

# FAMOUS TRIALS OF THE PHILIPPINES: THE GOMBURZA TRIAL OF 1872

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## ABSTRACT

Any discussion on famous trials of the Philippines can only begin with the trial of Fr. Mariano Gomez, Fr. Jose Burgos and Fr. Jacinto Zamora, (GOMBURZA). The case stemmed from the Cavite Mutiny, an event best described as an overnight disturbance, but which event led to the trial and execution of the three secular priests in the last few decades of the Spanish era in the Philippines. Historians marked the day of their execution as the day when the term "Filipino" became ingrained in the minds of the citizens of colonial Philippines leading to the advent of the Propaganda Movement in Spain, and eventually the Philippine Revolution of 1896. Dr. Jose Rizal himself admitted that were it not for the three martyr priests, he would not been part of the Propaganda Movement and would have been a Jesuit priest instead. **In spite of its significance, however, the proceedings of the trial have been kept hidden for many years. Fr. John N. Schumacher, a Jesuit historian, claims that until the present, an objective history of the trial cannot be made until the trial records in Segovia, Spain are released to researchers. In 1896, at the start of the Philippine Revolution and 24 years after the trial and execution of the three martyr priests, members of the Katipunan extracted testimonies from captured friars who testified that the whole thing was a set-up. By today's standards, the trial of the three martyr priests could hardly pass the basic tenets of due process.**

## THE CAVITE MUTINY

It is the late 19th century, and one of the key issues of the day is the secularization of parishes. Can the parishes be entrusted to the care of the local clergy? Fr. Burgos and Fr. Gomez championed the rights of the Filipino secular clergy to become the parish priests of local parishes over the claims of friars. Fr. Burgos was outspoken in his quest, and even wrote to newspapers in Spain for this cause. His insistence of secularization irritated the friars who belittled the abilities of the Filipino clergy to govern the parishes. Fr. Burgos's outspoken disposition on this issue even merited a warning from the Jesuit provincial, that should Fr. Burgos continue to speak and write about the secularization issue in public, Fr. Burgos may not turn to the Jesuits for help.

**The story begins with the arrival in Manila in 1871 of General Rafael Izquierdo y Gutierrez.** On the day he assumed control of the colonial government, he declared that " I shall govern with a cross and the sword in hand." Whatever he meant by that, it seemed that the emphasis was on the sword.

At that time, the Spanish government subjected the natives to forced labor and the payment of an annual tribute. The workers assigned to the navy yard and the artillery engineers and the arsenal of Cavite, however, were exempt from these obligations. These artisans were chosen from the infantrymen of the navy. They did not have any rank while they render service to the army. **But General Izquierdo changed all that when he issued an edict removing these privileges, requiring them to pay tax and render forced labor, and removing from them the rights**

**acquired from retirement.** This edict is believed to have caused widespread dismay among those affected who staged the mutiny.

Then in 1896, after achieving an early success as the Magdalo faction of the Revolution in Cavite, members of the Katipunan extracted a testimony from Fr. Agapito Echegoyen, a Recollect, who said that he learned from a fellow friar what really happened. He said that the heads of the friar orders had held a conference on how to get rid of Burgos and other leaders of the native clergy and had decided to implicate them in a seditious plot. A Franciscan friar disguised as a secular priest was sent with a lot of money to Cavite to foment mutiny, and negotiated with Saldua to denounce Burgos as the instigator of the uprising. Afterwards, the heads of the friar orders used a large bribe—"una fuerte suma de dinero" – to convince the Governor-General that Burgos should be arrested, tried, and condemned.

Another friar, Fr. Antonio Piernavieja said that a certain Fray Claudio del Arceo disguised himself as Father Burgos, went to Cavite to spread the idea of an uprising. When the mutiny was suppressed, the friars exerted pressure on the Governor General through his secretary and a lady with great influence on him, plus a gift of 40,000 pesos.

Soon after the publication of the order, forty infantry soldiers of the navy and artillerymen led by a certain Sergeant Lamadrid seized the Fort of San Felipe in Cavite. Sergeant Lamadrid and his band of mutineers killed the officials who resisted. At ten o'clock in the evening when the rebels entered the fort, the rebels fired a cannon to announce victory to the city. But at dawn, the following morning, the rebels failed to get the support of the soldiers who remained loyal to their regiment. From atop the walls, the rebels called loyal soldiers, induced them with promises to make them join the movement, but nothing proved successful. Instead, the regiment hurried to prepare an attack on the rebels, which caused the mutineers to hide in the fort, hoping that Manila would send the rebels help, but none came.

Instead, a column composed of two regiments of infantrymen and one brigade of artillerymen with four cannons came from Manila to quell the rebellion. After a few preliminary assaults, which were not successful, the loyal forces decided to force the surrender of the mutineers by starving them, as it turned out that Fort San Felipe did not have any provisions. With the blockade in force, the mutineers realized their doom and flew the white flag over the walls of the fort.

In spite of the white flag being flung by the rebels, the loyal forces decided to divide into two groups to prepare for the assault of the fort. **While this was being done, the principal gate of the fort was opened, and a small group of rebels carrying the flag of truce stepped out. The loyal forces allowed the rebels to take fifteen steps. When the rebels were near enough, the Spanish commander ordered his soldiers to fire.** Nobody among the small group that stepped out survived. Thereafter, the loyal forces assaulted the fort, firing shots as they entered it. The rebels offered very little resistance, as the mutiny was completely suppressed.

The aftermath of the mutiny was a mass purging of people who have been suspected of having led or supported it. On the day the news of the uprising was received in Manila, the Governor-General immediately caused the arrest of prominent priests and civilians as conspirators of the mutiny. Among them were Fr. Jose Burgos, Fr. Zamora, (curate and co-curate of the Manila Cathedral), Fr. Gomez (curate of Bacoor), D. Agustin Mendoza (curate of Sta. Cruz), Don Feliciano Gomez, Don Antonio

Regidor (eminent lawyer and municipal councilor), Joaquin Pardo de Tavera (counsellor of the administration), Don Enrique Paraiso, D. Pio Basa (old employees), Don Jose Basan, Maximo Paterno, Crisanto Reyes, Ramon Maurente and many others.

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## THE TRIAL

The sergeants and soldiers taken prisoners at the fort were court martialed and immediately shot, some in Manila and others in Cavite. Soldiers of the marine infantry had their sentences commuted to ten years of hard labor in Mindanao. Meanwhile, the clerics, lawyers, businessmen accused were tried by a special military court. Appointed fiscal of the government was a commandant of the infantry, a future governor of the province, Manuel Boscaza. The defenders were some officers of the infantry who were given only 24 hours to prepare their defenses.

The rebels were charged with the crime of proclaiming the advent of a republic in agreement with the ideas of the leaders of the progressive parties of the Peninsula. During the trial, the principal witness was a certain Francisco Saldua, who testified that the mutiny was a conspiracy, and confessed that he was a part of it. He wished to be pardoned in exchange for his testimony. He testified that for three times he delivered messages to Fr. Jacinto Zamora, who had then gone to Burgos's abode. Saldua said that Sergeant Lamadrid and one of the Basa Brothers told Saldua that the "government of Father Burgos" would bring the fleet of the United States to assist a revolution. He also testified that Ramon Maurente was financing it with 50,000 pesos, and Maurente would become the revolutions' field marshal. Saldua also testified that the conspirators met at the home of Lorenzana.

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Some military witnesses testified that they were told that should the uprising succeed, the president of the republic would be the parish priest of St. Peter. At that time, Burgos was the parish priest of the Manila Cathedral, which was known as St. Peter as a parish. Fr. Jacinto Zamora was his co-curate.

Other military witnesses mentioned the name of Fr. Burgos, or the native curate of St. Peter, as the one who would be president, but likewise this knowledge was only heard by them from someone.

**Enrique Genato** testified that Fr. Burgos, Marcelo H. del Pilar, Regidor, Rafael Labra, Antonio Rojas and others spoke of clerics, wars, insurrections and rebellions at secret meetings. **Marina Chua Kempo** testified that she heard the conspirators speak of a general massacre of Spaniards and that **Lamadrid, the leader of the mutiny, would be governor or captain general.** **Fray Norvel** testified that the Creoles were inciting the people to rise up in arms against Spai, and that he saw Burgos passing subversive pamphlets.

**Fr. Burgos's landlady testified as a sort of character witness. (a person who attests to another's moral conduct and good reputation in a court of law.) She vouched that Fr. Burgos was a peaceful man, devout to the virgin, and with no liking for gossip.** She said that others might talk of guns and cannons and cry "Fuera oficiales, canallas, envidiosos, malvados! or Viva Fiiipinas libre, independiente!". **But Fr. Burgos would advise them to seek reforms without spilling of blood or the recourse of violence.**

A curious piece of evidence was a note found in the belongings of **Fr. Jacinto Zamora, a gambling and card game aficionado.** The note said, "Big gathering. Come without fail. The comrades will come well provided with bullets and gunpowder." (**Nick Joaquin claims that this is a joke for bullets and gunpowder were idioms among card players to refer to gambling funds.**) **An idiom is a phrase or an expression that has a figurative. Categorized as formulaic language, an idiom's figurative meaning is different from the literal meaning.**

**Captain Fontivel, Fr. Burgos's counsel, moved to dismiss the case for lack of evidence.** *Hindi reliable ang eyewitness testimonies.* But the Governor General rejected it and ordered the court martial continued. **The defense then moved that Saldua be called to the stand. But the court claimed that Saldua was too ill to be called to the witness stand.** *Malay natin baka pinepeke lang ni Saldua ang sakit niya kasi baka natakot na siya o gusto niya na tumakbo sa ibang lugar para makawala sa influence ng mga Spanish*

After eight hours of discussion, the Council of War condemned to die in the garrote the three priests Don Jose Burgos, Mariano Gomez, and Jacinto Zamora. **Saldua was likewise sentenced to die.** *Kaya siguro pinapatay din nila si Saldua kasi para mailibing na din ang katotohanan.* The others were either sentenced to ten years of hard labor or sent to the Marianas for a period ranging from two to eight years.

At 11 o'clock in the evening of February 15, 1872, the Council of War dictated the sentence and asked the accused if they had anything to say in their defenses. **Burgos and Zamora expressed their innocence, maintaining that they had no relation with the rebels of Cavite and that there had been no positive evidence against them.** *We are innocent unless proven guilty, Dura lex sed lex, even if the law is harsh it is still the law and the law states that the men are innocent until proven guilty.* **The curate Gomez, an old man of seventy years, (Nick Joaquin claims he was 85) said that he was sure his judges would consider him innocent, but seeing that he was denied confrontation with his accusers, a lawyer for his defense chosen by himself, would be useless, the trial over, in influencing those who already decided that he was guilty.** The accused were led to the military jail and on the following day, the sentence was pronounced on them

by the Commissary of the government himself. As part of the sentence, **the Governor General ordered the Archbishop to defrock the priests as has been the custom, Defrocking, unfrocking, or laicization of clergy is the removal of their rights to exercise the functions of the ordained ministry but the archbishop refused to defrock the three martyrs until evidence of their guilt was presented to the archbishop. The evidence was never shown to the Archbishop. Malay natin dahil hindi sumulpot si Saldua sa trial nung una baka iniligpit na siya ng kalaban, Spanish government para hindi na magsalita, loose ends. Unfinished details, incomplete business. Gusto na ng mga espanyol na matapos na ang trial, nagmamadali ilibing ang katotohanan.**

## THE EXECUTION

On February 16, 1872, a big crowd gathered to witness the execution. **Saldua, with a smile on his lips for he thought that his pardon was forthcoming led the march.** Saldua was followed by Burgos, who cried like a boy, bowing to friends as he recognized them from the crowd, and then Zamora -- who had gone mad and had a vague stare -- followed. Last in line was Father Gomez who with eyes wide open, head held high, blessed the natives who were kneeling along the road.

**Saldua, expecting a pardon that never came, was the first to go to the scaffold. Testigo ng Spanish government kinakampihan niya mga espanyol yet hindi siya kinampihan, nakakatawa lang ironic kasi siya pa ang inuna papatayin, nakakapanghinala din kasi siya pa yung inuna, parang gusto na nila mailibing ang loose ends nila.** Then Fr. Gomez was called. Replying to his confessor, a Recollect, Fr. Gomez said, "Dear Father, I know very well that a leaf of a tree does not move without the Will of the Creator; inasmuch as He asks that I die in this place, may His will be done." Minutes later, he was dead.

Fr. Zamora rose when his name was called. He had gone mad two days before and he died without a final word.

**Fr. Burgos** was the last to be called. Upon mounting the scaffold, he cried to Commissary Boscaza, "Gentlemen, I forgive you, and may God forgive you like I do." Then he sat to his death chair.

**Suddenly, he stood up and cried, "But what crime have I committed? Is it possible that I should die this way? My God, is there no more justice on earth?"**

The friars went to him and obliged him to be seated again, begging him to die the Christian way. **Fr. Burgos obeyed, and as he was being tied he rose exclaiming: "But I am innocent!"**

**"Jesus Christ was also innocent," exclaimed one of the friars.**

Then Fr. Burgos stopped resisting. Then the executioner knelt before the condemned man saying, "Father, forgive me if I have to kill you. I do not wish to do so."

Fr. Burgos replied, "My son, I forgive you, comply with your duty."

Then the executioner did, and thereafter, Fr. Burgos was dead.

The natives who gathered to witness the event knelt and recited the prayer of the dying. The Spaniards who saw the reaction of the natives panicked and ran to the city walls of Intramuros.

## THE AFTERMATH

After the execution, the Spanish colonial government prohibited people from talking about the execution, and the records of the trial were kept from the public. *Kaya medyo kulang tayo or limited an gating mga references at resources sa mga tunay talaga na nangyari.* Jose Rizal soon published the novel, "Noli Me Tangere", the plotline of which includes a creole character, Crisostomo Ibarra, who was set up by the friars that led to his being charged with sedition by the authorities. Nick Joaquin says this was Rizal's allusion to the fate of the three martyrs. *Allusion is a figure of speech, in which an object or circumstance from unrelated context is referred to covertly or indirectly. It is left to the audience to make the direct connection.*

On February 15, 1892, twenty years after the event, the La Solidaridad, the newspaper founded by the members of the Propaganda Movement, which included Jose Rizal, in Spain, published an account of the mutiny, trial, and the execution written by Edmund Plauchut, a Frenchman supposedly living in Manila at the time of the trial and execution, from whom most of the above narrative was derived.

A few months earlier Jose Rizal dedicated his second novel El Filibusterismo to the three martyred priests. Appearing on the cover of the novel is a picture of the three martyred priests.

Then in 1896, after achieving an early success as the Magdalo faction of the Revolution in Cavite, members of the Katipunan extracted a testimony from Fr. Agapito Echegoyen, a Recollect, who said that he learned from a fellow friar what really happened. He said that the heads of the friar orders had held a conference on how to get rid of Burgos and other leaders of the native clergy and had decided to implicate them in a seditious plot. A Franciscan friar disguised as a secular priest was sent with a lot of money to Cavite to foment mutiny, and negotiated with Saldua to denounce Burgos as the instigator of the uprising. Afterwards, the heads of the friar orders used a large bribe—"una fuerte suma de dinero" – to convince the Governor-General that Burgos should be arrested, tried, and condemned.

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## CONCLUSION

Thus, until we have a firsthand account of this alleged conspiracy, this question of whether the trial was a set up may not be put to rest. For if Burgos Gomez and Zamora were indeed innocent of any crime, what motive could we attribute to Governor General Izquierdo and his military trial court for having acted as such against the prominent priests? Or is it possible

**that the three martyr priests were just circumstantial victims of Spanish hysteria in the wake of the Cavite Mutiny?**

Historians note that the significance of the trial of the three martyr priests lies in the fact that it marked the day that nationalism was born in the minds of the Filipinos. **By today's standards, the trial of the three martyr priests could hardly pass the basic tenets of due process. Clearly, the evidence against the three priests is at best hearsay, circumstantial, and by no means establishing any guilt beyond reasonable doubt. Thus, it can be said that Filipino nationalism may have been borne out of the cry for justice for the three martyr priests, but justice could not be obtained from the Spanish colonizers.**

*Trinahidor, problems with intimidation and interrogation, and bribery. Siyempre si Saldua kinuha ng mga espanyol, malamang tinakot na nila o binayaran para magsalita laban sa mga Pilipino, baka rin siguro gusto lang ni saldua sagipin ang kaniyang sarili kaya nakipagsabwatan na siya sa mga espanyol at nilaglag niya ang mga Pilipino, de bale na kung totoo o hindi ang pinagsasabi niyang witness accounts basta ang importante hindi siya ma death penalty o mapapatay ng mga espanyol Hindi reliable ang eyewitness testimonies. They were called martyrs because they died innocently.*

The foregoing accounts were taken from Edmund Plauchut's article "The Philippine Islands" in La Solidaridad, February 15, 1892, and Nick Joaquin's "How Filipino was Burgos?" in A Question of Heroes, published by the Filipinas Foundation in 1977 and reprinted recently by Anvil. Nick Joaquin based his trial accounts from Manuel Artigas who had copies of the trial records. Of course, Fr. Schumacher is saying that the authentic records are still in Segovia, Spain and prohibited from being disclosed to researchers. *Bakit kaya nila tinatago? Nakakapanghinala, tinatago ang katotohanan.* Finally, the date of execution has been officially marked on February 17, 1872 but according to the La Solidaridad and Edmund Plauchut, it took place on February 16, 1872.

The account of the execution contained is from Edmund Plauchut. It appeared in the La Solidaridad February 15, 1892 issue. Our second primary source is Fr. Shumacher's Revolutionary Clergy published by the Ateneo de Manila University Press. Our third primary source is from Shumacher, John N. , is a priest and an academic journalist as well.

#### **SECONDARY SOURCES:**

- <http://lavidalawyer.blogspot.com/2005/09/famous-trials-of-philippines-gomburza.html>

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- Fr. Shumacher's Revolutionary Clergy published by the Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- The account of the execution contained in this post is from Edmund Plauchut. It appeared in the La Solidaridad February 15, 1892 issue.