

An Essay on the Bonifacio-Aguinaldo Schism as Manifestation of National Disunity

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ABSTRACT

This essay conducts an analysis of the underlying factors contributing to the ideological and strategic disagreement between Emilio Aguinaldo and Andres Bonifacio during the Philippine Revolution. Employing a multi-dimensional approach, the essay scrutinizes the distinct objectives each leader had for the revolution, highlighting the complexities of their conflicting perspectives. Likewise it evaluates the substantive impact of the Aguinaldo-Bonifacio schism on what was otherwise considered a unified revolutionary movement, thereby presenting implications for the interpretation of historical revolutions.

Keywords: Bonifacio, nation, nationhood, Aguinaldo, Philippine Revolution, Philippine Studies

INTRODUCTION

In the latter half of August 1896, the *Katipunan* (KKK ANB) organization faced a critical moment as Spanish authorities had uncovered its operations, leading to the arrest of hundreds of its members. In response to this, the organization's leadership convened an emergency assembly in Kangkong, Caloocan, situated in Luzon, Philippines. The assembly was characterized by impassioned debates over strategic responses to the unfolding crisis. Ultimately, the faction spearheaded by Andres Bonifacio and Emilio Jacinto gained ascendancy, persuading the majority to transition into clandestine operations and initiate a protracted armed insurgency. Consequently, August 29, 1896, was designated as the commencement date for this revolutionary struggle, as documented by Kalaw (1925). Bonifacio subsequently orchestrated a series of military engagements in Marikina, Mandaluyong, San Mateo, and San Juan Del Monte, which formally started the revolution.

In Kawit, Cavite, Emilio Aguinaldo convened an assembly consisting of *Katipunan* members as well as leaders from local Masonic lodges, with which he was affiliated, to deliberate on a strategic course of action. The meeting resolved to initiate an autonomous revolutionary campaign. Aguinaldo subsequently led the successful seizure of a Spanish

military encampment in Kawit before extending military operations to other Spanish-held municipalities and haciendas. Capitalizing on the victory in Kawit, Aguinaldo mobilized additional towns in the provinces of Laguna, Cavite, and Batangas to participate in the insurgent efforts.

Emilio Aguinaldo and Andres Bonifacio emerged as the paramount figures orchestrating the revolutionary activities under the auspices of the *Katipunan Anak ng Bayan* (KKK ANB). While Bonifacio spearheaded or influenced military campaigns in the Metro Manila and Rizal regions, Aguinaldo and his followers conducted operations in Laguna, Batangas, and Cavite. The revolution proliferated geographically as additional provinces with strong *Katipunan* affiliations, including Pampanga, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Tarlac, Bataan, and Zambales, renounced their loyalty to the Spanish colonial government.

This scholarly essay aims to dissect the underlying factors that engendered discord between Aguinaldo and Bonifacio, two architects of the Philippine Revolution. Employing a multi-faceted analytical framework, the study explores the divergent objectives that each leader harbored for the revolutionary endeavor. The essay concludes by elucidating the substantial ramifications of the Aguinaldo-Bonifacio schism on what had been an ostensibly unified revolutionary movement.

A Venue of Pronounced Conflict

The Tejeros Convention, held on March 22, 1897, in Cavite, serves as an important manifestation of the underlying tensions between Emilio Aguinaldo and Andres Bonifacio. Convened with the objective of reconciling factional differences and transforming the *Katipunan* movement into a formal revolutionary government, the assembly initiated a democratic election. While Aguinaldo secured the Presidency and other notable figures were elected to various positions, Bonifacio, who was designated as the Director of the Department of Interior, faced public scrutiny from Daniel Tirona regarding his qualifications. The ensuing affront led Bonifacio to vacate the assembly and declare the election null and void, exacerbating the preexisting schism between the *Magdalo* (Aguinaldo's faction) and *Magdiwang* (Bonifacio's faction) groups.

Contrasting interpretations exist regarding the origins of this discord. Some historians perceive it as a class struggle, with Aguinaldo's *Magdalo* faction representing the educated and affluent elite, and Bonifacio's *Magdiwang* faction representing the less privileged masses (Mateo, 2003; Constantino, 1975). Others, such as Glenn May (2007), attribute the conflict to divergent military strategies and leadership styles, identifying Aguinaldo's approach as centralized and bureaucratic, and Bonifacio's as consultative and charismatic.

It is noteworthy that the Tejeros Convention was not an isolated incident revealing the fraught relationship between these factions. During a prior assembly in

Imus, the two groups failed to reach a consensus regarding Bonifacio's role within the revolutionary government. Rather, they resolved to operate independently, perpetuating animosity between them (May, 2007).

The authors maintain that the schism may have been exacerbated by differing perceptions of superiority within each faction. Aguinaldo's sense of entitlement could have stemmed from his faction's military successes and socio-economic status, whereas Bonifacio's could have been derived from his foundational role in the *Katipunan* movement. This conjecture gains credence from Bonifacio's subsequent nullification of the Tejeros election, an act that can be interpreted as an assertion of his perceived superiority over the *Katipunan*. Similarly, Aguinaldo reinforced his authoritative stance when he thwarted Bonifacio's attempts to rally support from revolutionaries in Batangas, further issuing a letter asserting his primacy.

Aguinaldo's letter states:

Once more I wish to impress upon your minds, the fact that the Government in its efforts to carry out its purposes must be supported by everyone, and that if you give it your assistance you will deserve not only the thanks of the whole country but mine as well; but, on the other hand, if you should fail to give me the assistance which I request of you my regret will be great, for I shall consider your indifference to matters affecting our country as a sign of a lack of patriotism, which the nation should punish with utmost severity and without delay. (Philippine Insurgent Records as quoted in Kalaw,1926)

The aforementioned letter elucidates two critical dimensions: Firstly, it unmistakably manifests Aguinaldo's assertion of his hierarchical ascendancy over the revolutionary force. Secondly, whether intentional or inadvertent, Aguinaldo's phrasing imbues him with a symbolic equivalence to the nation itself when he states, "You will deserve not only the thanks of the whole country but mine as well." This syntactical construction effectively conflates Aguinaldo's individual gratitude with the collective appreciation of the nation, thereby elevating his status to a nationalistic plane.

Thus, the interplay of class distinctions, military strategies, and perceptions of superiority significantly influenced the dissonance between Aguinaldo and Bonifacio, ultimately affecting the coherence and efficacy of the revolutionary movement.

Analytical perspectives on the discord between Aguinaldo and Bonifacio generally converge on the notion that the conflict was not rooted in personal animosities. Instead, it may be construed as a manifestation of class-based disparities, divergent strategic approaches, or varying perceptual frameworks.

Teleology of the Philippine Revolution

In organizational theory, the centrality of a well-defined vision for operational efficiency is a principle notably advanced by Max Weber. According to Weberian principles, organizations necessitate a specific set of objectives for optimal functioning (Kendall et al., 2004). However, during the Tejeros Convention of 1897—an important gathering intended to evolve the *Katipunan* into a revolutionary government—there was an evident absence of consensus among *Katipunan* members regarding the movement’s directional trajectory. Variegated objectives coexisted, encompassing political, personal, and organizational aims.

The convention, significantly influenced by Emilio Aguinaldo, aimed to transition the *Katipunan* into a more structured form of governance. In a manifesto dated October 31, 1896, Aguinaldo had proposed the establishment of a revolutionary government, consisting of a six-member central committee and subordinate local committees (Kalaw, 1926). Some members of the *Magdalo* faction contended that, given the military successes achieved by *Katipunan* revolutionaries—especially in Cavite—it was a propitious moment to transition from a loosely-structured revolutionary group to a formalized governmental entity.

Bonifacio held a different perspective, asserting that the existing structure of the *Katipunan* sufficed and negated the necessity for establishing an alternative governmental form. He expressed disapproval of the *Magdalo* faction’s plans, spearheaded by Aguinaldo. In correspondence with Emilio Jacinto, Bonifacio articulated:

Here the enmity between the two factions is very great, because those of *Magdalo* want to rule all and the entire Philippines, because they say that nothing but the government of Imus is recognized there and throughout Europe. The Government they try to establish here is as follows: President and General-in-Chief “*Magdalo*”; Director of Military Works, “Baldomero” and those of *Magdiwang* will simply act as sub-director or sub-minister. This plan truly disgusted the ministers of the *Magdiwang*, who saw through their game that if Imus is elected, they will govern here in Malabon. The selfishness of *Magdalo* is truly disgusting and has been the cause of their many reverses in the field (Quoted in Kalaw, 1926).

From the outset, Bonifacio exhibited skepticism towards the establishment of any revolutionary government distinct from the *Katipunan*. Although the motivations that led Bonifacio to participate and preside over the election at the Tejeros Convention remain speculative, it is documented that he was under the impression that he was a candidate for the presidency. Despite his initial declaration, which underscored the importance of respecting the majority’s electoral decision, Bonifacio nullified the entire proceeding when he failed to secure an elected position and was publicly disparaged by

Tirona. This action raises questions concerning Bonifacio's sincerity in honoring majority rule, and suggests that perhaps he too was swayed by personal ambitions for leadership.

Individual objectives among key revolutionaries were manifest. After his electoral defeat, Bonifacio is reported to have actively opposed the newly established revolutionary government. It is postulated that his actions emanated from personal animosities and retaliatory inclinations against the *Magdalo* faction, evidenced by his recruitment and arming of troops from Limbon with the purported aim of subverting Aguinaldo's governance.

Apolinario Mabini, another figure in the revolution, critiqued Aguinaldo's personal ambitions, stating that the elimination of Bonifacio was tantamount to the triumph of personal ambition over authentic patriotism (as cited in Kalaw, 1926).

Invoking Max Weber's organizational theory, this situation could be interpreted as indicative of an organizational failure in goal-orientation, consequently resulting in inefficiencies (Weber, n.d.). As the objectives of the Philippine revolution became increasingly disparate and fragmented, its efficacy declined. Weber's assertion that organizations are prone to oligarchic tendencies, characterized by the concentration of socio-economic power among an elite minority, appeared validated. This was evinced in the latter stages of the revolution, as elite classes became more actively involved, ostensibly to safeguard their socio-economic statuses.

Aguinaldo's Revolution was not national and homogenous

In the late 19th century and prior, the Philippine archipelago lacked a unified notion of nationhood, primarily functioning on regional identities rather than a collective national identity. This observation stands in contrast to the perspective of Alfredo Saulo, a scholar from Cavite, who posited that Emilio Aguinaldo facilitated national unity (Saulo, 1987). Saulo's assertion, based on a statement by General Arthur MacArthur that Aguinaldo was the embodiment of the aspirations of the Filipino people (US Senate Document, 1902), can be critically questioned. It is ambiguous whether MacArthur's statement refers to all Filipinos or merely a subset, primarily the Tagalogs, who supported Aguinaldo's vision. Thus, MacArthur's testimony should not serve as definitive proof of national unity (Mateo, 2003).

The revolts that unfolded during this period were distinct in character, fueled by diverse motives. For instance, the 1896 uprising in Cavite had religious underpinnings, while Andres Bonifacio's Manila-based *Katipunan* was politically oriented (Schumacher, 1976). These regional movements did not necessarily share a unified set of grievances or objectives, as illustrated by the absence of involvement by regions such as Pampanga in the uprisings that occurred between 1896 and 1897 (Mateo, 2003).

Colonial policies implemented by the Spanish regime further exacerbated ethnic, cultural, and regional divisions. The term “Filipino” was diluted, and natives were classified according to their respective ethnic and regional affiliations—Tagalog, Kapampangan, Cebuano, and so on (Robles, n.d.). Aguinaldo’s attempt to promote a Tagalog-centric revolution by encouraging his military officials to garner support from their native provinces was met with skepticism by revolutionary groups in other regions, who favored a federal arrangement (Robles, n.d.).

Historian Celedonio A. Ancheta (1973) catalogued at least 100 revolts against Spanish rule, each distinct in nature—12 political, 16 religious, 23 socio-economic, and the rest falling under miscellaneous categories. The multitude and diversity of these revolts underscore the absence of a cohesive national movement.

The failure of the *Katipunan*, designed to be a national organization, is often attributed to leadership struggles between Bonifacio and Aguinaldo, each representing divergent social classes. The internal divisions culminated in the arrest and execution of Andres Bonifacio and his brother Procopio under Aguinaldo’s orders (Mateo, 2003). In his memoirs, Apolinario Mabini highlights Aguinaldo’s appetite for power at the expense of Bonifacio (Mabini, n.d.).

The evidence presented herein supports the argument that the concept of a unified “nation” was notably absent in late 19th-century Philippines. Consequently, the idea of a national revolution is implausible, although this does not diminish the significance of the various regional uprisings that occurred. These revolts were distinct yet crucial in their own right, irrespective of their regional or ethnic orientation, as noted by historian Alfred McCoy (2001). Therefore, a betrayal of Aguinaldo’s revolutionary ideals should not be conflated with betrayal of a non-existent unified Filipino nation.

CONCLUSION

The disintegration of the revolutionary effort can be primarily attributed to the schism between two figures, Aguinaldo and Bonifacio. This disagreement, emanating from class distinctions, diverging strategic approaches, and perceptions of superiority, effectively undermined what could have been a successful revolutionary campaign.

Finally, the essay underscores the significance of Aguinaldo-Bonifacio rift in the larger context of the Philippine Revolution. It suggests that this internal conflict was not merely a product of personal differences but reflected deeper societal and class divisions. The authors argue that this disagreement weakened the effectiveness of the revolutionary movement. By analyzing the dynamics between Aguinaldo and Bonifacio, the essay provides valuable insights into historical revolutions, particularly in terms of leadership, ideology, and national unity.

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