Re-examining the Root Cause of the Calamba Agrarian Unrest of 1891[1]

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This paper will show that the Calamba agrarian unrest of 1891 was not purely a landlord-tenant affair. The ultimate reason behind the destruction of the harmonious relationship between the Dominicans and tenants was the discovery of an alternative source of sugar that gradually lessened the dependence of European consumers on imported cane sugar from the Philippines. The rise of beet sugar industry in Europe resulted to a significant drop of the price of sugar in the Philippines which ultimately reduced the income of families dependent on the sugar industry. The problem became complicated because instead of looking for a solution that will benefit everybody, the major players in Philippine sugar industry tried to solve the crisis based on their sectoral interest. The *inquilinos* (tenants) tried to lessen the impact of the crisis by not paying rent to the owners. The Dominicans on their part initiated legal measures that ultimately expelled the recalcitrant tenants out of the hacienda. These moves did not help both parties in coming up with a win-win solution to the problem. Consequently, the problems of the sugar industry became more complicated and the relationship of the Dominicans and the *inquilinos* deteriorated further.

Keywords: *Hacienda de Calamba, Jose Rizal, Paciano Rizal, Inquilinos, Friar Lands, Philippine Sugar Industry, Beet Sugar and Tenancy*

Studies in the past that dealt with the 1891 Calamba agrarian unrest analyzed it within the context of the struggle of two sectors of the Philippine society with opposing economic interest. The *inquilinos* of *Hacienda de Calamba* represented the former while the Dominicans represented the latter. Jose Rizal and other prominent members of the propaganda movement played central

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role in articulating the issues that the tenants raised.[2] The movement used the raised issues that tenants raised as pieces of evidence to besmirch the reputation of the Spanish friars and to solicit support from the Filipinos.

This paper will neither contradict nor challenge this popular view because indeed it has historical basis. But it will no longer be used as its framework because doing so will make the paper redundant and will in no way contribute to the enrichment of Philippine historiography. What this paper intends to do is to present the Calamba agrarian unrest from another perspective. It will analyze the unrest within the context of the rise and fall of Philippine sugar industry and it will be correlated with the global developments that happened in the last quarter of the 19th century. This is an interesting approach because it gives the readers vital information that could explain the behavior of the major players in *Hacienda de Calamba*.

Like many other socio-political issues, historical literatures that deal with the Calamba unrest may be divided into two opposing groups, namely the landowners and the tenants. In most cases, it is the version of the landlords that becomes dominant and well-articulated. But in the case of *Hacienda de Calamba,* it was the version of the tenants that became very popular and was considered the "true version." Part of the reasons of it is the fact that Rizal and other propagandists highlighted it in their articles published in *La Solidaridad*.[3] It is unfortunate that parties involved in this issue did not recognize and address the ultimate cause of the crisis. Consequently, they were not able to come up with a solution that could have restored the harmony and synergy that prevailed during the golden age of Philippine sugar industry.

The Rise of Philippine Sugar Industry

Historians dealing with Philippine sugar industry have various theories as regards the origin of Philippine sugar. C.W. Hines theorized that sugar cane (*saccharum officinarum*) originated from Taiwan and singled out the Chinese overseas traders as the persons responsible for introducing the crop to the Filipinos.[4] He based his conclusion on the observation that most of the old facilities that Filipinos used in extracting sugar juice were introduced by Chinese traders. Moreover, it is also a common knowledge that Formosa and Java were the early producers of sugar in

[2] The Propaganda Movement was an informal organization formed by Filipinos living in Europe in the 1870's. The movement aimed to bring to the attention of the Spanish authorities the reforms that Filipinos were asking from the colonial government. Some of their demands include representation in the Spanish Cortes, secularization of the parishes, recognition of the Philippines as a province of Spain, guarantee of basic freedoms and a few others. For more details about this movement cf. John Schumacher SJ, *The Propaganda Movement.* (Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1973.

[3] See Complain," *La Solidaridad,* 30 September 1890; "The Kalamba Incident." *La Solidaridad,* 31 January 1892; Rizal, Jose M. "Sin Nombre." *La Solidaridad,* 28 February 1890.

[4] C.W. Hines, *The Sugar Industry in the Philippines.* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1914), 2.

Asia. Carlos Quirino, on his part, asserted that Philippine sugar originated from New Guinea and the Guinean traders were the ones responsible for bringing the crop to the Philippines.[5] Recently, some scholars are considering the possibility that sugar cane is an indigenous plant of the Philippines. The climate and the type of soil of Taiwan, Java, New Guinea, Thailand and China are relatively the same. Hence, the chance that sugar cane evolved in these countries independently from each other is a big possibility.

Sugar is a commodity that predated the coming of Western powers in the Philippines. Before Magellan (c.1480-1521) came, local folks were already planting sugar cane and its juice was a favorite drink of many Filipinos. They used it as sweetener and in some places, it was fermented into wine. Antonio Pigafetta (c.1491-c.1534) wrote that Rajah Calanao (16th century), the chieftain of Northern Mindanao, offered them sugar juice as part of the latter's good gesture.[6] Similarly, the natives of Palawan gave the Spaniards some stalks of sugar cane as a form of gift.

During the first 200 years of Spanish occupation of the Philippines, colonial officials paid little attention to the agricultural products of the country. Many of them did not have capital and had no long term plan in the colony. Instead of spending their time and money on agriculture, they invested in the lucrative galleon trade. The reign of the Bourbon kings in Spain in the 18th century changed the economic outlook of the Philippines. King Charles III [1716-1788] sent economic-oriented governor-generals to the Philippines and ordered them to develop the colonies and make them at par with the British, Dutch and French colonies. One agricultural product that was given special attention was sugar. The British occupation of Manila (1762-64) was another factor that accelerated the growth of the sugar industry. The British saw its enormous potential and encouraged their countrymen to develop the industry. Because of the special attention that the sugar industry received from the colonial government and other foreign investors, the Philippines became one of the leading exporters of sugar during from 1775 to 1779.[7] Jonathan Fast and Jim Richardson wrote:

> *Sugar exports rose from 100 tons in 1788 to 4,500 tons in 1796, a reflection of the increased number of European ships calling at Manila. Although small by present day standard, this represented a fairly substantial proportion of total world sugar trade, and in this period Manila was probably the largest exporter of sugar in Asia.*[8]

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[5] Carlos Quirino, *History of the Philippine Sugar Industry.* (Manila: Kalayaan Publishing Co. Inc., 1974), 1.

[6] Antonio Pigafetta, *First Voyage Around the World.* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1969), 54.

[7] Manuel Azcarraga, "La Libertad de Commercio en las Islas Filipinas" as quoted in Quirino, 12.

[8] Jonathan Fast and Jim Richardson, *Roots of Dependency: Political and Economic Revolution in 19th Century Philippines.* (Quezon City: Foundation for Nationalist Studies, 1979), 7.

The opening of Manila to world trade in 1834 further accelerated the development of the sugar industry. The new policy lured American, British, French, German and Swiss companies to invest in the Philippines. They served as credit providers and middlemen between the local producers and the buyers of sugar abroad. They also helped the Filipinos modernize the industry by introducing new farming techniques and modern machineries. Because of the growing demand for sugar in the world market, sugar planters expanded the acreage of their haciendas (big landholdings) and improved their transportation and refining facilities. They also constructed bigger warehouses and built sugar mills with higher capacity. Big *hacenderos* (owners of the hacienda) even went to Europe to buy steam engines and boilers that made sugar production more efficient and economical. The end of the galleon trade, the opening of Suez Canal (1869), the introduction of high yielding variety and the liberal policy that the colonial government implemented were the other factors that brought about the golden age of the sugar industry.

One of the *haciendas* (estates) that made sugar its major crop was the *Hacienda de Calamba*. The estate was considered an ideal place for large scale sugar production because it is just less than a hundred kilometers away from Manila. Hence, it was easy to manage and the cost of transporting goods was not expensive. To address the problem of scarcity of workers, the Dominicans encouraged their converts in Biñan and other nearby towns to settle in Calamba and help them develop their land. They adopted the *inquilino* system to ensure the availability of workers. This system could be likened to a leasehold system wherein the lessee agrees to pay the landowner a definite amount in exchange for the use of the land. Initially, for a period of two to four years, the *inquilinos* were not required to pay rent. The Dominicans assumed that during this period, the land was not yet productive and the *inquilinos* were still clearing and preparing the land. After the said grace period, the *inquilinos* would start paying the agreed rental (*canon* or *terrazgo*). The amount would depend on the fertility of the soil, proximity to the market, customs of the locality, relationship of the administrator and the tenants and other factors that affected the productivity of the land.

TABLE 1

Schedule of Rent in Calamba Estate, c. 1890's

1st Class: P30, for a harvest of 500 pilones, which sold at 3.50 each, grossing P1,750.00.

2nd Class: P25, for a harvest of 400 pilones, which sold at P3.50 each, grossing P 1,400.00.

3rd Class: P20, harvest of 300 pilones, gross income P1,000.00

4th Class, P15, harvest of 200 pilones, gross income P700.

Source: Jose Arcilla S.J. trans. "Documents Concerning the Calamba Deportation of 1891," *Philippine Studies* 18 (1970): 577-633. A *pilon* is a loaf of sugar weighing 150 pounds.

The moment an *inquilino* enters a lease agreement, he has to follow certain policies. First, whatever improvements he will put up in the friar lands will remain there forever. He will not be compensated or reimbursed for the expenses he incurred in putting up the improvements. Second, it is his duty to maintain the irrigation facility of the hacienda. Third, he is obliged to help the administrator in controlling locusts and other pests that destroy the crops. Lastly, the *inquilino* must settle his obligations to the owners regardless of the output of the farm.[9]

Some *inquilinos* personally tilled their rented lands while others hired sharecroppers called "*kasamas*". Under this arrangement, the *inquilinos* acted as local capitalist and the *kasamas* did the manual work. During harvest time, the *inquilinos* and the *kasamas* would deduct the rent from the total harvest and whatever amount left would be divided among them. The Dominicans preferred to lease their lands to *inquilinos* than to *kasamas* because it freed them from supervisory work. They would have minimal role in the process of production once they have delineated already the parcel of land rented to the *inquilinos*. Ordinarily, they would stay in Manila most of the time and go to their hacienda only during harvest season to collect the rent.

Rizal and the *Hacienda de Calamba*

The economic history of the family of Jose Rizal could be easily understood if it would be correlated with the history of Philippine sugar industry in general and with *Hacienda de Calamba* in particular. The family was so dependent on the hacienda and its members were affected by its fluctuations and general trends. At the time the *hacienda* was on its peak, the family of Rizal was one of its beneficiaries. When it went down, they were affected financially. It is interesting to correlate the issues surrounding the family of Rizal with that of the *Hacienda de Calamba* and the sugar industry because it unravels a lot of information that one could not get by just reading the writings of Rizal and his biographers.

Jose Rizal came from a rich family and his ancestors had decent political career in Laguna. Juan Mercado, his grandfather, had been thrice mayor of Biñan (1808, 1813 and 1823). Lorenzo Alonso, his maternal grandfather, also served as *capitan municipal* of Biñan in 1824. Francisco Mercado, Rizal's father, did not continue the political tradition of his forefathers. Instead, he concentrated on farming and at a certain point became one of most successful farmers in their locality. He left Biñan after he got married and settled in the neighboring town of Calamba. He befriended the Dominicans and was able to negotiate a lease contract totaling 500 hectares.[10] For him to be able to cultivate the land awarded to him, he hired *kasamas* with whom he

[9] Contrato de Arrendamiento de Fincas Rusticas," *Philippine Insurgents Records*, Reel 520, Package No. 278.

[10] Jose Arcilla. "Documents Concerning the Calamba Deportation of 1891" *Philippine Studies* (1970): 587.

entered into sharing agreement. His venture proved to be a big success because in a short period of time, his family became one of the richest families in Calamba.

The Dominicans were not the original owners of *Hacienda de Calamba*. The estate was used to be administered by the Jesuits but they had to give it up in 1768 after they were expelled by Spanish authorities. The colonial government temporarily managed the hacienda but disposed it through public auction in 1803. Jose G. Azanza won the bidding and managed the hacienda for almost three decades. In 1831, Azanza's finances became messy and was forced to sell his landholdings to the Dominicans.[11] The new owners developed the hacienda and it became very productive and lucrative. Dominicans assigned lay administrators, who worked full time in the hacienda, to directly manage the operations and to personally address the concerns of farm workers. The income that the Dominicans got from the hacienda was good enough to support their community in Laguna and to cover the expenses of the other institutions they owned.

Francisco Mercado and his family had very good relationship with the Dominicans during the first two decades of their stay in the *Hacienda.* One granddaughter of Francisco wrote that the latter used to give the Dominican administrator a fat turkey every time he went to their farm to collect the rent. This practice continued for several years that it became customary for the hacienda administrator to get turkey from their stock whenever he felt like having a turkey dinner.[12] Paciano, Jose Rizal's only brother, also had nice memories of the Dominicans during his younger years. At the time Jose was studying in the University of Santo Tomas (UST), Paciano contracted a lease agreement with the Dominicans in Pansol at the expense of other families who coveted the same land. The term of the contract was favorable to Paciano because he was not required to pay rental for the first five years. Moreover, instead of charging him the standard rate of 25 pesos, he was only asked to pay 15 pesos.[13] Paciano proved to be a good farmer and the lands produced excellent harvest. Because of these, Paciano wrote to his brother in 1883 to refrain from antagonizing the Dominicans for they have been very good to him and his family. Part of the letter says:

> *The land in Pansol is improving and much can be expected from it in the future, provided I enjoy good health. The land is good and extensive. This land, which did not cost us anything and was ceded by the Corporation to us in preference to anybody else, deserves to be appreciated a little.* ***We ought to be a little grateful to***

[11] Asuncion Bantug-Lopez, *Lolo Jose: An Intimate and Illustrated Portrait of Jose Rizal.* (Quezon City: Vibal Foundation, 2008), 91. For more details about the owners, development and controversies surrounding the *Hacienda de Calamba* see Dennis Morrow Roth, *The Friar Estates of the Philippines* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1977).

[12] Ibid.,105.

[13] Arcilla, 587.

> ***the corporation which, without owing us anything, desires the welfare of our family… Knowing this, it behooves us to refrain from displeasing them in the least with our behavior, in view of the needlessness of our service.***[14] [emphasis supplied]

The family of Rizal took advantage of the opportunities made available to them in *Hacienda de Calamba*. Hard work, accompanied with good judgment and sheer luck, made them one of the most prosperous families living in the hacienda. The income they got from farming and from the business ventures of Doña Teodora enabled them to build a two-storey stone house located in a very prominent site just a stone's throw away from the parish church. Rizal's niece wrote in her memoirs that "the Mercados were considered one of the richest families in town."[12] Leon Ma. Guerrero, one of the biographers of Jose Rizal, also shared the same observation. He wrote:

> *He* [Don Francisco] *became one of the town's wealthiest men, the first to build a stone house and buy another – in a town with only four or five houses of any size – keep a carriage, own a library, and send his children to school in Manila. Jose himself had a yaya that is to say a nanny or personal servant, although he had five elder sisters who, in less affluent circumstances, could have been expected to look after him. When he was old enough, his father engaged a private tutor after him, a former classmate called Leon Monroy who lodged with the family and gave the boy lessons in reading, writing and the rudiments of Latin.*[13]

Undoubtedly, the economic status of the Rizal family was far much better compared with the other farm workers in Laguna and the nearby provinces. Part of the explanation for this could be attributed to the hard work, good judgment and ingenuity of Don Francisco and the members of his family. One should not also set aside the favorable terms that they got from the Dominicans and the availability of farm infrastructure that enabled them to produce bountiful harvest. Lastly, the family of Rizal also benefited from the high price of sugar in the international market from 1850 to 1870. Taking all of this into consideration, one will no longer be surprised why the family of Rizal was able to acquire a big fortune while working as tenant in *Hacienda de Calamba*.

The Rise and Fall of Philippine Sugar Industry

The success of the sugar industry could not be attributed solely to the Bourbon-sent governor-generals. Credit must be given also to foreign investors who directly participated in the development of sugar and other agricultural products. For

[14] Jose Rizal, *Letters between Rizal and Family Members*. Vol. 2 Book I (Manila: National Heroes Commission, 1964), 84. At the height of the sugar crisis, Paciano gave up his land in Pansol because according to him he could no longer afford to pay its rent. Ibid., 230.

instance, the active involvement of the British in Philippine economy had significant impact on the country's financial well-being. They established commercial houses in many parts of the colony and provided credit facilities to those who want to engage in commercial agriculture. They also helped in marketing Philippine products in their own country and in other parts of Europe. Because of their successful stint in the Philippines, other nationalities followed them when Manila was opened to world trade in 1834. By the middle of the 19th century, the Spaniards were no longer considered the major economic players in the Philippines. As one aphorism puts it "Spain kept the cow while Britain and the United States drank the milk."[15]

A number of events in the international scene contributed to the development of Philippine sugar industry. One is the opening of Suez Canal which reduced by half the travel time from Manila to Europe. The shortened route lessened the cost of bringing goods to Europe which ultimately made the price of sugar competitive in the European market. Second, the numerous wars that happened in Europe disrupted the local production of sugar which forced them to source their requirement from Southeast Asia. Statistics show that at the height of the Napoleonic war (1803-1815) and the Crimean war (1853-1856), sugar exports of the Philippines increased significantly. Similar observation could also be said at the time the U.S. was in the state of Civil War (1861-1865). After the abolition of slavery, sugar production of the U.S. declined which made them dependent on imports coming from sugar-producing countries.

Francisco Mercado was fortunate because at the time he contracted lease agreement with the Dominicans, the price of sugar in the world market was on its peak. The period 1840 to 1861 may be considered the golden age of Philippine sugar industry. In 1840, sugar export of the Philippines was only 16,815 tons. By the time Rizal was born in 1861, the figure, rose to 53,114 tons and in 1880, it went high up to 181,697.[16] Sugar export of the Philippines almost grew a thousand times in just a span of four decades. During this period, the Philippines was ranked the third biggest producer of sugar next to Cuba and Java. This development brought a lot of benefits not only to the Dominicans but to their tenants as well. The result of the sugar boom during this period is best described by Fast and Richardson in these lines:

> *The three decades of boom of sugar prices dating from the Crimean war had generated a wealthy planter class which was becoming accustomed to extravagant living. Fine haciendas were built on sugar plantations and imported furniture, pianos and carriages became commonplace. Italian opera companies visited annually after the opening of Suez and the children of planters began to obtain*

[15] Bantug-Lopez, 105.

[16] Leon Ma. Guerrero, *The First Filipino: A Biography of Jose Rizal.* (Manila: Guerrero Publishing, 2007), 20.

> *European education as a matter of course. Prior to 1884 the price of sugar, the foundation of hacendero fortunes, had never suffered serious fluctuation or decline within memory or experience.*[17]

The glorious days of Philippine sugar industry did not last long because at the time when sugar was so in demand, many European researchers looked for alternatives that could be sourced locally. They realized that it was disadvantageous on their part if they would remain dependent on other countries. For several centuries, they have been sourcing their sugar requirements from countries that generate it from sugar cane. This crop grows abundantly in Southeast Asia and Central America. One reason why European countries maintained colonies in these regions was precisely to make sure that they will have stable supply of sugar at a reasonable price. For quite some time, this system worked. But as political tension rocked Europe, the supply of sugar was disrupted from time to time. Hence, they started to look for an alternative local source of sugar.

Major breakthrough happened in the 18th century when agricultural researchers in Europe discovered the potential of beet sugar (*Beta vulgaris*) as an alternative source of sucrose. Sugar beet was already a known crop as early as during the Greek and Roman period. But it was more known for its medicinal use rather than a sweetener. It was also used as additive to make feeds palatable to cattle and other ruminants. It was not used as source of edible sugar because its supply was very limited. Moreover, it is a very demanding crop and grows best on deep rich soil with regular supply of water. Obviously, these requirements are hard to satisfy in Europe. Lastly, beet sugar did not prosper because companies with big investment in sugar cane industry prevented it from developing further.

Sugar beet is not a tuber but a root crop. Once it is pressed, it produces juice that has high concentrate of sucrose. In 1590, French botanist Oliver de Serres (1539-1619) conducted studies on how to extract sweet syrup from beet. But his experiments did not generate widespread interest because the supply of cane sugar was not yet a problem. In 1747, Prussian chemist Andreas Sigismund Marggraf (1709-1782) explored the potential of beet sugar but like earlier attempts, his initiative did not result to widespread production. Franz Karl Achard (1753-1821), Marggraf's student, continued what his predecessor started and generated a variety of beet sugar that produced higher yield of sucrose. Under the patronage of Frederick William III of Prussia (1770-1840), Achard opened in Cunern, Silesia (present day part of Poland) the world's first beet sugar factory in 1801. By the turn of the 19th century, the variety of beet that he was producing contained five to six percent more glucose compared with other variety.

[17] Fast and Richardson, 10.

The European beet sugar industry developed rapidly during and after the Napoleonic Wars (1802–1815). In 1807, Britain imposed a naval blockade against France and her allies, which made it very difficult for the latter to import sugar from their regular sources. This move disrupted the supply of sugar in Continental Europe and it forced many affected countries to look for local sources of sugar. One of the options that they considered was to source their requirement from their own sugar beet industry. When the Napoleonic wars ended, over 300 sugar beet mills were already operating in France and Central Europe. From then on, beet sugar would replace cane sugar in continental Europe. As shown in the table below, at the time Jose Rizal published *Noli Me Tangere* in 1887, world production of beet sugar was already higher compared with cane sugar.

Table 2
World Production of Sugar (in tons)

	Source of Sugar	Year 1880	Year 1887	Variance	Percent
1.	Cane sugar	3,285,714	2,333,004	- 952,710	- 28%
2.	Beet sugar	1,443,349	2,492,610	1,049,261	72%
	Total	**4,729,063**	**4,825,614**	**96,551**	**2%**

Source: John Foreman. (1980). *The Philippines*. (Makati: Filipiniana Book Guild), p. 275.

The discovery of beet as source of sugar and its subsequent commercialization in Europe had devastating effects on Philippine sugar industry. From 1883 onward, sugar export declined continuously. It left an irreparable damage to the industry and its effects haunted Filipino sugar producers for almost three decades. Filipinos tried to export their sugar to the U.S. but transportation cost, high tariff duty and the booming Cuban, Hawaiian and Puerto Rican sugar industries prevented them from penetrating the American market.[18] The sugar crisis that happened in the 1880's resulted to financial losses and socio-political unrest. The middle class of the Philippine society, who tasted the bounty of the sugar industry, severed their ties with their landlords and joined the radical movements against the Spaniards. They were expecting that the moment they become owner-cultivators, their life will improve significantly.

Rizal and the Sugar Crisis

When Jose Rizal was studying in Ateneo Municipal and UST, the sugar industry was already on its downward trend. But its effects were not yet felt by the family because they had enough savings to cushion its impact. But at the time he was already studying in Spain, the financial strain brought by the sugar crisis was already unbearable. There are a number of letters in the *Epistolario Rizalino* where one could

[18] Quirino, 39.

see the impact of the sugar crisis in the finances of the Rizal family. Herewith are some excerpts:

Paciano to Jose Rizal, 5 November 1884

> *"I suppose you must be querulous of us for not receiving letters from here and for the irregularity of the remittance of your pension. You have reason to be so, inasmuch as you don't know what is happening to us. Imagine that on account of the low price of sugar, we lost more than three thousand and we are still in debt for four thousand for the new machine; since the month of June until now, we are without a peseta."*[19]

Paciano to Jose Rizal, 8 December 1886

> *"If we manage to mill our sugar I shall send you the amount you lack for the printing. There is a great deal of poverty in this town; a third of the people eat only once a day."*[20]

Paciano to Jose Rizal, 6 March 1887

> *"With this letter goes another addressed to Luna in Paris with a draft for P1,000; I am not sending this to you directly for fear that it may go astray since you yourself say in your last letter that you are thinking of moving to Switzerland. I would have wanted to send you more but it is not possible because last year's sugar is still unsold. However, I believe that, though this sum is inadequate, it should suffice to cover your traveling expenses, doctorate fees, and essential ophthalmological instruments. If there is anything left over, use it to print your book; leave for better times any other things you may want to buy, just as I refrain for now from ordering the bicycle and the German shotgun which you described in your letter."*[21]

These letters of Paciano describe how devastating the sugar crisis was. It spared no one even rich *inquilinos* like the Rizals. By the 1880's, the beet sugar industry in Europe and the U.S. were already wrecking havoc on sugar cane producing countries. Table 2 shows that by 1887, beet sugar industry had overtaken already cane sugar producers in terms of output. This was the end result of the stimulus package and bounty system that European countries extended to beet sugar farmers. By the time Rizal was studying medicine in Europe, world market was already flooded with cheap high grade sugar. Paciano mentioned in his letters that he could no longer sell his sugar harvest at a good price and his decision to hoard it for a time did not yield positive results.

[19] Rizal, *Letters between Rizal and Family Members,* 149. Peseta was the currency of Spain from 1869 to 2002.

[20] Ibid., 238.

[21] Ibid., 260.

Table 3
Price of Muscovado
Sugar in Manila

Year	Price Range	Average	Year	Price Range	Average
1880	4.250-5.625	4.937	1886	3.000-4.125	3.562
1881	4.375-4.875	4.625	1887	2.875-4.250	3.562
1882	4.500-5.500	5.000	1888	3.500-4.125	3.812
1883	4.500-5.000	4.750	1889	3.625-5.250	4.437
1884	3.250-4.500	3.875	1890	3.250-4.000	3.625
1885	3.000-4.250	3.625	1891	3.375-4.000	3.687

Source: John A. Larkin, (1993). *Sugar and the Origin of Modern Philippine Society.* (Quezon City: NewDay Publishers), p. 52.

Table 4
Destination of Philippine Sugar

Year	Great Britain	Europe	United States	Total
1880	70,939	4,562	99,480	174,981
1881	110,658	9,685	81,710	202,053
1882	67,224	3,213	77,126	147,563
1883	57,213	9,362	142,915	209,490
1884	19,022	8,203	78,430	105,655
1885	33,827	4,242	150,373	188,442
Average	**59,813**	**6,544**	**105,005**	**171,364**
1886	26,873	5,529	132,985	165,387
1887	30,367	4,582	120,908	155,857
1888	31,655	4,703	75,253	111,621
1889	55,755	5,205	114,025	174,985
1890	40,684	3,989	36,052	80,725
1891	49,603	2,375	60,986	112,964
Average	**39,156**	**4,397**	**90,034**	**133,589**
Variance	**- 20,657**	**- 2,147**	**- 14,971**	**- 37,775**
Rate of Decrease	**34%**	**32%**	**13%**	**22%**

Source: Larkin, *Sugar and the Origin of Modern Philippine Society,* p. 250.

Tables 2 and 3 show that by 1880's the price of Philippine sugar was already erratic and the trend was downward. The figures in both tables were very discouraging on the part of the stakeholders in Philippine sugar industry. In Table 3, one could see that countries which in the past were regular destinations of Philippine sugar gradually lessened their sugar import from the Philippines. Britain's figure is the most alarming because its average importation in a span of five years declined by 34 percent. The general average of 22 percent is big enough that it flooded the local market with cheap sugar. The family of Rizal and other sugar farmers were severely affected by this development and they knew that the golden age of the sugar industry was already coming to an end. Fast and Richardson wrote:

> *As the slump was not merely due to market fluctuations but rather to fundamental changes in the structure of the world sugar economy, the prospect of early return to pre-1884 prices were poor to say the least. The 1884 price decline seen in historical perspective was not simply a temporary depression but a permanent re-adjustment to the market structure resulting from the advent of beet sugar as a commercial rival to cane. Philippine export earnings fell off by nearly a third in the years following the slump, but production figures did not appreciably decline. Exports were re-directed after the loss of the UK market to some of the slack was taken up by increased sales to the U.S. But higher transportation cost made it difficult for the Philippines to compete with booming Hawaiian production, which also had the advantage of coming under U.S. tariff protection. By 1887, the Manila price reached a record low of 1.7 cents per pound.*[22]

It is mentioned in Table 3 that aside from Europe, Philippine sugar was also exported to the U.S.. Initially, sugar producers considered the U.S. as an alternative market, but this option was not very promising. In 1884, Rizal wrote Paciano that Spanish colonial officials were negotiating a treaty with the U.S. wherein sugar from Cuba and Puerto Rico will be admitted in the American market free of duty.[23] If the request would be granted, Philippine sugar would end up more expensive than its competitors in the American market. Because of this scenario, Rizal advised his brother to prepare for the worst scenario and explore other options that will not involve other nations.

Going back to the three letters of Paciano, one could see that the initial reaction of the sugar planters was to tighten their belt hoping that things would improve in the coming years. But after realizing that a return to pre-1880 scenario was already impossible, they looked for a long term solution to the problem. Some tenants accepted the crisis calmly but those who were accustomed to opulent lifestyle felt upset when all of a sudden they lost a significant part of their income. Out of desperation and disgust, they started to question some practices which in the past were never considered problematic.

[22] Fast and Richardson, 45

[23] Rizal, *Letters between Rizal and Family Members,* p. 152.

Calamba Agrarian Unrest

The sugar crisis in the late 1880's was an offshoot of the financial crisis brought about by the loss of the European market. The *inquilinos* of different friar haciendas were the ones severely affected because farming was their major source of income. The friar landlords and other hacenderos were also affected but since they were affluent and they have enough savings, they managed the crisis calmly. Problems which were disregarded in the past became major source of conflict. For instance, the ownership of the *Hacienda de Calamba* and the act of collecting rent were accepted practices for several decades. But in 1890's, it became a legal and social issue that ultimately resulted to the expulsion of the Rizal family and many other tenants from the Dominican hacienda.

The conflict between the Dominicans and the *inquilinos* started on December 30, 1887 when the *gobernadorcillo* of Calamba received a letter from the Central Administrator of Direct Taxes asking whether haciendas in their respective locality had increased its production and size in the last three years.[24] Their answer would be vital in determining whether landowners were paying the right amount of land tax. According to Spanish law, landowners should pay the government 10 percent of their harvest. The official of Calamba tasked to write the reply was Nicolas Llamas. At that time, Jose Rizal had just arrived from Europe and he actively participated in writing the reply. He helped Llamas in translating the directive into Tagalog so that ordinary people could understand it. The reply, which was signed by more than 50 Calamba residents, was submitted to colonial authorities on January 8, 1888.

The *inquilinos* of *Hacienda de Calamba* were not primarily concerned with correct taxation when they wrote their reply. Rather, they took it as an opportunity to explore means that could help them survive the devastating effects of the sugar crisis. Aside from answering the questions of the administrator, they also brought to the attention of the administrator the economic injustices committed by the Dominicans. Regarding the question whether the size of the hacienda increased, they answered positively. They claimed that it happened every time the hacienda was measured. They sarcastically remarked that "either a supernatural force that invisibly extends the land or a natural power that shortens the measure of the official, who after

[24] The order states; "Gobernadorcillo of Calamba: As soon as you receive this order, jointly with various *principales* of that town you will inform this office if the estate owned by the Dominican fathers situated in that locality has increased its products or lands during the last three years in compliance with the wishes of the Central Administration of Direct Taxes communicated in an official letter of the 24th instant. Santa Cruz. 30 December 1887. – Emilio Bravo." The order and the reply of the people of Calamba were published as "The Town of Calamba". Marcelo H. Del Pilar, *Monastic Supremacy in the Philippines* (Manila: Garcia Publishing House, 1958), 88. See also Jose Rizal, "Petition of the Town of Calamba" *Political and Historical Writings,* vol. VII. (Manila: National Heroes Commission, 1964).

all is neither an expert nor a surveyor," determined the boundary of the hacienda.[25] They also clarified that the boundary of the Dominican hacienda covers not only the lands around Calamba town proper but also the whole town.

The rent that the Dominicans collected from the *inquilinos* was another issue that the latter discussed in the reply. They admitted that initially the virgin tracts of lands were awarded to them without rent but once these lands are already productive, tenants have to start paying rent. The amount they paid covers their farm, their residential lot and the idle lands that they did not till for various reasons. The amount varied depending on the quality of the land and its productivity. They also claimed that they paid for every bamboo they planted and for the shed built inside the estate. They also pointed out that while production of the hacienda increased in volume, the income of the *inquilinos* showed no corresponding increase because of the many exactions, abuses, and irregularities committed in the administration of the estate. They also complained that the administrators of the hacienda were not issuing receipts to acknowledge that they have paid their rent already. To secure them from arbitrary charges, they petitioned that a formal contract be made between them and the owners of the estate.

When the colonial officials sent the query to the Calamba residents, they were only after the actual land area of the hacienda and its income for taxation purposes. They never thought that it would trigger an unrest that would affect many families. Needless to say, the reply of the Calamba residents did not sit well with the Dominicans. Landlord-tenant relationship turned from bad to worse when Jose Rizal advised his parents and other *inquilinos* to stop paying the rent on the ground that the friars were not the legitimate owners of the land. Jose wrote:

> *"With respect to the question of the estate, I have consulted some lawyers here, and what they have advised me is the following; do not pay the rent and when the estate demands payment, you ask that it show its titles of ownership and then matter can be discussed and examined. At all events, the question can be raised to the Supreme Tribunal. This will not prevent us here from writing a pamphlet referring to this question with all the necessary data that we may have on hand."*[26]

Rizal expected that the tenants of *Hacienda de Calamba* would follow the move of his family. He was anticipating that it would become a full blown issue and attract the attention of colonial officials. He was hopeful that it would subsequently propel them to come up with measures that would relieve them from the financial pressures brought about by the sugar crisis. Unfortunately, Rizal's initiatives did not produce positive results. Colonial officials did not dignify the contents of their petition. In their attempt to ask for financial relief, they earned the wrath of the

[25] Rizal, "Petition of the Town of Calamba," 38.
[26] "Jose Rizal to his Parents and Brother," 21 September 1889.

Dominicans instead. The Dominicans were disgusted when the *inquilinos* withheld their payment of rent. To divert the attention of the colonial officials, they circulated the rumor that a widespread uprising was imminent. In effect, the government focused on the political threat that the *inquilinos* posed and the economic problems brought about by the sugar crisis were left in oblivion.

A month after they submitted the petition, Rizal departed for Europe leaving his hometown in a state of unrest and confusion. Administrators of the hacienda spent several months trying to settle the issues through persuasion but their effort did not produce positive results. Consequently, they were left with no other option but to file a lawsuit against the tenants. They asked the court to require the tenants to pay the rent and demanded the eviction of those who refused to do so. The family of Rizal hired Felipe Buencamino Sr. to help them argue their case. Initially, Buencamino tried to settle the legal dispute amicably with the help of Don Francisco Iriarte and Don Vicente Reyes, the judge and governor of Laguna respectively. He was able to convince the Dominicans to cede the ownership of all lands comprising the area of the Poblacion of Calamba which is about 100 *quiñones*.[27] The latter also agreed to condone the rentals which were in arrears. In exchange, the Dominicans demanded from the tenants to acknowledge the ownership of the Dominicans of the rest of the *quiñones* of the estate and pay only ten percent of the canon in succeeding years. The family of Rizal consulted Jose Rizal on the merits of the proposal. The latter took a radical position and sent a cablegram asking his family to reject the deal.[28] The family followed the instruction of Jose and terminated also the services of Buencamino.

The collapse of the negotiation resulted to the shift of the battle to the court of law. Don Jose Gutierrez, a Spanish lawyer who is a known anti-friar, represented the family of Rizal in the court proceedings. The tenants won the case in the Justice of Peace of Calamba, because Paciano allegedly dictated the judgment of the court.[29] But when the case was elevated to the Court of First Instance in Sta. Cruz, the decision was reversed in favor of the Dominicans. The court ordered the recalcitrant tenants to vacate the leased lands of the hacienda. The tenants elevated the case to the *Royal Audiencia* but failed to get a favorable ruling. Rizal brought the case to the Supreme Court and filed a plea for suspended judgment but it was dismissed for lack of merit.[30]

[27] A *quiñon* is a measurement of land equivalent to 2.79 hectares or 6.94 acres.

[28] Felipe Buencamino Sr. *Sixty Years of Philippine History.* (Manila: Philippine Historical Association, 1969), 14-15.

[29] Villarroel, 202.

[30] Rizal, in his *Noli Me Tangere*, portrayed the fate of his town- mates and other victims of the friars in the person of Cabesang Tales. Tales personified those Filipinos who lost their land to the friars, protested the arbitrary increase in the rental, refused to pay their rent, sued by the friar administrator and later lost the case in court. See Chapter IV of the *Noli Me Tangere*.

The Dominicans and their supporters tried to implement the decision of the tribunal of Sta. Cruz while the case was pending in the Supreme Court. But the family of Rizal and other affected tenants refused to comply with the court order. Because of this, the Dominican sought the help of Gov. Gen. Valeriano Weyler who right away ordered Col. Francisco Olive Garcia to execute the eviction order.[31] He also instructed Garcia to stop any agitation or public disorder that might erupt in the execution of the eviction order. While implementing the court order, a number of houses were burned and farm lots were also damaged.[32] On November 13, 1891, Weyler issued a decree ordering the deportation of known enemies of the Dominicans. Those who were banished included the family of Jose Rizal, Antonino Lopez, Cipriano Rubio, Manuel Hidalgo, Leandro Lopez, Mateo Elejorde, Silvestre Ubaldo and many others.[33]

Re-examining the Calamba Unrest

The narrative above shows that the Calamba agrarian uprising of 1891 should not be regarded purely as a landlord-tenant affair. Moreover, its ultimate cause was neither the tenants nor the Dominicans. Both may be considered collateral victims of the rise and fall of Philippine sugar industry. Unfortunately, they did not recognize this reality and focused instead on issues which were parochial, divisive and counter-productive. Since both parties assumed hardline position, the issues that should have been solved peacefully became a nasty confrontation that destroyed the harmonious relationship of the Dominicans and the *inquilinos*.

The family of Jose Rizal may be considered a microscopic version of the story of the *inquilinos* of *Hacienda de Calamba* and the history of Philippine sugar industry during the last two quarters of the 19^{th} century. From the time Francisco Mercado moved to Calamba until Jose Rizal studied in Ateneo Municipal, the family enjoyed the bounty brought about by the golden age of Philippine sugar industry. Their relationship with the Dominicans was so cordial to the extent that they gave the administrators symbolic gifts every time they visited them.

The harmonious relationship of the Dominicans and the *inquilinos* started to deteriorate in 1880's not because there were radical changes in the landlord-tenant

[31] For a detailed account of the execution of the notice of eviction, cf. Narcisa's letter to his brother Jose dated 10 March 1891. *Letters Between Rizal and Family Members*, 323-324.

[32] The grandniece of Rizal wrote that the eviction was done on the day of the Calamba town fiesta, when most of the evicted families had in happier times kept the door of their house open. Instead of merry making, they heard the sounds of planks and rafters being torn down as their houses were demolished and the wailing of women as their husbands were arrested and taken away for deportation. Bantug-Lopez, 106.

[33] On 23 January 1892, a decree by Gov. Gen. Eulogio Despujol appeared in the gazette pardoning 66 Filipino` offenders and 15 of them were Calamba deportees. Arcilla, 621.

arrangement but because of certain developments which were not directly under their control. The primary cause of the problem was the rise of beet sugar industry in those countries that used to import sugar from the Philippines. As a consequence of this, Philippine sugar gradually lost their markets abroad and it resulted to huge losses on the part of the sugar planters. It brought the price of Philippine sugar to all time low and this trend continued in the succeeding years. In the letters of Paciano to his brother Jose, he mentioned that he could not send his allowance on time because he could not unload their sugar harvest because of low price.[34] Other *inquilinos* did the same thing which further brought down the price of sugar. From a high of 5.750 in 1871 it went down to 2.875 when Rizal went home in 1887. The price was so low that many *inquilinos* including those who were well off got depressed.

When Rizal returned from Europe, the *inquilinos* of Calamba were already in panic mode and everybody was looking for ways in which they could survive the sugar crisis. Rizal had one letter to Paciano wherein he told his brother to be prepared for the negative impact of the impending sugar crisis brought about by the new developments in Europe and the United States.[35] This only shows that Rizal was aware of the impending crisis and he knew personally the root cause of it. But instead of educating his family and other *inquilinos* of the real cause of the problem, he diverted their attention to the practices of the Dominicans and other problems which in the past were non-issue. Matters concerning rent, land area of the hacienda, ownership, credit practices and other related issues were brought into the open which gradually destroyed the harmonious relationship of the Dominicans and the *inquilinos*.

From the time the parents of Jose moved to Calamba they knew that they were just *inquilinos* of the Dominican hacienda. They do not own the land they till and they were supposed to give a fixed rent every harvest. When the sugar industry was on its glorious years, the *inquilinos* did not find the rent exorbitant and burdensome. In fact, many of them accumulated money which they used to build stone houses and enabled them to send their children to school. But their income dropped significantly when the sugar crisis hit them. Consequently, there were so many things that they used to enjoy in the past, which they had to give up because they could not afford them anymore. To improve the situation, the *inquilinos* explored various options that would lessen the impact of the crisis. It was in this context when they realized that if they will not pay rent to the Dominicans, their cash position would be better. But it would only happen if they can prove that the Dominicans were not the owners of *Hacienda de Calamba*.

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[34] Rizal, *Letters between Rizal and Family Members,* 260.

[35] Ibid., 152, 167.

In view of the discussion above, the response of the *inquilinos* to the inquiry of the colonial government should be construed within the context of the sugar crisis in 1880's. Their response was not primarily intended to correct the tax assessment of the hacienda but it was their way of improving their financial position in the light of the sugar crisis. The issues concerning rent, land area, ownership and a few others were raised to justify their non-payment of rent. Paciano himself admitted that they were not paying rent not because they don't want to but because they had no money left for that purpose.[36] On the part of Jose Rizal, he had other things in mind when he returned from Europe in 1887. Felipe Buencamino disclosed that it was Jose who advised his parents and other *inquilinos* of Calamba to stop paying rent on the ground that the friars were not the legitimate owners of the land.[37] He was expecting that the tenants of *Hacienda de Calamba* and other estates will follow the example of his family. He anticipated that the tenants that the friars sued would pose a big disturbance that will force the government to act on people's complaints against the friars. In short, he did not consider it an economic problem but a political issue that could be used as leverage in pushing for reforms through the simple act of not paying rent.

What happened to Philippine sugar industry in 1880's revealed a lot of things about the industry and the economy of the Philippines as a whole. Unknown to Filipino sugar producers at that time, they were already involved in world trade where they did not have full control of the factors that determined the supply and price of sugar. Events happening far away from the Philippines, hardly noticed by tenants and landlords, led to the disastrous fall of the price of sugar which resulted to the destruction of the harmonious relationship of the major players in the sugar industry.

The sugar crisis also revealed the disadvantages of engaging in a mono crop business. As in the case of the sugar industry, the stakeholders became so dependent on the existing set up and on their traditional market. At the height of the crisis, some of them explored the possibility of engaging in another business. But they could not do so because their investments were highly specialized, which made the sugar plantations not readily convertible to other ventures. Lastly, the crisis also revealed the strong influence of politics in economic affairs. Philippine sugar industry collapsed because of the political decision of the French and German government to subsidize their own beet sugar industry. Philippine sugar could not be diverted to American market because of the political decision of the Americans to grant tariff concession to Hawaiian and Cuban sugar producers.

[36] Bantug-Lopez, 105.
[37] Buencamino, 14.

One could conclude from this study that the Calamba uprising was not purely a landlord-tenant affair. The ultimate reason behind the destruction of the harmonious relationship between the Dominicans and tenants was the discovery of beet sugar as an alternative to cane sugar. The rise of beet sugar industry in Europe resulted to a significant drop of the price of sugar in the Philippines which ultimately reduced the income of families dependent on the sugar industry. But instead of looking for a solution that will benefit everybody, the major players in Philippine sugar industry tried to solve the crisis based on their sectoral interest. The *inquilinos* tried to lessen the impact of the crisis by not paying rent to the owners. The Dominicans on their part initiated legal measures that ultimately expelled the recalcitrant tenants out of the hacienda. These initiatives, however, did not help both parties in coming up with a win-win solution to the problem. Consequently, the problems of the sugar industry became more complicated and the relationship of the Dominicans and the *inquilinos* deteriorated further.■

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