Political Collaboration during the Japanese Occupation of Negros Oriental: The Case of Guillermo Z. Villanueva, Wartime Governor (1942-1945)

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Abstract

This study discusses the collaboration issue of wartime Governor Guillermo Villanueva with the Japanese imperial forces from 1942 to 1945. More specifically, this study would delve into Villanueva's political collaboration and know whether he was a passive collaborator, i.e., refers to the kind of collaboration that most of the Filipino elites followed, which was to become "puppets" but not actively help the Japanese forces, or an active collaborator, i.e., refers to the kind of collaboration typified by extreme loyalty to Japan and hatred towards the Americans. As a work of local history, the researcher then relied on primary documentary sources taken from the RB Silliman War Papers and Silliman War Diaries. Some limitations of the study include the lack of primary sources (i.e., personal accounts) of Guillermo Villanueva himself. Nevertheless, from the evidence found, it is apparent that Villanueva's actions were an amalgamation of active and passive collaboration. He was a man caught in the middle, and his collaboration story evinces the challenges a wartime governor faces in a tight situation.

Keywords: Guillermo Z. Villanueva, Japanese occupation of Dumaguete, Political Collaboration, World War II, Collaborators, Local History of Negros Oriental

Introduction

In hindsight, the Filipino elite response to a colonial power is more often than not a *compromising* one. During the Spanish occupation, especially at the height of the Philippine Revolution, most *ilustrado* elites – Jose Rizal, Antonio Luna, Apolinario Mabini, et cetera– were opposed to immediate independence. Later on, a few of them – the likes of Luna and Mabini – changed their views during the second phase of the revolution and fought, at the outset, against what remained of the Spanish troops, and ineluctably against the Americans during the Philippine-American War. Nonetheless, the *ilustrados* who went against American rule during its inchoative years were only considered a minority since the others followed the pragmatic approach and switched sides. By and large, Filipino elite aspirations were not ascribed with political independence, but more so apropos of "individual

freedoms, the relation of individuals in society to their political institutions, the proper functions of government, [and] the limits of governmental authority in a free society" (Salamanca, 1968, p. 19; Seabrook, n.d.). From this, one can infer that what most of the Filipino elites wanted was a fair share and active role in governance – one that they could or did not experience during the Spanish period, as the highest position that a Filipino can attain was only *gobernadorcillo* or a town mayor, and one that was benevolently, if sagaciously, given to them by the Americans. Hence, they willingly accepted or collaborated with the latter even if that meant being subjected once again to colonial rule (Salamanca, 1968).

What the Filipino elite collaborators have done — irrespective of the deprecatory nature of colonial collaboration — is most probably driven by practicality; for they knew that many Filipinos would suffer if they would not collaborate with the Americans, whose military prowess they could not surmount, and, eventually the Japanese, who had already gained the upper-hand against the Americans. Again, it was just a matter of practicality that these elite collaborators, perforce, acquiesced with their colonial counterparts. Even Claro M. Recto (1946), a renowned Filipino nationalist, justified his — and by and large, the Filipino elites' — collaboration to lessen the suffering of his fellow countrymen. He then juxtaposed the Filipino elites' collaboration with the Japanese to the same group of elites who — 40 years ago — collaborated with the Americans.

Apropos of the related literature, Dante C. Simbulan's *The Modern Principalia: The Historical Evolution of the Philippine Ruling Oligarchy* narrates and delineates the development of the Filipino elites from the Pre-Spanish, Spanish, American, and Japanese until the Post-War period. The parts relevant to this study, however, are the experiences of the elites during the Spanish and American period, as it will explain the ascendancy of the Filipino elites -- from their limited participation in politics during the Spanish period to their gradual accumulation of power and influence during the American period. Moreover, Simbulan's book is also helpful as he tries to understand and make some inferences on the elites' behavior in politics. A particular behavior that he inferred was the elites' capriciousness, especially in times of crisis. For example, Simbulan (2005) pointed out that those elites who were members of the Malolos Congress (e.g., Cayetano Arellano, Benito Legarda, T.H. Pardo de Tavera, etc.) were quick to change sides after noticing that the "…former American allies against the Spaniards showed determination and ability to crush the Philippine republic" (p. 32). To him, this has invariably been a common trend among the ruling elites in the Philippines. In hindsight, Simbulan (2005) looks at its historical development and aptly states that:

> The principalia's opportunistic behavior and doubtful loyalties have been amply demonstrated, firstly, *by abandoning the interests*

> *of their country and people and becoming willing agents of Spanish rule for several hundred years;* secondly, *by switching sides from Spain to their late-hour decision to join the revolutionary government* when they saw that the days of their "mother" Spain in the Philippines were numbered and, thirdly, *by their equally sudden decision to go over to the American side* while the Philippine-American War was still raging (pp. 293-294).

Simbulan's book is of utmost relevance to the current study because it helps the researcher understand the general attitude or behavior of the ruling elites – that is, their opportunism and colonial mentality; and of equal import, it also delineates their historical background and/or development, not to mention the overall political milieu of the Philippines under the two previous colonizers – the Spaniards and the Americans.

The two primary sources on collaboration at the national level are De Viana's (2016) *Kulaboretor!* and Steinberg's (1967) *Philippine Collaboration*. Both sources have helped create the knowledge foundation for looking into collaboration at the local level. At the local level, of course, one of the vital pieces of literature is the researcher's study on the *Political Collaboration of Mayor Mariano Perdices* (Bulado, 2015). That study talked about the motivations of Perdices for collaborating and the results of his intricate passive collaboration with the Japanese imperial forces. Another source on local history which is also helpful in the study is the essay of Resil Mojares in the book entitled *The War in Cebu* (eds. Eleazar, J. & Bersales, R., 2015). His essay, entitled *Wartime Politics*, talked about the role that the Cebu politicians played in collaborating with the Japanese imperial forces. Mojares elucidated in intricate detail how politicians like, for example, Governor Hilario Abellana worked along with the Japanese and the amount of influence that they bore, which was virtually non-existent, as puppet officials in Cebu.

By and large, these works give the researcher a broader perspective on the issue of collaboration in the Philippines, especially about the varying motives and justifications for collaboration — at the national and local level, and the views of those who resisted, perhaps even the passive witnesses, during the war towards the purported collaborators. Indubitably, there is a dearth of academic papers/research on collaboration at the local level. It is a historical phenomenon that has not been given much attention by local historians, most probably due to the sensitivity of the subject matter, or the nationalist approaches, if not proclivities, which would shroud their judgment, and would consequently turn a historian into a moralist. Davies (2004) adroitly puts into words how historians should perceive collaborators by saying that:

> They were not 'born colla-

> borators'; they were just ordinary folks who had to develop some kind of survival mechanism, however risky and questionable in ethical terms. This is why collaboration is such a fascinating theme. It was like a spider's web that eventually trapped significant sections of the population. Some were genuine collaborators, but a sizeable proportion was not (p. 11).

Methodolgy

Like the previous paper on Mariano Perdices, the historical method was used in writing this study. On the historical method, M.C. Lemon (2003) elucidated that "an explanation is 'historical' simply and solely since it deals with any occurrences by putting them into an intelligible sequence, whereby one thing 'follows from' another" (p. 312). Therefore, the writing of history is by and large a narrative of connected events or occurrences. Also, M.C.Lemon (2003) adroitly pinpointed the significance of the term "'*then*' in the basic formula of narrative, 'this happened, and *then* that happened, and *then* that happened' and so on" (p. 313). From this, it is safe to infer that a historical narrative invariably deals with how a series of events can be interconnected, i.e., how one event/ occurrence led to another, and this can be done using the historical method.

In the historical method, the researcher gathered data from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include the R.B. Silliman War Papers and the unpublished work of Earl Jude Cleope entitled *Silliman War Diaries*. In contrast, secondary sources included books, journal articles, dissertations, and online sources. An interview was also done with a close relative, let alone a family historian of the Villanueva's. All the sources have been scrutinized or checked for their veracity and are considered valuable written sources in the Japanese Occupation of Negros Oriental.

Discussion

This paper is part of a series of studies that the researcher has compiled – and is still compiling – about political collaboration in Negros Oriental during World War II. Note that the focus is on political collaboration – and not military collaboration, nor economic collaboration, which are the other forms of collaboration with an occupying power. Hence, this paper is a historical narrative about the roles and experiences of Governor Guillermo Z. Villanueva as wartime governor from 1941 to 1945; it also seeks to understand his motivations for working along with the Japanese occupying forces. More importantly, this study also looks into two forms of collaboration – i.e., passive and active. In the end, much emphasis is given on the issue of whether he was a passive collaborator, i.e., refers to the kind of collaboration that most of the Filipino elites followed, which was to become puppets but not actively help the Japanese forces or an active collaborator, i.e., refers to the kind of collaboration typified by extreme

loyalty to Japan and hatred towards the Americans. This study is significant since it tries to fill the historical lacuna on understanding why Governor Villanueva collaborated and remember the legacy (although at times misunderstood) that he left to the people of Negros Oriental.

Roles of a Wartime Governor

One of the prominent political elites who collaborated with the Japanese in Negros Oriental was Guillermo Z. Villanueva, a native Baisanon. From his surname, *Villanueva*, one can infer that he belonged to a political clan or family. This statement would hold true as his father was Hermenegildo Villanueva, and his mother was Josefina Rubio – both of whom were landed elites in Bais. *Memong,* as Guillermo was fondly called, was also a well-educated individual – receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree from Silliman Institute in 1912 and Bachelor of Laws from Michigan University in 1918 (Negros Oriental Historical Data Papers; The Michigan Alumnus, 50). After finishing his education in the United States, Memong returned to the Philippines in 1919; his political career started when he was appointed as councilor of Bais in 1920 and eventually a member of Congress in 1922. He served for four consecutive terms as congressman, re-elected in 1925, 1928, and 1931. During his third term, he was elected as Chairman of the Committee on Agriculture; he also took particular interest in the field of education by serving as a member of the Joint Committee of the Legislature, which reviewed "the school system of the Philippine Islands" (Nellist, 1931, p. 337). He was part of the Villanueva dynasty, which dominated Negros Oriental politics during the American period. After his stint as a congressman, he was elected Governor of Negros Oriental just before World War II. Thus, he eventually became the wartime governor during the Japanese occupation of Negros Oriental.

The task of Villanueva as wartime governor was difficult. Firstly, he did not exercise any form of power as the final say lay with the Japanese army commander; his role was merely to help in the pacification campaign wherein Villanueva and other provincial and municipal officials would go to the different towns in Negros Oriental trying to convince other officials and civilians to return to the occupied areas. This role was not easy as it made others think – especially the guerrillas – that they had become *puppets* of the Japanese. Secondly, he had to face opposition mainly from the guerrillas as the latter would invariably – in most cases – think that the Governor was an active collaborator of the Japanese – but was he an active collaborator? Lastly, unlike Perdices, Villanueva did not blatantly play the *double game;* he was conservative in his decisions, he had to play safe – at times too safe as he did not want the Japanese to harm him and his family (he had ten children).

The Japanese' policy of attraction was almost immediately implemented upon their arrival in Dumaguete. They had aimed to peacefully pacify the entire province and convince the people, who had already escaped to

the hinterlands in fear of Japanese atrocities, to return to the towns or occupied areas. This was the major role that the Japanese assigned to Villanueva – that, as Governor, he was to help them convince the people that everything was back to normal and that they should return to their respective homes. They also tried to convince former USAFFEs and members of the guerrilla forces to surrender their weapons and live peacefully in the occupied areas. There were many instances wherein Villanueva helplessly pled to the guerrillas and some civilians to return to the occupied areas. In fact, Rodriguez (1989) reported that one of Villanueva's very first directives stated that:

> All officials and employees and prominent persons must come down from the hills to resume their normal business and occupation and offices on or before June 30, 1942. Failure to do so will subject such officials and employees, and prominent persons to prosecution in accordance with the military laws of the Imperial Forces of the Japanese (p. 39).

The Governor's role in the occupied area was verily limited. He did not have the power and influence he had before the war. Some accounts would state that he merely accompanied the Japanese in the different towns of Negros Oriental to help convince hitherto elected municipal officials to return to town. The first areas that Villanueva and the Japanese visited were the southern areas of Negros Oriental. Their pacification – through the policy of attraction – campaign in the south was reasonably successful, and they were able to convince the mayors of Bacong, Dauin, Zamboanguita (Mayor Acapando), Siaton (Mayor Tayko), and Tolong to return to town (Silliman, 1980, p. 84). It must be noted, however, that Villanueva played a vital role in convincing these municipal officials; it was not necessarily done out of coercion, but Villanueva would invariably warn those municipal officials who had not returned to their post that if they did not follow the order of the Japanese, "…he, the governor, would not be able to protect the mayor and his family from the wrath of the Japanese" (Silliman, pp. 86-87). This was not a threat but a warning which showed how the Governor lacked the authority, power, and influence to protect his fellow government officials. Villanueva, however, was very influential in trying to convince these government officials; he had to do this, if under duress, to gain the trust and confidence of the Japanese. Concomitantly, after Villanueva was able to convince the previous officials to return to their post, the Japanese then came in and ordered "the local mayors and chiefs of police to collect and surrender all private arms and the weapons of all ex-USAFFE soldiers who might have returned to their homes" (Silliman, p. 87). This then became the primary role of the municipal mayor and other officials – it was a relatively dangerous task as they would oft-times be antagonized by the guerrillas, but they had to do it to

survive.

Villanueva continued with his pacification campaign to the north of Dumaguete, but he was not as successful in these areas compared to the south. More specifically, in Old Ayuquitan (now San Jose), Mayor Norberto Pareja defied his orders to return to post and opted to escape to the hinterlands – then eventually cross Tañon Strait heading to Cebu – to prevent from collaborating with the Japanese. Moreover, old Ayuquitan was also a hotbed for the guerrillas since this was the hometown of Federico Ridad, an officer in the guerrilla movement. With the continuous raids done by the guerrillas in the Ayuquitan area and the bellicosity of Mayor Pareja, Villanueva and the Japanese troops then had no choice but to constantly revisit the area and inveterately try to ameliorate the situation – continuing with their mission of attracting the locals and guerrillas to return to town.

Governor Villanueva served as a buffer between the Japanese and the local populace of Negros Oriental. While it is true that he was always with the Japanese in their pacification – through a policy of attraction – campaign, it must also be emphasized that he did not have any form of power to order the arrest of his fellow Oriental Negrenses, nor were there any accounts which would show that Villanueva was an informer or a spy of the Japanese. His role, again, was that of a messenger trying to convince the people to return to the occupied areas. The only problem was that he was always with the Japanese, which could have caused the guerrillas to suppose he was an active collaborator. Nevertheless, as Donn V. Hart (1964) pointed out: "no Filipino official, however, could make a major decision without the approval of the Japanese" (p. 112). Given that Villanueva – and perhaps most of the other puppet officials – did not exercise power under the Japanese occupation, how can one brand them as *collaborators?* And why is it found in the guerrilla reports and historical works on Negros Oriental that Villanueva and others were active collaborators?

"The Much Tormented Official"

When Villanueva was still an assemblyman in 1936, he, along with other Filipino assemblymen (Manuel Alzate, Chairman on the Committee of Foreign Relations and Pedro Vera, Member, Committee of Appointments), was sent to Japan, specifically in Osaka, Kyoto, Nara, Nagoya, Ikko, and Tokyo, for "study and goodwill." During this time, Villanueva was chairman of the Committee on Public Instruction (Goodman, 1983, p. 34). It has been said that these three assemblymen seemed to have predilections for the Japanese and their "point of view"; while, more specifically, Villanueva has known for being a supporter of Japan in the assembly, a fact that "Japan could use" (Goodman, p. 35). Scott Mills noted another link of Villanueva to Japan in his book on Prof. Roy Bell of Silliman University. In his book, Mills retold the story of Villanueva's pre-war preparations and how Bell thought that he was somehow insouciant about the

preparations as evinced by his lack of interest – and being less assertive – in the meetings. Bell purported that this was due to Villanueva's investments in Japanese companies (Mills, 2012, p. 4, p. 10). Governor Villanueva's Japanese links would somehow lead readers to believe that he could be an active collaborator, but these links are inconclusive – Villanueva's prior dealings and investments do not equate to him being an active collaborator. It is possible that his Japanese links and connection made the Japanese forces in Negros Oriental trust him more, but this is not sufficient nor a piece of conclusive evidence that would equate to Villanueva being an active collaborator; he was not a spy, nor an informer; he was more or less a buffer.

Be that as it may, during the Japanese occupation of Negros Oriental – from the start to almost the end – Villanueva was continuously asking the guerrillas and civilians in the hinterlands to return to the occupied area. In an act of desperation, he wrote a letter to Col. Abcede on June 21, 1944 (Silliman, pp. 63-64), asking him to surrender and return to the occupied area, in it he said:

> My Dear Colonel Abcede,
>
> I am again appealing to you to come down from the mountain. The Japanese Army to patrol our mountains are already here with airplanes and they are now ready to strike. Before making effective patrol, I have agreed with the Commander, Col. Oie, to invite you to come down and join us. This invitation is for you and for the other officers and also for all your men so that with you, the civilian population which has long been suffering may come down.
>
> We have agreed that you may either come down and stay with us permanently or you stay for a short time and find things for yourselves. We want to show you that our hearts are with you and that we should like to invite you to join us in building up a country progressive. Please take our word that it will be safe for you to be with us.
>
> Take this letter along and I can find a way by which a representative of mine and Japanese Army can meet you at any designated place.
>
> Hoping that you will give this consideration that it deserves for the good of all those now living in the mountains and of our dear Motherland, I am
>
> Very respectfully,
> G.Z. Villanueva
> Governor of
> Negros Oriental

Villanueva was becoming desperate; perhaps he was under immense pressure by Colonel Oie, the Japanese commander in Negros Oriental. Colonel Abcede, however, was obstinate and gave him a reply which

most likely exacerbated Villanueva's desperation, telling him that he and his men would not surrender to the Japanese.

As Governor, there was no doubt that he was placed under immense pressure, and most of his actions were done under duress. The more he acted as the mouthpiece of the Japanese imperial forces, the more the guerrillas abhorred him. The more he continued trying to convince people to return to the occupied areas, the more the guerrillas perceived him as a Japanese sympathizer. Unfortunately, if he did not continue performing his role as the top executive of the province, the Japanese would doubt his loyalty and possibly execute him and his family.

On September 22, 1944, under pressure by the Japanese and with the impending return of the Americans, President Laurel putatively declared war against the United States through what is now known as Proclamation No. 30. In this proclamation, Laurel and the 2nd Republic declared that "*a state of war* existed between the United States and Great Britain effective September 23, 1944, at ten in the morning" (De Viana, 2012, p. 114). However, it must be noted that Laurel had not specifically mentioned the conscription of Filipinos in his proclamation; it was simply a play of words. After that, Teofilo Sison, the Secretary of Interior, called for a meeting of all provincial governors that prompted them to continue serving the country and "reminded them of their legal obligations to the republic;" more specifically, Sison also belabored that if they did not follow orders from the national government, they would be charged with treason, as stated in Article 114 of the Revised Philippine Penal Code (Steinberg, 1967, p. 98).

On September 24, 1944, thinking that President Laurel had declared war against America and England, Governor Villanueva then ordered all the municipal mayors of Negros Oriental to require "able-bodied men" to register "for any kind of service during the emergency." Furthermore, he instructed the mayors to "segregate those fit for the armed forces and those fit for other emergency services" (FN 4 of RB Silliman War Papers). However, the local populace did not deal with this positively, as they thought this was a form of conscription. As a result, many young men decided to evacuate to the hinterlands so that they would not be registered and possibly conscripted (Silliman, p. 67). Concerned about the cavalcade of young males to the hinterlands, Villanueva then wrote a notice on September 27, 1944, stating that the main reason for the said required registration was for screening purposes and that it was "security measures and to seek ways by which they may be of help to our present-day government" (FN 103 of the RB Silliman War Papers).

The order of Governor Villanueva on September 24, 1944, to segregate the registration of men fit for the armed forces and the other for emergency services, contradicted his notice on September 27, 1944. It seemed that he took back what he had ordered the municipal mayors after realizing that the local populace of Negros Oriental had thought that his order was a form of conscription. Perhaps for Villanueva, his

order to the municipal mayors did not necessarily mean conscription of male citizens of Negros Oriental; seemingly, he was merely following what President Laurel declared in Proclamation 30 for Filipinos to remain loyal or be supportive of the government. However, President Laurel himself made it clear later that there was no conscription to be done; thus, this probably became one of the reasons why Governor Villanueva eventually backtracked. Villanueva had written the notice just a few days after Proclamation No. 30 and after they were met and briefed by the Secretary of Interior, Teofilo Sison. He was then doing what was expected of him as Governor of Negros Oriental, as he did not also want to be tried for treason as hitherto mentioned.

The only problem with Governor Villanueva was how he worded his order to the municipal mayors. It was evident in his first line alone as he said: "War against America and England having been declared by his Excellency President Laurel," following it with a direct order to the mayors, stating: "Register the men under your respective jurisdiction and segregate those fit for the armed forces and those fit for other emergency services" (FN 4 in RB Silliman War Papers). These statements then seemed – especially to the guerrillas who are overly loyal to the Americans – that he was, in fact, sympathizing with the Japanese and advocating for war against America. Indubitably, he was not as particular or as careful as Laurel and the others – in fact, just like the Japanese, he might have not fully understood the difference between waging war and waging a *state of war*.

It was possibly one of the reasons why the guerrillas, more specifically R.B. Silliman (Lt. Governor of the Free Government), thought that Villanueva became an active collaborator who "had become more and more involved" with the Japanese. Silliman even thought that Villanueva "sincerely believed that MacArthur would never return" (Silliman, p. 67). This was the problem of Governor Villanueva - he was caught in the middle, and he was already in too deep.

Governor Villanueva was already cognizant of his precarious situation months before the Americans arrived. He knew that his life was now in jeopardy due to his supposed Japanese proclivities and his role or actions as Governor of Negros Oriental during the Japanese occupation. He also knew that the guerrillas were after him and that the Japanese were constantly checking on his children to ascertain if they were all complete (Rodriguez, 1989).

By 1945, Gov. Villanueva had already disappeared and was "never again to be heard from;" it has been said, according to Antonino Calumpang, that "he had earlier entrusted Rep. Jose E. Romero with the task of looking after the people in case anything were to happen to him" (Calumpang, 1993, p. 192). The guerrillas, who kept surveillance on Governor Villanueva, reported that on March 8, 1945, the Governor had changed residence and transferred to the house formerly occupied by Pedro Dimaya, around 500 yards west of Channon Hall (FN 17 in RB

Silliman War Papers). Later on, it was known that Governor Villanueva and his family, together with some civilians from Dumaguete, were clandestinely brought to the hinterlands by the Japanese forces.

Villanueva and his family were with the Japanese forces in the hinterlands for months – hiding from the Americans and the guerrillas. It was an unfortunate, if expected, ending for a government official who was putatively too involved with the Japanese. Arthur Carson (n.d.) gave a detailed narration of the last moments of Governor Villanueva in the hinterlands of Zamboanguita, stating that:

> On the hike to the lowlands, Governor Guillermo Z. Villanueva perished. His widow last saw him alive at a point on the trail where he had stopped to rest. The Japanese were trying to drag him to his feet and he was pushing them off. A little later one of the soldiers regained her company. Handing over personal articles, he reported, 'Your husband died of a heart attack'. She was not permitted to go back. The body was never recovered. At Mrs. Villanueva's request, her evidence was relayed to the War Crimes investigating team but the Japanese concerned could not be located (pp. 229-230).

At the age of 52, Governor Guillermo Z. Villanueva was killed on September 18, 1945, by the retreating Japanese forces in the hinterlands of Nasig-id, Zamboanguita. His death happened just a few days before what is left of the main body of the Japanese imperial forces surrendered on September 22, 1945, at Guinso-an Bridge, Nasig-id, Zamboanguita. Unfortunately, there is no conclusive evidence to point out why the Japanese forces killed him, and for the nonce, his remains have not yet been recovered.

Legacy of a Misunderstood Wartime Governor

The legacy of Governor Guillermo Villanueva is a farrago of active and passive collaboration. Many of those who believed that he was an active collaborator thought so because of his persistence in working with or for the Japanese, especially in the pacification campaign (i.e., trying to convince the ex-USAFFEs, guerrillas, and civilians staying in the hinterlands to return to the occupied areas) of the province. He also was more conservative in his actions towards the guerrillas, i.e., playing it safe by not dealing or getting himself involved with the guerrillas. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, his role as a member of the KALIBAPI and concomitantly as a representative of Negros Oriental in the National Assembly made him quite unpopular among the guerrillas; also, his notorious order for the purported "conscription" only undergirded his image and exacerbated his reputation as a puppet governor. Lastly, and of much import, the Public Opinion Office – otherwise

known as the Japanese Spy Corps in Dumaguete - was under his jurisdiction. This office was responsible for reporting or identifying guerrilla members, informers, and sympathizers. It even caused the death of many individuals in Negros Oriental who were reported as having connections with the guerrilla. Villanueva – as Governor – also controlled the Bureau of Constabulary (BC) (Horner, 1973, p. 122). Since both the Public Opinion Office and the Bureau of Constabulary were under his purview, it can be inferred that this was one of the reasons why many considered him an active collaborator -– simply put, it was a mere case of command responsibility.

In hindsight, apropos of Villanueva's passive collaboration, it is indubitably clear that he was a government official caught in the middle of things. As one of the old guards in Philippine politics (he was a friend of Quezon and the many political elites who converged in Manila), there is no reason to doubt that Villanueva was following orders from Quezon – not dissimilar to what the likes of Laurel, Recto, Paredes, Vargas, and others did at the national level. Villanueva was a friend of, let alone a loyal servant to, Quezon. When Quezon visited Dumaguete on November 3, 1938, he praised both Villanueva and Jose Romero (who were both assemblymen) for their loyalty to the government. In his speech at the Public Plaza (now befittingly named as Quezon Park), he told the crowd: "You have today two members of the National Assembly who have no superior in any province of the Philippines, either for their ability or for their loyalty to their duty as your representatives to the National Government" (Official Gazette, November 3, 1938). This loyalty to the government and Quezon would explain why Villanueva carried on his duties and responsibilities as Governor during the war. As the Governor of Negros Oriental, he was the top chief executive of the province; and, of course, being an executive, albeit he had no power or influence, he was still in charge of the province and had to do what the Japanese wanted or asked him to do, which mainly was to pacify the towns of the province.

Another motivation, which led Villanueva to collaborate with the Japanese passively, was that – according to Villanueva family historian Prof. Josefino "Penn" Larena – he had to protect his family and the Villanueva clan in general. The Villanueva clan before, during, and to some extent, after the war was a political dynasty; Jose E. Romero called this dynasty "The Machine" in his autobiography. It was an undefeatable machine, and it was a huge clan. As Larena averred, "if Governor Memong had not collaborated, the entire Villanueva clan would vanish." He also believed that Governor Villanueva was also motivated to collaborate to protect his children, especially his daughters (he had seven daughters), whom the Japanese could have potentially maltreated (Interview with Prof. Josefino "Penn" Larena, November 26, 2019). This motivation for collaboration is akin to *survival*. Villanueva did not necessarily share the same ideology or belief with the Japanese, but he was merely cooperating with them to save

not only himself but, more so, his family (his children) and his clan. This was the personal aspect of his collaboration.

Lastly, Governor Villanueva's collaboration proved helpful – although not as many cases as Mayor Perdices – to some government officials in the province. One of those he could help was Rep. Jose E. Romero. As the story goes, during the latter years of the war, the Japanese became more belligerent towards the civilian populace in Dumaguete. Gone were the days of Captain Tsuda's policy of attraction; the Japanese were now becoming quite desperate and paranoid. As Romero recalled, at one point, most of his friends were imprisoned and that among them, there was one who identified him as pro-American. Romero then relayed this information to Governor Villanueva. Thereafter, in the words of Romero (1979):

> Fortunately, the Governor, in whom the Japanese had much confidence, had many relatives who were with the guerrillas. I reminded him of this fact and the suspicions that the Japanese might also have of him. This rather made him apprehensive. *He said he had assured the Japanese that I was not in any way disloyal and did not engage in any subversive activities* (p. 172).

Another local whom Villanueva helped was Guillermo Magdamo. The two Guillermos were close friends as both served at Silliman University as faculty members before the war – Villanueva serving from 1913 to 1915 while Magdamo from 1916 until his retirement in 1952. As the story goes, Governor Villanueva was instrumental in Magdamo's release from prison in December 1943; Magdamo wrote that the charges against him were serious in the eyes of the Japanese, but he was still set free because Villanueva vouched for him. The Governor then sent him food, money, and clothing upon his release. After that, he was appointed Adult Education Superintendent in Negros Oriental. The Governor envisaged a sort of new Renaissance, and he believed that Magdamo could help him in his vision to rejuvenate the local populace of Negros Oriental.

When the Governor contacted Magdamo, he told him that he wanted him to lead the drive for education among the people of Negros Oriental; he was able to convince Magdamo when he said, "This is really the work of Silliman, only let us not call it Silliman" (Excerpt from Guillermo Magdamo, *Governor Guillermo Z. Villanueva*, A War Victim, Unpublished). It must be emphasized that Magdamo was given the liberty to formulate his educational policies – an indication that the Japanese did not force Governor Villanueva to educate the locals based on the latter's policies. Nevertheless, Magdamo had attested that the public's perception of Governor Villanueva was wrong and unfair. "I must bear witness," Magdamo recalled, "for his [Governor Villanueva] deep concern and covert action for the welfare and protection of the Filipinos in occupied Negros Oriental" (Excerpt

from Guillermo Magdamo, *Governor Guillermo Z. Villanueva, A War Victim*, Unpublished).

These incidents would show the positive side of Villanueva's collaboration. With the trust and confidence of the Japanese, he was then able to save the lives of Rep. Jose Romero and Guillermo Magdamo – like how Laurel was able to save the life of Roxas and others — by vouching for him or by clearing his name.

Conclusion

Again, the case of Governor Villanueva is a complicated one as his collaboration was not consistently passive or active. Many accounts would picture him as an active collaborator, but there are also quite a few accounts that show that he was not. Sadly, Governor Villanueva could not vindicate himself, as he did not live to tell his tale. He did not have the heroic touch of Mayor Perdices; during his stint as wartime governor, he became an unpopular government official – publicly resented by the guerrilla forces and perhaps privately doubted by his constituents. Indeed, some of his constituents and employees started to question his loyalty – but those people did not have the benefit of hindsight.

His collaboration, however, can be explained – regardless of whether it was passive or active, or the combination of both – as more of a necessity, i.e., for practical (survival) and personal (family) reasons, and a continuation of his previous duty as Governor of Negros Oriental. He believed in – and followed the orders of – Laurel's Second Republic; he was also one who obeyed the orders of Quezon that was to "cooperate with the Japanese without taking an oath of allegiance to the Emperor" (Malay, 1967, p. 15). There is no doubt that he was loyal to the Philippine government. Sadly, his loyalty to the Philippine government was perceived as loyalty to the Japanese.

Villanueva played his role as Governor to a tee: his participation in the governance of the Japanese over the people of Negros Oriental was to alleviate the tension between the occupying forces and the guerillas. Like most government officials during the Japanese occupation, he was caught between the desire to fulfill his duties, under the Laurel government, despite the current predicament of war in the country, and trying to step up and be the leader he was elected to be. In the end, Governor Villanueva is neither an active nor a passive collaborator. Instead, he was playing his role as Governor – even if it meant being ostracized by his constituents, let alone the guerrillas, who were loyal to the Americans. He was a misunderstood government official during the war, and his story was – and to some extent, still is – a gray area.

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