

Social Systems and Food Crisis: A Study of Social-Historical, and Economic Determinants as Inferred from a Case Study of Negros

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ABSTRACT

A diachronic study of the phenomenon of food crisis shows that it is not directly the consequence on natural disasters or calamities, or the failure of the base population to produce enough food. Analysis of the history of economic development in Negros shows that periodic food crisis emerged upon the formation of a social system organized around the hacienda. The early experience of food crisis in the nineteenth century may be traced to the establishment of new social relations between those who controlled ownership of land and dictated what is to be produced in it on the one hand, and those who tilled the land and are dependent on their wage-labor for subsistence on the other hand. The history of the sugar industry in Negros therefore shows that the problem of hunger is not one that concerns technology or organization but that of socio-politics.

The close dependence of Negros' economy on the movement of sugar prices in the world market implies that the food crisis is also a macro social problem, traceable to the overall subordinate position of the Philippine economy to the world political economy, dominated by the capitalist industrial nations.

INTRODUCTION

The Philippines' recent cataclysmic experiences of an earthquake, a long-drawn drought, destructive typhoons, and continuing rapid environmental destruction, raise serious concerns about food security issue. The spectre of famine and of the demand which falls on Government to maintain large numbers of affected rural people among them, "environmental refugees", raises the timely issue of the appropriate view and response to the problem of food shortage. Faced with the threat of a food crisis, it is important to look into the ideological underpinnings of the state's relief system - i.e., the definition of hunger. What is hunger? Is it merely a biological process arising out of conditions of drought? What are its elements? How can the process itself be contained? From another vantage view, the problematic can be posed as a question of the capability of the Philippine system to recognize famine, the threat to survival, at its onset, and not at a point of large-scale mortality.

As a subject for sociological-historical inquiry, the problem of hunger has remained largely of marginal interest among sociologists. Thus far, only a few social science researchers have published works with hunger as the main theme, though the phenomenon of food crisis has been the subject of international academic scrutiny and policy debate since the seventies. At best, what has come out of the social science disciplines on the subject of hunger are working papers and preliminary theoretical exercises as that of the group of Humanity and Society (cf. publication vol. 7, 1983) and the First Regional Conference on Afro-Asian Studies on Social Systems and Food Crises held in 1989.

A number of social science theorists have tended to be critical of relief policy being premised on population expansion and foodstock imbalance, as well as of the subsidiary themes of low technology, malnutrition, natural disaster and crop failure as proximate causes of food crises (cf. Sen 1981; Garcia 1984). Garcia (1984), in particular, has sought for fresh studies of social and economic processes implicit in a food crisis situation. This paper is a response to such a lead.

Following insights gained from four-year research on the history of Negros, I raise in this paper the question of the extent to which hunger is a byproduct of social history. The paper will thus consider the social historical factors determining food scarcity; it will also examine the phenomenon of the

continuing food crisis experienced by the landless sugarcane workers in Negros Occidental.

Hunger has been defined in various ways – as a "craving or urgent need for food or a specific nutrient; the weakness, debilitation, or pain caused by a prolonged lack of food". While hunger as these definitions imply may have both psychological and physiological dimensions, as sociologist Richard Wells points out, it is the conceptual construct of hunger as a significant dimension of human social organizations that is most important for social scientists. As such, hunger may be defined according to Wells as a type of social condition whereby a significant proportion of a given human population is characterized by insufficient amounts of the nutrients derived from food consumption (Wells 1983: 340). In this paper, hunger is used to refer to an observed social condition as that found in Negros, characterized by a recurrent phenomenon – through different generations of Negrenses since the 19th century – of the generally weakened condition and physical debilitation of the disenfranchised rural population brought about by prolonged lack of food.

HUNGER: THE SOCIAL HISTORICAL FACTOR

A study of the trajectory of development in Negros shows that the problem of food crisis is a phenomenon that has periodically recurred since the 19th century. As may be inferred from the study of extant records and documents of the Spanish colonial government, food scarcity is closely related to capital expansion, the fencing of land, and the concentration of land and labor in the emerging sugarcane plantations in Negros at the turn of the century. This development, in turn, could not be divorced from the broader realm of international economic relations in the mid-nineteenth century – a period marked by unprecedented level of technological achievement for Western Europe, exemplified by the British Industrial Revolution which ushered in a corresponding new economic order (cf. Peck 1983).

International economic development in the nineteenth century came to mean, among other things, a relatively steady increase in the consumption of formerly luxury items like sugar, a commodity previously enjoyed only by the elites. With the trickling down of the benefits of the industrial revolution to the working class, especially in the United Kingdom, sugar became accessible to a wider number of people, especially to members

of the working class who required a perk in their dull diet (Mintz 1983:197). Thus, given this increased demand, sugar became an important commodity in international trade, becoming as precious as the metals.

The upsurge and expansion of international trade in almost all regions of the world in the 19th century had its immediate repercussions in south central Philippines. In 1855, the port of Iloilo was opened to direct foreign commerce, an event which ushered in unprecedented economic and social development in the region. That the chief agent of socioeconomic change in Western Visayas was British in the person of Nicholas Loney was not surprising at all. Owning one-third of the total fixed steam power installed in the world's factories in the 1850s, Great Britain achieved the highest national income per head and disproportionately engaged in international trade (Foreman-Peck 1983:3). Significantly, a sizeable part of British international trading was transacted with the Philippines. Thus, though thwarted by the Spaniards in their attempt to establish their political dominion in the Philippines, the British succeeded in expanding their economic empire.

It was a period of economic boon for the British traders and their Filipino cohorts, i.e., the Chinese-Spanish *meztizo* traders, many of whom became "hacenderos" in Negros. But for the natives it was the beginning of a state of crisis. The by-product of British capital expansion was the widespread migration to Negros of different social classes from the neighboring island of Panay, leading to the opening of the island's frontiers to active land colonization. This process of change eventually resulted in unprecedented cycles of food shortages among the natives, caused by outright displacement from their lands or the destruction of their fields when they resisted conversion and incorporation into the colonial society (see Romero 1974:24).

Inevitably, this inter-island migration led to the transformation of the island's agricultural landscape and social structure. Prior to the establishment of sugar "haciendas" in the island, Negros possessed a diversified economy. Spanish chroniclers of the nineteenth century made specific references to abundant rice grown in Negros which was sufficient not only for its own consumption but for export to other islands as well. Other than abundant staple production, these accounts also speak of the diversity of trade and skills in Negros. As a whole, the extant Spanish records delineate a picture of a relatively self-sufficient people living in the island who, though using what in European terms was primitive technology, managed to produce not only other staples as corn and edible root crops, but also textile

fibers which they used in the home manufacture of clothing, baskets, hats, and slippers. In addition, they produced cacao, tobacco and wax, not only to meet their finer needs but to trade as well. This picture of a healthy economy changed radically with the introduction of a new mode of production organized around the "hacienda", and the formation of a complex of social relations which reduced many of the formerly self-sufficient natives into wage-dependent rural workers.

The penetration of Western capitalism into the traditional sphere of peasant production and economy in Negros created a new opportunity structure. However, it also produced new norms, new demands, and new needs that many uneducated natives could not meet, and therefore kept them from availing of the new opportunities. A major element which undermined the foundations of the traditional society in the island is the transformation of its agriculture from subsistence farming to commercialized agriculture. With this transformation came the monetization of the island's economy. The economic revolution in the island brought to fore a new social structure - i.e., a network of social relations revolving around the hacienda, with the emerging landed gentry, mainly Spanish peninsulares or Chinese-Spanish mestizos in control of capital, and directing the trajectory of development. This change affected deeply the base population of Negros, particularly the living conditions of the individual peasant households. Though the rural population managed to obtain some cash from their small agricultural production and wage labor in the haciendas, it was insufficient to raise their standard of living. Perhaps, the greater harm which the peasants came face to face with was the new economic order which demanded that they themselves possess capital to participate in it. Ironically, there was lack of credit and adequate credit facilities. As such, the unrestricted activities of money lenders, and their usurious practices finally led to large-scale alienation of land as shown by many recorded court cases of foreclosures which records are still available at the Philippine National Archives.

The widespread fencing of land, and the emergence of the haciendas and landlords on the one hand, and a landless social sector on the other, further led to rural indebtedness, widespread poverty, seasonal scarcity of food, and an increasingly low level of nutrition, and serious health conditions. Inevitably, such conditions led to manifestations of the final stage of famine, that is, a high mortality rate which was the end result of a complex of factors which ranged from hunger, natural calamities, and epidemics and the absence of health services.

Outside sugar, trading was minimal and the prices of food commodities were very high. With the limited infrastructure growth, traded food items hardly reached the interior areas which have been cleared of the forest and the traditional subsistence patches of the natives or the small migrant farmers (cf. Echauz 1984, Genova 1986). The growing commitment of agriculture to sugarcane production made the emergent laboring class vulnerable to hunger with the onslaughts of a storm, a drought or a horde of locusts (cf. Echauz 1894). In fact, from the second half of the nineteenth century onward, the scourge of famine frequently struck the laboring class in Negros. As one Spanish writer notes, it was sugar, more than the dialectic of births and deaths, that determined the demographic rhythm of the island (Cuesta 1980:259).

In the transition phase of the institution of the American colonial government in Negros, many among the disenfranchised peasants now working as laborers in the haciendas experienced food scarcity. In response to the food crisis, a Hunger Commission was formed with the object of raising funds with which to purchase rice direct from China. Subcommissioners were appointed in every pueblo and various methods were used to obtain money and food for the relief of the poor (USNA RG 395, June 13, 1900, 1160).

Basic staples like rice and other goods were in critical shortage that the American military had perforce to control their movements. In particular, the Chinese immigrants who were slowly incorporated into the island's social structure, controlled the sales of rice. Military records in the U.S. National Archives disclose that the retail trading stores of local Chinese in Victorias provided supplies to military garrisons (USNA RG 395, E-5290, 1899). Moreover, there were several references to Chinese traders to the insurgents by supplying the latter with rice (*ibid.*, July 31, 1900).

From the establishment of the American colonial government, food production became increasingly marginalized in Negros Occidental as the sugar industry became a mainstay of the provincial economy. The passage of the Sugar Act of 1934 (later superseded by the Sugar Act of 1937) ensured a stable price for Philippine sugar because of the high quota set at approximately one million short tons every year since the late 1930s. In the post World War II period, the country continued to enjoy the same high quota. By 1973-74 crop year, the amount of sugar export quota to the highly profitable American market reached 1.6 million short tons. It must be pointed out that high world market demand for sugar in the early 1970s

spurred a renewed attack on the remaining frontiers and resources of the province. In Negros, world market pressure for increased production of sugar led many hacenderos to expand their haciendas to the uplands, resulting in deforestation and, in a number of cases, the grabbing of the land filled by small farmers, especially in the southern municipalities like Kabankalan, Cauayan, Candoni and Hinoba-an.

The lure of easy money and great profits from sugar therefore led to the wholesale commitment of capital, land, and manpower to sugarcane production in Negros Occidental after the second world war. In fact, as early as the 1920s, modern sugar mills costing millions of pesos were established with the impetus coming largely from American capital. National capital investment in the expanding sugar industry came mostly from Spanish and Filipino mestizo sectors. Spurred by the modernization of the milling sector, the hacienda-owners themselves followed the trend towards modernization of the sugarcane industry. In less than two decades after the introduction of centrifugal sugar production in centralized operations of the milling companies, sugar came to occupy the central position in the economy of Western Visayas, especially Negros Occidental. As the region's major produce, sugarcane became the primary agricultural product, and its processing into sugar the major industrial output.

Inevitably, the dominance of sugarcane production led to the neglect and underdevelopment of the industrial structure of Western Visayas. This "development of underdevelopment" made the problem of food scarcity an annual experience for rural workers totally dependent on their hacienda wages. Within the organization of sugarcane production around the hacienda and the mills, there is a set period for the "dead" or off-milling season. During this period, workers go through an institutionalized form of hunger arising out of reduced or nil work and, consequently, depressed or zero wages. Thus, at the onset of the "tiempo muerto", unskilled sugarcane workers go through a period of belt-tightening marked by a reduction of the number of meals taken and by a change of diet. During this season, many workers shift to a mainly starch diet of boiled plantain banana, cassava or rice gruel with salt. This annual, seasonal experience of food scarcity which reached its worst point in the mid-1980s has actually led to a state of physical deterioration among the workers and their children - a condition which may be referred to as "invisible famine".

Some comparative survey figures help illustrate this point. For instance, within Region IV Negros Occidental has the most

number of families belonging to the bottom 30 percent in income distribution – a grouping of families with annual incomes approximately not more than P1,500 in 1985. Those in the bottom 30 percent got measly shares of 10.2 percent and 11.1 percent of the total provincial income in 1985 and 1988, respectively. The structural imbalance in wealth and income manifests itself in the hunger that stalks the province. A recent survey conducted by the DOH in Western Visayas on the prevalence of malnutrition among pre-schoolers shows as high as 57,905 cases or 25.1 percent incidence. Compared with the neighboring province of Iloilo which has a comparable population, land area and production system, the latter province has a prevalence of malnutrition among pre-schoolers of only 9.5 percent (cf. Paredes 1990. Table 12).

THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL FACTOR

By the time the Philippine Republic was established, the sugar industry had become the elite among all the Philippine agricultural-based industries. A sociopolitical consequence of this was the industry serving as the main basis for wealth and power of a strategic grouping of landed gentry – the hacenderos, now commonly referred to as planters. Though its vast capitalization and large workforce (431,000 persons in 1976), sugar has historically been the most profitable and powerful of the export industries (see McCoy 1983:1). Until the major sugar crisis of the 1980s, the industry has been a significant source of the country's foreign exchange. In fact, sugar generally accounted for 25 percent of the total exports (cf. NEDA Statistical Yearbook 1982:345-355).

The centralized organization of the sugar industry into a federation of sugarcane planters facilitated the smooth translation of export profits into political power. Before the Martial Law era the "sugar bloc", a powerful clique of planters and millers, was credited with powers of undue influence "apt to shake the confidence of any politician, regardless of rank" (Lynch 1969:2). With comparatively large plantations, mills and labor force concentrated in a few agricultural centers, the consolidated political influence of the sugar industry's elites was able to dictate its own terms on a pre-Martial Law Congress and Presidency (McCoy 1984:4). For instance, by bartering U.S. military base and concessions for liberal U.S. sugar quota, the Philippine sugar industry was able to increase its export to the United States from the postwar period through the early

1970s (Ibid.). The fact that Congress was controlled by scions of the sugarcane industry effectively delayed legislation favorable to sugarcane workers – such as minimum wage and improved conditions of work – resulting in depressed income and, hence, long-drawn experience of nutritional deprivation.

High social status and power derived from ownership and control of sugarcane plantations thus led to social abuse. In the sugarcane farms, persistent poverty marked by chronic food shortages or "gutom" as the workers themselves refer to this problem, and an endless cycle of indebtedness, became their common lot. Locked in under a social system which provides no alternative for employment outside the hacienda, nor opportunity to better themselves through education, or other forms of agricultural production, the workers had no choice but to remain dependent on the "amo". Born and bred within the hacienda complex, the sugarcane workers are enculturated into a learned sense of helplessness, and a dependency on a social system which ironically has institutionalized their seasonal experience of hunger. Being landless and totally dependent on their wages, the off-milling season directly results in reduced caloric intake and poor nutrition. Subjected to this yearly physical stress, the sugarcane workers, their families, and generation of workers before them, have suffered through cyclical famine. This long-drawn food deprivation has led to biological deterioration indicated by chronic illness, miasma, and a generally debilitated population of workers based in the hacienda (cf. SRC surveys 1983-1988).

Largely a monocrop region whose vast land areas are owned by only one-half percent of its population, Negros Occidental represents a residual form of a semi-feudal society. Structurally, the Negrense society is best represented by a pyramid with its apex occupied by the dominant class of hacenderos, the landed gentry who traditionally maintained a group of permanent farm workers, the "dumaan", wholly dependent on them for survival. In better days of the sugar industry, the hacenderos acted as the social security system of the "dumaan", providing housing, work, cash advances, medical assistance and other loans. In exchange, the "dumaan" went duty-bound, and for want of an alternative social support system, to remain in the hacienda and render labor often below the legal minimum wage. This dependency relation between hacenderos and workers remained deeply entrenched until the 1970s.

The declaration of Martial Law in 1972 and the end of a half century of preferential treatment in the U.S. domestic

market brought real threats to the survival of the sugar industry and the different social classes dependent on it. Its importance as the country's major export crop started to diminish over the years, as a consequence of the declining sugar price in the world market. The removal of the US quota in 1974 upon the expiration of the Laurel-Langley agreement was a critical factor in its historic downfall. Though the expiration of the agreement was initially accompanied by a boom in the world sugar market price in 1974, the price collapsed not long after to as low as US \$0.07 per pound in 1975. Exacerbated by the Marcos regime's monopoly control of the industry through the NASUTRA, these developments effectively clipped the powers of the "sugar bloc". After sugar exports went down to only 6.3 percent of total exports in 1978, the hacenderos have been shorn their powers.

The resulting contraction of the sugar market following decades of exploitation and excesses of the once-powerful hacenderos made masses of displaced peasants and unemployed workers restive. Expectedly, the wholesale dependence of the province on sugar production – it being a lifeblood – led to massive labor displacement, widespread incidence of absolute poverty, and famine conditions at the peak of the crisis from 1984 through early part of 1986.

Labor unrest became more pronounced when, in response to the erratic movement of the price of sugar, the planters started mechanizing their farms. With efforts to rationalize sugarcane production, the century-old hacienda patronage system eroded. At such a strategic point, the underground dissident movement started infiltrating farms through the organization of radical unions. Aided by the sudden withdrawal of the total life support system in many haciendas, the dissidents led by some renegade Roman Catholic priests formed a strong mass base support.

ARMED CONFLICT, FORCED MOBILIZATION, AND THE HUNGER PROBLEM

From the first protest rally staged against the assassination of Ninoy Aquino, bringing for the first time a number of elites to march alongside the laboring class and the poor, Negrense society rapidly underwent radical changes. Late in 1983, sugar payments were being defaulted. The payments stopped coming by the first two months of 1984. Sugar being the major source of revenue, the provincial economy

became moribund. Hundreds of haciendas were abandoned. Bank lending ground to a halt. The planters cut off the workers' "consumo", and hunger stalked the land. The economic crisis in the province was so severe that it became known world-wide as the Philippine's "Ethiopia." In a span of two years, the dissident movement grew rapidly. Members of the New People's Army (NPA), the military wing of the banned Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), entered and left Negros under cover and freely roamed sugarcane fields just outside city limits.

With many workers either displaced or underemployed, the province soon became the seat of labor unrest in Western Visayas. Despite strong military presence, particularly of the Civilian Home Defense units north and south of the province, mass actions increased in great number. Long marches and mass strikes as the "Welga ng Bayan," brought thousands of mobilized hill and interior workers and peasants to the provincial capital's paved roads.

As the economic crisis worsened, a gradual shift in the nature of mass actions became evident. From mere airing of political dissent, more militant demands for changes, as the toppling of the Marcos' regime, were made. The growing militancy and the increasing violent confrontation in the streets (one leading to the death of 27 demonstrators in Escalante in September 1985) led to the dwindling participation of the landed gentry in street protests. Late in 1985, most of the street protesters hailed from the grassroots of Negrense society. At the same time, military reports showed the phenomenal rise in insurgency (see Lopez-Gonzaga 1986:20).

A key factor in the phenomenal growth of insurgency in Negros was the widespread experience of hunger resulting from the closure of sugar mills and the abandonment of sugarcane farms. With the inability of the provincial government to respond quickly and effectively to the worsening crisis, the rebels who took up the cause of the assetless rural poor gained large mass-based support. In fact, the politicization of displaced sugarcane workers, peasants and marginal fishermen facilitated the establishment of "red liberated zones". i.e., regions said to have been secured by the NPA to the extent that the military can penetrate only at the high risk of suffering significant casualties (cf. Montelibano 1985:5). By mid-1985, many of the haciendas and the upland settlements in the south-central towns of Negros have been identified as such zones. According to a military assessment in June 1985 (cf. Lopez-Gonzaga 1986:23), Central Negros was in an advanced "sub-

stage of insurgency", a condition where political support for the rebels was present and where the government has been isolated from the people. The former commander of the military Task Force himself described the NPA strength in the province in early June 1985 "as having already entered the strategic offensive stage". This was manifested, according to him, by mobile warfare mapping up operations in some parts of Negros Occidental.

To counter the growing NPA spheres of influence, the military under the defunct Marcos regime set up a string of strongholds designed for offensive actions which, however, failed. Having lost their credibility through acts of "salvaging" committed by its para-military units, the military was unsuccessful in winning civilian cooperation in their "stronghold" campaign. A high-ranking military officer explained the failure of their counter-insurgency campaign as a direct effect of the raging crisis in the province: "The people have no food, they have no money because the planters too, are strapped for cash: thus, many of the people have been swayed by the NPA's propaganda campaign."

While the countryside poor of the province refused to cooperate with the military, some planters, particularly large landholders in the south, went all out to support the creation of the special civilian home defense force units - special security forces to be attached to the military in the latter's counter-insurgency operations. This elite response to the insurgency problem inevitably led to the militarization of Negros in the 1985-1986 milling season.

In the short time that the special security forces were in operation, they made enemies for the military rather than curbed the insurgency problem. Poorly paid themselves, these paramilitary forces would chronically draw from small farming hamlets their food supply. Largely through their abuses like forced extraction of the rice supply or chickens of farmers, they further isolated the *pumuluyo*, the Negrense mass, who saw the private militiamen as guardians of the vested interests of the few rich.

Expectedly, militarization in the province led to gross violation of human rights, especially for the interior and upland rural folk. Civilians who engaged in mass organization and mobilization became easy prey for salvaging by indiscriminate paramilitary units. Commonly "salvaged" victims were militant church workers, union organizers and members.

Militarization, on the one hand, and the growing pressures from the Left on the other, led to a new wave of migration

from the countryside into the capital city of Bacolod between 1984 through 1986. The common reason cited by the new city migrants for fleeing the countryside is to escape the *gamo* (lit., trouble) between what they euphemistically refer to as the *taga-babaw* (lit. those from the upland, the New People's Army) and the *taga-ubos* (lit. from the forefront, the military). Neither pro-NPA nor pro-military, most of the migrants moved into the city in the hope of finding a more peaceful and independent pursuit of livelihood. As one former rice grower puts it, "I am tired of the taxation of the NPA, and the constant asking for contribution of the soldiers". Yet, most peasants and agricultural workers find themselves hardly better off in Bacolod. The common lament of such migrants is that they have to pay for everything, and without money they cannot eat. As one migrant from the uplands expressed it, "In the hill, even when you do not have cash, you can find food by simply digging up camote or gathering the fruits of wild growing bananas; in Bacolod if you do not have money, you really get hungry".

Generally unskilled and assetless, the new city migrants end up living in makeshift shelters, or under cramped quarters with city relatives or close friends in quasi-communal settings. Meal preparations and eating are, however, separate. With scarce jobs availed of in their newfound communities, the migrants commonly face the spectre of hunger in the city. While they have found relief in the capital from the crossfires between the military and the NPA, they have continually been haunted by deprivation of basic human necessities, clothing, shelter, and food. Life for those who stay in the sugarcane farms was not any better than the lives of those who moved out the city. Completely dependent on their low wages from their labor in the sugarcane farms, when the planters stopped receiving payments for their sugar, many of the workers were themselves not paid, and were eventually displaced from their work. Finding no other option, those workers in abandoned sugarcane farms simply faced up to reducing their meal intakes to wild-growing edible plants, field rats, and wild rootcrops.

The change of government in 1986 did not readily arrest the unstable state of affairs in the province. The psychological or social condition characterized by unusual instability caused by excessive stress - i.e., of armed conflict - continued to prevail, particularly in the upland, interior regions. Under such conditions, the hunger problem persists.

An ethnographic study of a small farming community in Dacongogon in upland Kabankalan shows that the continuing food crisis is largely due to the armed conflict in the area.

Despite the introduction of bio-intensive gardening which initially resulted in a surplus of vegetable crop, the small tiller continue to face food shortage, and still cite "gutom" as their main problem. This problem is directly related to the fact that the farmers cannot freely engage in agricultural production. Farm work schedule has to be adjusted not according to the natural rhythm of their work and environment but to the schedule of the local militia in their area. A farmer to avoid being mistaken for a rebel, for instance, has to avoid going to his farm early in the morning, the period of the day actually best-suited for farming work. He also has to make sure that he is out of his farm before late in the afternoon to avoid the same pitfall, worse, that of accidental salvaging. The disruptions in their field work has led to a drop in their farm productivity. As observed in Dacongogon, in recognized "no man's land" or areas of intensified military activity or armed conflict, farmers ready to harvest have to secure permission from both the NPA and the military to harvest their crops. Since it takes time to interface with agents of the two armed groups, by the time they secure the necessary clearance, their crops (as in the case of the marginal rice and corn growers whose production was observed), are already over mature.

Major military offensives like Operation Thunderbolt - an operation launched towards the end of April 1989 by the Army as part of its drive to flush out the insurgents from their stronghold in the far south of Negros - have led to forced mobilization and the displacement of people from their base for livelihood production. Inevitably, this has resulted in the worsening of the hunger problem among the internal refugees, numbering as many as 30,000 at the height of the campaign, who were forced to abandon their food production. Forced resettlement brought about not only by military operations, but also by NPA offensives and "zoning activities" - i.e., the forced eviction of uncooperative residents of interior, upland barangays under their control - has the net result of food scarcity, and prolonged experience of nutritional deprivation, owing partly to inadequate relief services and assistance from government

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

Implications of the Case of Negros on the Problem of Food Security

A diachronic study of the phenomenon of food crisis, i.e., hunger and famine conditions, shows that it is not directly the

consequence of natural disasters or calamities, or the failure of the base population to produce enough food. Analysis of the history of economic development in Negros, particularly that of agriculture, shows that periodic food crisis emerged upon the formation of "Sugarlandia" – a social complex, the control of the resource base for development lay primarily under the control of one social class – the hacenderos, who looked at land mainly as a form of capital investment, and relied mainly on cheap resident and migrant labor for the production of their prime agricultural commodity, sugarcane. As the social historical data imply, the early experience of food crisis in the nineteenth century may be traced to the establishment of new social relations between those who controlled ownership of land and dictated what is to be produced in it on the one hand, and those who tilled the land and are dependent on their wage-labor for subsistence on the other hand.

Political power that accrued from the fencing of the land by the agricultural entrepreneurs at the turn of the century, and the build-up of their capital from profits generated from sugarcane production, gave them the prerogative to dictate what constitutes the agricultural "surplus", and how it is distributed. Thus, a social-historical study of the process of development in Negros since the 19th century shows that while widespread hunger was experienced by the landless rural workers in the haciendas, the hacenderos did not suffer the same fate (Cuesta 1980, Echaz 1894). While a large number of the base rural population died in the famines which occurred in the late 1880s, the historical records made no mention of any hacenderos dying from starvation. The accounts in fact speak of the benevolence of the hacenderos saving the day for their workers. The history of the sugar industry in Negros therefore shows that the problem of hunger is not one that concerns technology or organization but that of sociopolitics.

The close dependence of its economy on the movement of sugar prices in the world market implies that the food crisis is also a macro social problem, traceable to the overall subordinate position of the Philippine economy to the world political economy, dominated by the capitalist industrial nations. As was inferred from the social historical data which was analyzed, the trajectory of development in Negros was initially influenced by the technological revolution in Great Britain which gave birth to a worldwide demand for sugar. From the latter part of the 19th century onward, the expansion of American capital interest and dominion in the Pacific area, particularly the Philippines,

provided the impetus for the rapid growth of the monocrop economy of Negros which is rooted in sugar production.

The "development of under-development" (Wells 1983:344) has created peripheral states like the Philippines, and within it an "internal colony" like Negros where considerable economic inequality exist and sizeable portions of the population live in poverty. Under crisis, the traditional patron-client relationship between the "hacenderos" and the sugarcane workers have broken down and have been replaced by purely capitalist relationship. Land, food, and human labor alike have been treated as nothing but commodities and sources of profit.

Finally, the problem of perennial food shortage in Sugarlandia may be described as a social and ecological problem. With the transformation of the agricultural landscape from diversified subsistence farming into monocrop wide-scale production of sugarcane, most of the rural base population who were absorbed in the "hacienda" labor force were forced to obtain their food from markets rather than their own production. Being dependent on their depressed wages, their limited purchasing power has kept their nutritional intake to bare minimum level. On the other hand, the massive clearing of the forests of Negros to pave the way for the expansion of sugarlands at the peak of sugar prices in the world market deprived the rural folks (including the tribal people traditionally dependent on hunting and gathering of forest products), of a major source for their subsistence. The available evidence from my study of the phenomenon of food crisis in Negros island shows that it is a problem that can be halted with deliberate and decisive state intervention.

From the data, it is also clear that for as long as the hacienda system exists, the hunger problem will remain. By implication, the penultimate solution to problem of hunger lies in the dismantling of this age-old social structure, and the nature of social relations as well economic system organized around the sugar industry. It is significant to note that despite many attempts at diversification of agriculture and economy in Negros Occidental, none has really succeeded except for prawn farming. This is mainly due to the fact that, to this day, almost all social and physical infrastructures are organized around sugar production. Outside key sugarcane producing areas (including the haciendas and the mills), for instance, a functional road network system is almost nonexistent. Thus, small tillers and farmers are unable to effectively market their produce; if they do get visited by traders, they are hardly compensated for their labor and capital investment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As may be inferred from the data, the main entry point for structural transformation is the realignment of ownership and control of the means of production, mainly land. With less than one percent of the total population of Negros Occidental controlling this key factor of production up to this time, food shortage remains a yearly occurrence, especially during the off-milling season. Total dependency on wage labor which has only a seasonal demand, spells outright lack of food upon cessation of work and pay by March or April of each year. Yet data from an on-going process documentation of the agrarian reform process in Negros Occidental show that transfer of land alone will not solve the food security problem. A case study of former sugarcane workers who were among the pioneering agrarian reform beneficiaries show that acquisition of land did not encourage them to go to outright food production. Instead, they have been absorbed into the prevailing social system as petty cane producers. Forced to operate under a system which demands provision for crop loan and cash to sustain one's household during the growing and maturation period of cane, these beneficiaries have fallen under the exploitive non-formal type of agricultural credit - the "alili" system. Forced to commit their standing sugarcane at fifty percent less than the market price of sugar, these workers turned small farmers end up with similar problems of cash and food shortage which they faced when they were yet plain sugarcane workers. The initial findings of this ongoing study indicate that the problem of low productivity is also due to lack of knowledge in the cultivation of other crops and adaptive farm technology, poor value orientation, absence of physical infrastructures like irrigation system, and almost nil inputs (i.e., fertilizer and pesticide).

What then is the policy or program implication of the alternative view of hunger as explicated in this paper? To predict levels of hunger prior to the manifestation of 'terminal' signs as third degree malnutrition and miasma, one needs to look at social historical factors like the degree of land concentration and the proportion of landless laborers. As may be inferred from the case of Negros, the more unequal the holdings, the higher the proportion of landless tillers, and the greater the incidence of hunger. With fewer than 11.6 percent of the

Negrense landholders controlling 66 percent of the cropland, the number of landless Negrense rural dwellers numbering approximately 198,000 households have no other option but to hire themselves as wage laborers, or go hungry. The immediate causes of hunger imply the need to strike at the existing structure of land ownership.

Under our constitution, however, the redistribution of land, property and income is extremely slow. It requires a process of lengthy studies, followed by negotiations, public hearings, culminating to compromise. As the Garchitorena, Villasor Marubeni cases have shown, the centerpiece agrarian reform program of the Aquino government is highly susceptible to moral irregularities by the bureaucracy, and the attitudes of the urban elite who are sympathetic to landed interests.

So with the successful implementation of the CARP in question, and the President's war against poverty overtaken by the galloping forces of inflation and peso devaluation, what can be realistically undertaken to arrest the problem of hunger in a context like Negros?

The most immediate step this government can take is a more conscientious implementation of the minimum wage law -- i.e., the payment of an adequate, "livable" wage for farm workers that will cover the *tiempo muerto*. A series of surveys conducted by the DOLE in different sugar milling districts in Negros show as high as 85 percent violating the legislated wage increase. The DOLE needs to increase its field personnel to monitor more closely the operations of the many sugarcane farms, and effect a more efficient system of implementing the labor laws.

The ongoing study of the implementation of the CARL in Negros by my research team indicates the strong probability of only a small percentage of the sugarcane lands being distributed by the end of ten years. Given the likelihood that only foreclosed sugarlands will be redistributed, the government should either legislate or issue a presidential order mandating a certain amount of land, as has been suggested by Governor Daniel Lacson, 10 percent of the prime sugarlands, to be allocated for communal or individual production of food crops in each hacienda. This move will in a small measure break the monocrop syndrome.

A more radical step has to be undertaken by government and the private sector in areas of armed conflict. Where food production and economic activity has stood still because of the NPA-military conflict, it is necessary to create a peace, agrarian reform and development zone (PARDZ). The concern for hun-

ger must transcend ideology, hence the delivery of basic services needed for the survival of people especially women and children must be "depoliticized". In the establishment of a PARDZ the prime object will be the delivery of government services, and the implementation of agrarian reform which is the penultimate solution to social unrest.

Finally, the problem of overpopulation in the haciendas, of surplus labor which acts as a depressant on wages, must be addressed. Wider opportunities for nontraditional skills training, improved education for hacienda children should open the door for them for migration and employment in growth centers. An effective national industrialization plan in regional centers will naturally lead to outward migration and absorption of redundant labor in the sugarcane farms.

Political will manifested by decisive government intervention and innovative measures at poverty alleviation can bring an end to the persistent problem of hunger.

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