalo, a rift was created between the two factions and the conflict began. (Francia 273) This conflict grew to the point that neither side would help each other during battles, which resulted to more losses. "Their conflict had deteriorated such that each one refused to assist the other in battles. Moreover, in one of the battles in Manila, the Caviteno forces even failed to provide assistance to the revolutionaries of Manila." (TOMSSUH) Because of these events, Bonifacio was asked to meet in Cavite with the aim of resolving the internal conflict and to unite his people against the Spanish.

This event is known as the Tejeros Convention of March 22, 1897. It is important to note that at this moment in time, Aguinaldo was seen by the masses as the "more superior military strategist" (Francia 131) and that the convention was held in Cavite, Aguinaldo's hometown, which meant that "the gathering was dominated by pro-Aguinaldo members." (Francia 131) After several hours of heated debate between the two factions, Bonifacio

had to intervene and "prudently acceded to the wish of some that a new government be established to replace the Katipunan." (Agoncillo 177) With that, the election for the leadership of the Republic of the Philippines begun, with the result having Aguinaldo as president and Bonifacio as the Director of the Interior. Even with Bonifacio only receiving the position of Director of the Interior, members of Aguinaldo's Magdalo continued to question his competence with one of the members saying "The position of Director of the Interior is an exalted one and it is not proper that a person without a lawyer's diploma should occupy it!" (Agoncillo 178) This portrays the Magdalo's intention to fully remove Bonifacio from all aspects of the government, which attributes to the idea that the ilustrados would do everything they could to keep their power, especially in a time like this where victory against the Spanish looked possible.

Bonifacio and the Magdiwang's dissatisfaction and outrage with the result, fled to Naik "to be as far as possible from the Magdalo men who, they thought were responsible for the commission of anomalies during the Tejeros election" (Agoncillo 179) Here they created the Naik Military Agreement, which basically stated that the Magdiwang would not recognize the Republic and that they would establish their own independent government than the one established in Tejeros. Upon hearing about the goings-on in Naik, Aguinaldo immediately had Bonifacio and his brother Procopio arrested and eventually tried. Andres and Procopio Bonifacio were both "found guilty of sedition and treason," (Francia 132) and were sentenced to death. "On the same day, May 8, President Aguinaldo commuted the death sentence to banishment." (Agoncillo 180) This makes a case for the ilustrados

represented by its main figurehead, Aguinaldo, showing that they wanted what was best for their country, keeping Bonifacio alive. If the ilustrados had the sole aim of maintaining their power, Aguinaldo would not have hesitated to have his main rival and the main obstacle to preserving ilustrado aristocracy killed. Yet, despite this, high-ranking, anti-Bonifacio, Magdalo officers, the main one being Pio del Pilar, who previously sided with Bonifacio but was now one of Aguinaldo's most trusted generals, were able to convince Aguinaldo to go back to the original sentence of death. The example of Pio del Pilar is only one of the many who switched allegiances, showing that they weren't sided with the person with the correct ideology but with the person with the most power. Their willingness to go against someone who they once were allied to shows that they would do anything to stay in power.

With Bonifacio's death, the leadership of the nation was now solely on the "propertied men, members of the principalia, rather than the working-class forces that Bonifacio had represented" (Francia 132) Ramifications of this include a series of negotiations with Spain that Aguinaldo deemed was the way to end the war. One of these is the Malabar manifesto (Appendix). The Malabar manifesto is important because it shows how Aguinaldo now aimed to continue Spanish sovereignty and completely opposed Bonifacio's aim of total independence from the Spanish rule. With this in mind, these set of rules show exactly how the class that now led the Revolution would work: "willing to fight but ready for retreat, capable of fighting bravely but prudently preferring to negotiate in pursuance of its own interests. The formula, evidently, was to use the fighting as a leverage for negotiations." (Constantino 187) Further evidence of the negotiation is

seen in the Truce of Biak-na-Bato, which was the supposed end to the feuding between the Spanish and the Filipinos. The truce is further evidence of how the ilustrados compromised the revolution for their interests because one of the outcomes of the truce was that "Primo de Rivera (Spanish Governor-General) would pay the sum of P800,000 to the rebels in three installments," (Agoncillo 184) half of which would end up with Aguinaldo. This is blatant evidence to the fact that the figurehead of the ilustrados at the time sold out the independence of his fellow countrymen for personal gain.

Section E: Conclusion

As Emilio Aguinaldo stood in the balcony of his home in Kawit, Cavite to announce the independence of the Filipino people, was he truly doing it for the freedom of his countrymen or to keep he and his fellow elite ilustrados in positions of power to maintain their aristocracy? The evidence suggests the latter. The ilustrados initially fully support the revolution as they felt it would not be a beneficial battle for them to participate in, they created a socioeconomic divide that would later fuel the resentment of the masses, they had the leader of the Katipunan, who was the face of the masses, executed to bring their own leader into power. Despite the good and true intention of a handful of ilustrados like Rizal, his actions were not able to compensate for the actions of the majority. The effect of the measures the ilustrado took to stay in power is still seen today. The Philippines is still poverty-stricken caused by the economic divide that the ilustrados left and still riddled by the corruption stemming from the social class structure that favored the elite.

Appendix

Kartilya:

I. "Life which is not consecrated to a lofty and sacred cause is like a tree without a shadow, if not a poisonous weed.

II. A good deed that springs from a desire for personal profit and not a desire to do good is not kindness.

III. True greatness consists in being charitable in loving one's fellow men and in adjusting every movement, deed and word to true Reason.

IV. All mean are equal, be the color of their skin black or white. One may be superior to another in knowledge, wealth and beauty cannot be superior in being.

V. He who is noble prefers honor to personal gain; he who is mean prefers personal profit to honor.

VI. To a man with a sense of shame, his word is inviolate

VII. Don't fritter away time; lost riches may be recovered, but time lost will never come again.

VIII. Defend the oppressed and fight the oppressor

IX. An intelligent man is he who is cautious in speech and knows how to keep the secrets that must be guarded.

X. In the thorny path of life, man is the guide of his wife and children; if he who guides moves toward evil, they who are guided likewise move toward evil.

XI. Think not of woman as a thing merely to while away time but as a helper and partner in the hardships of life. Respect her in her weakness, and remember the mother who brought you into this world and who cared for you in your childhood.

XII. What you do not want done to your wife, daughter and sister, do not do to the wife, daughter and sister of another.

XIII. The nobility of a man does not consist in being a king, not in the highness of nose and the whiteness of the skin, nor in being the priest representing God, nor in the exalted position on this earth, but pure and truly noble is he who, though born in the woods, is possessed of an upright character; who is true to his word; who has dignity and honor; who does not oppress and does not help those who oppress; who knows how to look after and love the land of his birth.

When these doctrines spread and the Sun of beloved liberty shines with brilliant effulgence in these unhappy isles and sheds its soft rays upon the united people and brothers in everlasting happiness, the lives, labors and suffering of those who are gone shall be more than recompensed." (MPPML)

Malabar Manifesto:

(1) Expulsion of the friars and restitution to the townships of the lands they have appropriated.

(2) Spain must concede to us, as she has to Cuba, parliamentary representation, freedom of the press, toleration of all religious sects.

(3) Equality of treatment between Insular and Peninsular civil servants.

(4) Restitution of all lands appropriated by the friars to the original owners, or to townships which shall sell them in small holdings to individual purchasers.

(5) Abolish the government's power to banish citizens, as well as unjust measures against Filipinos.

(6) Legal equality of all persons under the civil and penal code.

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