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Agrarian Relations and Friar Lands

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AGRARIAN RELATIONS AND THE FRIAR LANDS

The History of the friar lands in the Philippines can be traced back to the early Spanish conquistadors who were awarded lands in the form of haciendas for their loyalty to the Spanish crown. Approximately 120 Spaniards were granted either large tracts of land called *sitio de ganado mayor* or smaller tracts called *caballerias*.

One reason is that the Spaniards were not expected to permanently stay in the Philippines. Many of them returned to Spain once they were done serving in the country. Also, the livestock market during this time was still small. Thus the Galleon Trade based in Manila, appealed more to the Spaniards because it offered better economic opportunities.

When the export of agricultural crops started to blossom in the 18th century, the *inquilinato* system was put into place. In this system, one who rented land for fixed annual amount, an *inquilino* was expected to give personal services to the landlords. If he or she failed to do so, he or she would be expelled from the land.

The *inquilinos* could also lease the land they were renting from the landlord to a *kasama* or sharecropper who would then be responsible for cultivating the land. The *inquilinato* system functioned as three-layered system with the landlords on top, the *inquilinos* in the middle and the *kasamas* at the bottom.

The Hacienda de Calamba was originally owned by a Spaniard who donated the land to Jesuit friars to allow him to permanently stay in the Jesuit monastery. However, since the Jesuits were expelled from the Philippines. The hacienda went to the possession of the Spanish colonial government. In 1803, the land was sold to Don Clemente De Azanza. After his death, it was eventually sold to the Dominicans who claimed ownership of the hacienda until late 19th century.

Rizal's family became one of the principle *inquilinos* of the hacienda. They rented one of the largest leased parcel of land measuring approximately 380 hectares. The main crop was sugarcane since it was the most in-demand in the world market then. The Rizal family got their income mainly from the land they rented.

The Ownership of Land: Precolonial Period

The society was called “barangay” composing of people living in the same area under the rule of a Datu. This era showed the importance of personal possessions. There are lots of natural resources to be found in their location. Their debt is sometimes a problem due to the fact that they lack resources for certain occasions, thus it led to pay in double.

The Datu in this era owns the largest patch of land. The people did not feel oppressed while serving their Datu and they also served themselves. They gave tributes “buwis” to their Datu from their own productions.

The Ownership of Land: Spanish Colonial Period

A. The People and the Friars

During this period, the society is in fear. The reverence of the Datu have started to diminish. The Filipino natives turned themselves into Catholics. The indigenous people in our country were classified or called as “Indios”, those with pure Austronesian descent. These Indios became peasants. Thus, the Spanish government in the Philippines established law on debts – amounted to no more than 5 pesos, which is high priced that time.

The friars owned the lands which was donated to them by the Spaniards and the native elites. These friars replaced the roles of the Datus and the Babaylans. The friar estates on the other hand imposed too much price on rents for the tenants. The friars were also exempted from the government taxes, which is very unfair and unjustifiable for the Filipinos. Worst is that, they still collected tributes “buwis” from the laborers.

The attitudes of the Filipinos are one of the reasons why they turned themselves into peasants. They used to believe in good and bad lucks, destiny, and gambling. Gambling like cockfighting is the Filipinos worst attitude that time that lead them to peasantry, and they opted to work on monastic estates for just pride and privilege.

B. Historical Antecedent of the Church at the Hacienda de Calamba

The Hacienda de Calamba’s area was said to be one of the villages of Tabuco, now Cabuyao, Laguna. It was certain that a layman named Don Manuel Jauregui, owned the haciendas of Calamba and Nagtajan which he entrusted to the Society of Jesus (S.J.) on 29th day of January 1759. The conveyance was conditioned on his being permitted to live at the Jesuit monastery for life with a pension of Php 25 per month until his death. From henceforth, it was known as the Hacienda de San Juan Bautista.

However, the trust was not destined to last within Jauregui’s lifetime. On the 27th day of February 1767, King Charles III issued a decree expelling the Jesuits from the entire Spanish Empire including the Philippines. The Jesuits order was accused to be the instigator of the violent riots in Madrid and elsewhere that took place a year earlier. Impoverished, Jauregui took asylum at the monastery of the Hospitaller Order of St. John of God. And as an act of

gratitude, he worked for the transfer of the haciendas to his new benefactor. However, because of the royal policy of promoting secular ownership of lands in the Philippines, the petition, together with many other similar petitions were disapproved. (Escoto, 1975)

Hacienda de Calamba, together with the Makati and Nagtajan were known as the haciendas of the Jesuit Province. The hacienda, together with other Jesuit properties which the government did not see fit to assign to ecclesiastical authorities were confiscated and placed under the management of the Juez Comisionado de Temporalidades or Office of Jesuit Temporalities. The said office was created purposively to administer the Jesuit estates. (Horacio, 1961)

Some inhabitants of Manila were drawn to Calamba. The Mercados became one of the principal inquilinos of the hacienda. It is known that the ancestors of this Filipino ingrate (Jose Rizal) came to Calamba as simple tenants, poor folk on the brink of destitution who rented lands, and little by little created their fortune on the hacienda of the Dominicans. The Hacienda, for many years, yielded more than enough for the tenants. The tenants were able to erect houses of strong materials and their children were able to study in elite schools in Manila and Europe

In the year 1885, for the first time the tenants defaulted their annual interests. The interests increased, the price of sugar was so low. To punish the tenants for their lack of punctuality, the administrator declared all the lands of the hacienda vacant. He also invited citizens of other towns to take over all the lands. Frightened, some tenants paid their obligations with the distressed sale of their sugar. Others ignored the administrator altogether. Few investors responded to the invitation, thus, the administrator softened his position and spared the tenants from eviction, —except four or five who were really victimized by the comedy. (Manila: National Heroes Commission, 1964),

Thus, the short term effect of the Hacienda de Calamba agrarian problems was the eviction of more than three hundred (300) insolvent families who were tenants and subtenants of the estate. These evictees were subsequently replaced by tenants with deeper pockets. This ushered the unprecedented increase in the income of the hacienda from 1892 to 1896. A temporal increase in wealth with wanton disregard for what lies ahead – the 1896 Philippine Revolution.

C. The Peasants' Discontentment

The Philippines has been ultimately involved in the colonial government as ruled with the Roman Catholics churches during the three centuries of Spanish domination in our country. Most of these religious orders such as Dominicans, Augustinians, and Recollects had almost acquired one-tenth of some improved lands in our archipelago. Thus, the native peasants becoming discontented and lead to the Philippine Revolution during 1896-1899.

There was the loudest expression that time for peasant discontentment during the Spanish colonization such that it jumped to agrarian dispute occurred between 1887 – 1891 at the

Hacienda de San Juan Bautista in the province of Laguna –including the territory of what is now called Calamba. And the dispute involved, among others, the respected Rizal family. Knowing the fact that this was not the first time that the peasants challenged the “ownership” of the friars over that vast tracts of lands. Since the friars were alarmed and threatened, the friars branded the problem as rebellion and its players, filibusters. Later on, this led to the deportation of influential Calamba residents to different parts of the archipelago.

According to Atty. Robert John I. Donesa (2009) of University of Santo Tomas, the Hacienda de San Juan Bautista affair, notorious as it was, became a cause célèbre among the members of the Hispano-Filipino Association, a society in Spain composed of Filipinos and Spaniards, which worked for reforms in the Philippines. The incidents were used as propaganda material by the association to expose the friars’ supposed excesses and greed. We can see the details of the said agrarian problems published at the fortnightly *La Solidaridad*, that is why it founded its way into the powerfully critical novels of *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*.

Locally, the Dominicans successfully fought for their rightful ownership over the subject lands in the courts of first level. They were likewise successful in obtaining eviction decrees. When the implementation of these decrees was defied, the friars then asked and were granted assistance of Governor General Valeriano Weyler. The governor general deployed troops to Calamba to effect mass evictions. Contrary to claims of orderly execution of eviction orders, it was in total chaos. These events spurred a more passionate propaganda staged by the ilustrados in Spain.

Ascendancy of Chinese Mestizos’ Land: Spanish Colonial Period

The Chinese Mestizos are normally traders from our country. They leased farm lands from the monastic estates. They shared tenancy with the Indios. These people used to do pacto de retroventa or popularly known as a contract at which the borrower conveyed his land to the lender with the proviso that they could purchase it for the same amount of money that he had received.

These people are related to the Indios as if equal but, in reality they were the ones who were at higher financial situation. They did not help cultivate the farm but they have the capital enough for production.

Conclusion

Among these three periods, we have realized how land has been a “major player” on how Philippine societies run. On how it affects the relationship of each group with each other like the friar-indio, mestizo-indio, and datu-natives. As an end, this shows how the distribution of these lands reflects the shifting of power and wealth among the people.

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