

THE KILLING OF  
ANDRES BONIFACIO:  
A Critical Linguistic Reading  
of History<sup>1</sup>

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INTRODUCTION

*On 10 May 1897... (Andres and Procopio Bonifacio) were brought to the hills of Maragondon and shot; because of the lack of reliable witnesses, the precise details of their deaths may never be known.*

This statement was made by the distinguished historian Reynaldo Ileto in

*Pasyon and Revolution* (1979: 138). Fifty years prior to the publication of his work, Lazaro Makapagal, the man whom history declares was ordered to shoot Bonifacio, wrote a narrative recounting the details of the shooting. Why was Makapagal's story not considered a reliable source of details concerning the revolutionary hero's death?

As a student of language, I could not ignore the significance of the existence of the narrative written by Makapagal. It is a text — an instance of language use. Critical Linguistics tells me that language encodes systems of belief or ideology which originate from social and political structures. In "representing the world," the linguistic choices of Lazaro Makapagal signify implicit values which can be made explicit through a Critical Linguistic analysis of the text.

Texts are the linguistic part of complicated communicative interactions. These, in turn, are implicated in social processes in complex ways. The structure of discourse and of texts reflects and expresses the purposes and roles of its participants, these in turn being products of the prevailing forms of economic and social organization. But communication (thus language) is not just a *reflex* of social processes and structures. In the expression of these processes and structures they are affirmed, and so contribute instrumentally to the consolidation of existing social structures and material conditions. Interpretation is the process of recovering the social meanings expressed in discourse by analyzing the linguistic structures in the light of their interactional and wider social contexts.

The *critical* nature of this linguistic interpretation has its motive in the fact that so much of social meaning is implicit: not contained in the statements of the texts, and often not in the speech acts ostensibly offered by the language structures (Fowler et al. 1979: 195-96).

While a critical linguistic analysis of Makapagal's narrative may not directly address the problem of the reliability of his narrative as a source of historical information, it may be used to 'understand values which underpin political formations' in one phase of the Philippine Revolution of 1896 by examining the following points closely: (1) Makapagal's role as the narrator of the tale; (2) his narrative and linguistic choices; (3) the power shifts within the revolutionary society; (4) overlapping significations of power in the roles of the 'characters' of the narrative; (5) the struggle between Makapagal's position in the larger power structure of the Revolutionary Society and his place in the hierarchical series of commands; and (6) his capacity to make use of his power to save the life of Bonifacio, the founder of the organization whose ideals he was fighting for.

## THE TEXT

The text I have chosen for this Critical Linguistic analysis is a personal letter written by Lazaro Makapagal to Jose P. Santos on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 1929 in Manila. Where I found a copy of the letter is significant in the categorization of it as a form of narrative. It was found in a book called *Ilang Talata tungkol sa Paghihimagsik nang 1896-97* (Ronquillo 1996: 811-15), and not where one would usually find a collection of personal letters — say, in a box or an envelope stashed away in a closet. The main topic of the letter, the shooting of Andres Bonifacio, accounts for the inclusion of this personal letter in a book about a significant period of our country's history. The text falls under two of Toolan's forms of narrative as it is not only a personal letter but a historical document as well. The original letter is at the Aguinaldo Shrine in Kawit, Cavite (Ronquillo 1996: 802).

## CRITICAL LINGUISTICS AND HISTORY

Roger Fowler, in 1996, pointed out the link between history and Critical Linguistics:

... critical linguistics is a form of history writing or historiography. This characterization would suitably reflect the central interest of the subject, which is not Language as traditionally understood by linguists. As we have seen, critical linguistics is an 'instrumental' linguistics looking beyond the formal structure of Language as an abstract system, towards the practical interaction of language and context. I link critical linguistics with history rather than, say, sociology (as disciplines devoted to what from the traditional linguist's point of view constitutes 'context') because the broadest possible frame of reference is needed: there is no knowing what the critical linguist will be interested in next (10).

I cannot ignore historical events (and other extralinguistic elements) related to the writing of the Lazaro Makapagal letter, nor isolate them from the study of how language is used in the text. Makapagal wrote the letter 32 years after the shooting of Andres and Procopio Bonifacio. He addressed it to Jose P. Santos, the eldest son of Epifanio de los Santos, who, like his father, ardently studied the Philippine Revolution. According to Makapagal, he was repeatedly told by Santos to write a letter explaining his "*actuacion militar*." In the letter, Makapagal comments about the time that had elapsed between the event and the writing of the letter: "*napakatagal na po ... Tila lipas na sa panahon, ay hindi na kailangan.*" But even if Makapagal did not seem to find it necessary to write the letter, he did so because he was told to do it: "*Gayon man po ay susunod ako sa loob niño, at ganito ang nangyari ...*"

Eleven years after Makapagal wrote the letter, Jose P Santos wrote (Don) Emilio Aguinaldo (December 4, 1940) about the essay he had written that justified the act of Aguinaldo concerning the

death of the Bonifacio brothers. (Santos was referring to a Bonifacio biography contest entry he had written.) Santos later said that it was very clear in his work that Aguinaldo was not responsible for the execution of the brothers:

*... maliwanag na ipinakikilala ng mga kasulatang inilakip ko sa aking akda na kayo'y WALANG DAPAT SAGUTIN SA NANGYARI SA PAGKAKAPATAY SA KANILA ...*

Aguinaldo, in his *My Memoirs* (1967), expressed pity for the two brothers after the death sentence was imposed on them by the court during the Bonifacio trial in 1897. According to Aguinaldo, he never had an enemy, and he "never thought that in this struggle against Spain, I would have an enemy and a Filipino at that!" (161). He said:

I ordered ... the presiding judge, to ask the military court to relax the penalty on the brothers ... My reasons were pity, my desire to preserve the unity of the Filipinos, and, above all, because I did not want to shed the blood of other revolutionists (162).

Nevertheless, he was convinced by Generals Pio del Pilar and Mariano Noriel to order the execution of the brothers. In Aguinaldo's memoirs, the two generals said:

... if you will allow Andres Bonifacio to live, the cause of the Revolution will be in danger. We cannot afford to be divided, especially in these critical moments (162)

So, Emilio Aguinaldo "rescinded (his) order. Thereupon, General Mariano Noriel ordered Major Lazaro Makapagal to bring with him a squad of soldiers to fetch the prisoners and carry out the punishment originally imposed by the military court. Very early on the morning of May 10, 1897, Major Makapagal and his men took the prisoners to Mount Tala where they were shot" (163).

The historian Renato Constantino believes that Andres Bonifacio had been "outmaneuvered."<sup>2</sup> In his work, the execution of our Revolutionary hero is attributed to "dirty politics," a hunger for power and control, not unlike the driving forces of malevolent occurrences in our era's political scenarios.

Let me go back to Roger Fowler:

Like the historian, the critical linguist aims to understand the values which underpin social, economic, and political formations (1979: 10)

I believe that Critical Linguistics cannot answer all the questions concerning social, economic, and political formations that arise out of a linguistic study. Still it provides an alternative angle from which to view some sociohistorical issues. This particular work reexamines an aspect of our country's past, but it does not aim to address all possible issues arising out of the study. In fact, it may provoke more questions and generate more issues, some of which may be left unanswered for the time being.

As for method ... the critical linguist, like the historian, treats texts both as types of discursive practice (charters, letters, proclamations, Acts of Parliament) and as documents (sources for the beliefs of institutions, for example) (Fowler, 10).

In this study, Lazaro Makapagal's letter will be treated both as a personal letter and a historical document.

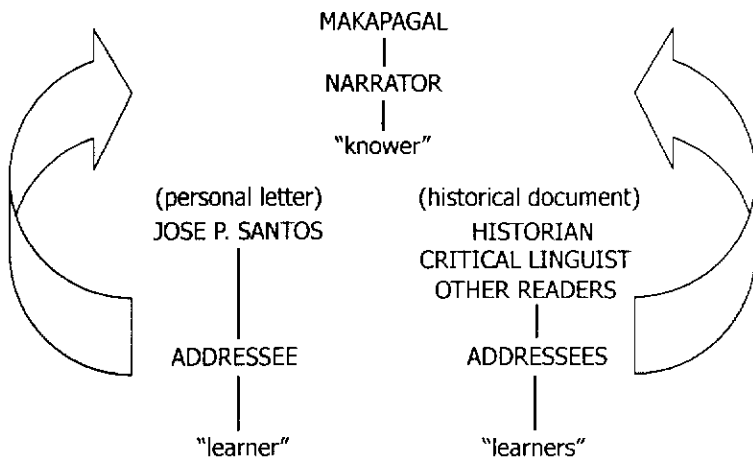
### **NARRATING AS "MAKING A BID FOR A KIND OF POWER"**

It is necessary to pay attention to the power players involved in the production of the text. Toolan says that the act of narrating itself is making a "bid for a kind of power" (1988: 3); therefore, it

is supposedly Makapagal here who holds the power. However, what happens to this kind of power if it functions within a larger power structure?

The narrator, Makapagal, narrates because he was told to do so. Did he recognize his power as a narrator? Or was he just following orders? If we are to consider his power as the narrator, did he acquire this power because of his narration? Or did he narrate because he had power?

There are overlapping significations of power here because of the multiple roles of the people involved as well as the merging of text and context in this analysis. If the text is categorized as a personal letter, the roles are clear: Lazaro Makapagal as the narrator (the "knower," the one who holds the power); Jose P. Santos as the addressee (the "learner"). If the text is considered as a historical document: Lazaro Makapagal is the narrator (the "knower," the one who holds the power); the readers (the historian, the critical linguist, and other readers) are the addressees (the "learners"). However, outside the sphere of the text, we seem to observe a reversal of power-playing roles: Jose P. Santos tells Lazaro Makapagal to write the letter; the historian and/or critical linguist can also subvert the narrator's power by exposing its source and dynamics.



It is also interesting to note that in the larger context of the narrative, there had been power reversals prior to the incident recounted by Makapagal. The power struggles within the revolutionary society brought Andres Bonifacio's status from the Supremo, the founder, the leader, the recognized "king" of the people, to that of a prisoner to be executed whose life was in the hands of those who had been his inferiors (within the political hierarchy of the organization).

Teodoro Agoncillo presents a list of those who were elected to office early in 1895 (1990: 151-52):

Andres Bonifacio -----	Supremo
Emilio Jacinto -----	Fiscal
Jose Turiano Santiago -----	Secretary
Vicente Molina -----	Treasurer
Pio Valenzuela -----	Physician
Pantaleon Torres -----	Councilors
Aguedo del Rosario	
Doroteo Trinidad	

"On December 31, 1895, another election to the Supreme Council (of the Katipunan) was held, with the following officers":

Andres Bonifacio -----	Supremo or President
Pio Valenzuela -----	Fiscal and Physician
Emilio Jacinto -----	Secretary
Vicente Molina -----	Treasurer
Enrique Pacheco -----	Councilors
Pantaleon Torres	
Balbino Florentino	
Francisco Carreon	
Hermenegildo Reyes	



"Eight months later, in August 1896 ... the ... Supreme Council took its oath of office. Elected were":

Andres Bonifacio -----	Supremo
Emilio Jacinto -----	Secretary of State
Teodoro Plata -----	Secretary of War
Briccio Pantas -----	Secretary of Justice
Aguedo del Rosario -----	Secretary of Interior
Enrique Pacheco -----	Secretary of Finance

"On March 22, 1897, the two councils of the Katipunan met and decided to elect the officers of the revolutionary government (thus unceremoniously discarding the Supreme Council of the Katipunan under whose standard the people had been fighting and would continue to fight). The results of the election were" (Constantino 1975: 184):

Emilio Aguinaldo -----	President
Mariano Trias -----	Vice-President
Artemio Ricarte -----	Captain-General
Emiliano Riego de Dios -----	Director of War
Andres Bonifacio -----	Director of the Interior

Constantino speaks of the "power-play" in the elections and of how "the typical ilustrado belief that leadership should be the exclusive prerogative of the educated" is manifested in Daniel Tirona's protest against Bonifacio's post as Director of the Interior because of his lack of education. Constantino also claims that "the death-blow to the Katipunan and his (Bonifacio's) election as a mere Director of the Interior showed clearly that he had been maneuvered out of power."

"Aguinaldo took his oath of office the day after the Tejeros assembly. The composition of his government was as follows":

Emilio Aguinaldo -----	President
Mariano Trias -----	Vice-President
Artemio Ricarte -----	Captain-General
Emiliano Riego de Dios -----	Director of War
Pascual Alvarez -----	Director of the Interior
Jacinto Lumberas -----	Director of State
Baldomero Aguinaldo -----	Director of Finance
Mariano Alvarez -----	Director of Commerce
Severino de las Alas -----	Director of Justice

Bonifacio's name, which consistently appears in the lists as Supremo or President, disappears from the list above. According to Constantino, "Bonifacio refused to recognize the new government ... There were now two declared and rival foci of power. In the ensuing struggle, several prominent leaders initially vacillated between the two. But this was Cavite and Bonifacio was not only a non-Caviteño among predominantly Caviteño leaders but worse, a propertyless man in the midst of the Cavite elite. Moreover, Aguinaldo had won an election. This gave his position a stamp of legality which carried weight with the ilustrados. Bonifacio did not have a chance. With more or less naked opportunism, those who at first joined him later abandoned the founder of the Katipunan and turned against him" (Constantino 1975: 184-88).

The power shifts within the framework of the revolutionary society would later influence the relationship between the narrator of the tale and the "major character": the Katipunan Supremo who, in Makapagal's letter, knelt before him and begged for forgiveness:

*... ñig akoy makita nia ay nagpapaluhod-luhod, sinasabing  
kapatid patawarin mo ako ...*

THE GRAMMATICIZATION OF CHARACTER  
AND SITUATION, THE TRANSITIVITY OF CLAUSES,  
AND OUR "VIEW OF REALITY"

This work is an appropriation of Halliday's grammar of the transitivity of clauses for an analysis of a text written in Tagalog.

For Halliday, transitivity concerns rather more than purely syntactic questions such as whether or not a particular verb takes a direct object ... Halliday assumes that the semantic processes and participants expressed by particular noun phrases and verb phrases in a clause are a representation of *what we take to be going on* in the world. By means of choices from among limited sets of processes and participant roles, expressed in the grammar of the clause and, in particular, its verb, we characterize our view of reality.

Transitivity (or process) analysis is a simple semantic parsing. That is to say, the analyst is identifying the process or action that a clause expresses, whether there is an animate individual intentionally doing the action to another entity (these participants are labeled the 'agent' and the 'affected,' respectively), or whether the action is rather one of saying something or thinking something or unconsciously doing something (verbal, mental and behavioral processes, respectively). The entire business of representing the processes and participants of reality is what Halliday has termed the ideational function of language. In relation to this ideational function, the clause is the basic vehicle for representing basic patterns of experience (Toolan 1988: 112).

According to Halliday, "the ideational function (of language) is a major component of meaning in the language system that is basic to more or less all uses of language. And the structures that

express these ideational meanings are still recognizably derived from the meanings themselves ... Hence this function of language, which is that of encoding our experience in the form of an ideational content, not only specifies the available options in meaning but also determines the nature of their structural realizations" (1985: 31).

## MATERIAL PROCESSES: PROCESSES OF DOING

Material processes entail verbs of doing, and doing to. These involve agents, (and) affecteds ... (Toolan 1988: 113).

The clauses below are taken from General Mariano Noriel's words, as written by Makapagal in his narrative:

*kunin niño ang magkapatid na si G. Andres at Procopio  
Bonifacio*

ACTION: *kunin*  
AFFECTED: *niño*  
AGENT: (absent)

Outside the text, if the action is done, the AFFECTED becomes the AGENT of the action:

ACTION: *kunin*  
AGENT: *niño*  
AFFECTED: *magkapatid na si G.. Andres at Procopio  
Bonifacio*

In the text:

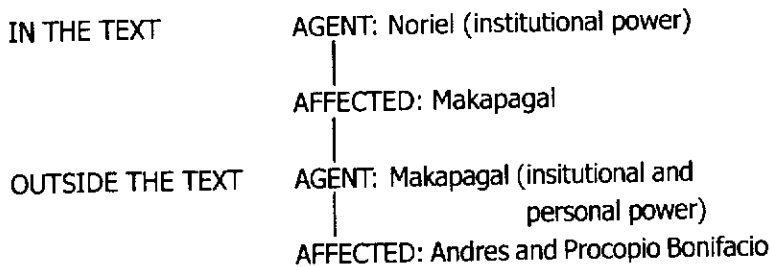
*dalhin niño sa Bundoc ñig tala*  
ACTION: *dalhin*  
AFFECTED: *niño*  
AGENT: (absent)

Outside the text:

ACTION: *dalhin*  
 AGENT: *niño*  
 AFFECTED: (*magkapatid na si G. Andres at Procopio Bonifacio*)

The Agents of the Actions are the ones who hold the power To Do. In the world of the text, it is General Mariano Noriel, the absent agent, who issues the 'commands' (Actions). Outside the world of the text, the Affected, Lazaro Makapagal (and the four soldiers under his command), will become the Agent of the Action if he decides to perform or Do it.

The transformations in the roles of the people involved in the Actions in and outside the text are illustrated in the diagram below:



Institutional power is demonstrated in the text as Makapagal assumes the role of the Affected and Noriel the absent Agent of the Actions. Outside the text, when the Affected becomes the Agent of the Actions, personal power presents itself to the Agent as the decision To Do the Actions is in the hands of the Agent.

Makapagal's narrative includes the letter addressed to him, written by General Mariano Noriel. The following actions come from Noriel's letter:

*kayo at mga kawal na nasa ilalim ng iñong kapangyarihan, ay sia nautusan upang ganapin ang nasabing hatol na barilin ang dalawang magkapatid*

In the text:

ACTION: *nautusan*  
AGENT: (no agent)  
AFFECTED: *kayo at mga kawal na nasa ilalim ng iñong kapangyarihan*

Outside the text:

ACTION: (barilin)  
AGENT: *kayo at mga kawal na nasa ilalim ng iñong kapangyarihan*  
AFFECTED: *ang dalawang magkapatid*

In the text:

ACTION: *binalikan*  
AGENT: *ko*  
AFFECTED: *si G. Andres*

*na binabantayan ng dalawang kawal*

ACTION: *binabantayan*  
AGENT: *dalawang kawal*  
AFFECTED: *(Si G. Andres)*

*biglang tumakbo, tinuño ang kagubatan hinabol namin*

ACTION: *hinabol*  
AGENT: *namin*  
AFFECTED: *(Si G. Andres)*

*at ñig malapit na ay binaril*

ACTION: *binaril*

AGENT: (*namin*)

AFFECTED: (*Si G. Andres*)

Lazaro Makapagal, the narrator, used *namin* as the agent for the actions *hinabolat binaril*. But would the soldiers, who were under his command (*mga kawal na nasa ilalim ng iñong kapangyarihan*), have done anything without his consent? As the Agent of the Action, he could have chosen not to do it. But he said he could not do anything because it was an order:

*kung isiping koy wala akong magagawa laban sa nagutos, hindi makasuouay*

because he would have to face the consequences:

*sa anumang kapabayaan o kakulangan ñig pagsunod sa utos na ito ay pananagutan niño, ipapatas sa iño ang bisa at bigat ng mga kautusang nasasabi sa Código de Enjanciamiento militar Español*

even if he claimed that

*ang aking sariling loob ay galit sa aking guinawa*

Apart from the contradictions between his explicit statement (he had no choice) and the implicit meanings found in the narrative (he had a choice), the presence of *galit* (anger) and *awa* (pity) in the text leads us to the conflict between the institutional and personal power of Lazaro Makapagal:

*... bumalik kami sa Maragondon, na malumbay ako sa nangyari, datapat ano ang magagawa sa mabiglang oras na yon?... dahil sa awa ko sa dalawa at hindi ko gusto ang ganoong servicio ... masarap pa sa aking loob ang humarap*

*sa barilan, sa gumanap ng gayong tungkot sa taong hindi  
ko katalo at walang sama ng loob."*

Makapagal was not completely consumed by institutional power. The struggle between the conflicting manifestations of power (institutional and personal) demonstrates his implicit recognition of his personal power even if he explicitly states that he could not do anything about the order.

### OBEDIENCE TO AUTHORITY

Makapagal, in his narrative, never referred to Andres Bonifacio as the Supremo, but he knew that the man he was ordered to kill was the founder of the Katipunan, the organization whose ideals he was fighting for. Yet he chose to obey the order that came from those who were above him in the hierarchical structure of the Revolutionary Army. Why did he choose to obey the order even if the act was against his will (or so he claims)?

This militaristic behavior can be compared to unjustifiable acts, by non-military standards, justified only by the military mind's obedience to authority. The countless Jews who were killed during Hitler's regime, for instance, were direct victims of people who were "just following orders from superiors."

Hannah Arendt "covered the trial of Nazi war criminal Adolph Eichmann. She found him a dull, uninspired, unaggressive bureaucrat who saw himself as a little cog in the machine" (perhaps like Makapagal who was not only an "agent," but an "affected" as well). Arendt, in a study called *A Report on the Banality of Evil*, "concluded that most of the 'evil men' of the Third Reich were just ordinary people following orders from superiors" (Atkinson et al. 1981: 572). This means that one does not need to have a "military mind" to be capable of doing "evil deeds" if she/he is ordered by an



authority to do them. Can obedience to authority really be that powerful and pervasive among ordinary citizens? This chilling possibility was explored in a series of important and controversial studies by Stanley Milgram (Atkinson et al. 1981: 573). The necessity of "the potential for obedience to authority" was established in the Milgram Obedience Experiment (Milgram 1974: 573):

The division of labor in a society requires that individuals have the capacity to subordinate and coordinate their own independent actions in the service of the goals and purposes of the larger social organization.

Parents, school systems, and work organizations all nurture this capacity further by teaching the developing individual the importance of following the directives of others who "know the larger picture."

Lazaro Makapagal was aware of this 'importance of following directives of others who knew the larger picture'. The consequences of refusing to follow the order to kill Bonifacio were explicitly presented to him. In the context of the situation of the narrative where he was the one who could make use of institutional power to do actions with or to all the other "characters" (the soldiers and the Bonifacio brothers) in his narrative, his position in the larger power structure of his organization and his place in the hierarchical series of commands prevailed over his capacity to make use of his power to save Bonifacio's life.

The tight hierarchical nature of the military system adopted by the Revolutionary army became part of the justification Makapagal felt he had to include in his narrative: he was "just following orders." But whose orders were they?

In Noriel's letter, the agent of *nautusan* is absent.

*kayo at mga kawal na nasa ilalim ng iñong kapangyarihan, ay sia nautusan upang ganapin ang nasabing hatol na barilin ang dalawang magkapatid*

ACTION: *nautusan*  
AGENT: (no agent)  
AFFECTED: *kayo at mga kawal na nasa ilalim ng iñong kapangyarihan*

But it was General Mariano Noriel who "ordered" Major Lazaro Makapagal to bring the two brothers to Tala and follow the instructions in the letter. The following series of commands are evident in Emilio Aguinaldo's *Memoirs*:

... the court unanimously imposed the death sentence on them ...

I (Emilio Aguinaldo) ordered ... the presiding judge, to ask the military court to relax the penalty on the brothers.

... I rescinded my order. Thereupon, General Mariano Noriel ordered Major Lazaro Makapagal to bring with him a squad of soldiers to fetch the prisoners and carry out the punishment originally imposed by the military court (Aguinaldo 1967: 161-62).

Generals Mariano Noriel and Pio del Pilar were the ones who convinced Emilio Aguinaldo to "rescind" his order.

When the order reached Lazaro Makapagal's level, the killing of the Katipunan Supremo was "justifiable":

The most important factor producing ... voluntary obedience ... is the individual's acceptance of an overarching ideology that legitimizes the authority of

the person in charge and justifies following his or her directives.

It was the overarching ideology that prompted an individual to leave autonomy behind, voluntarily subordinating his or her own independence to goals and purposes of the larger social organization (Atkinson et al. 1981: 578).

## CONCLUSION

Makapagal chose not to make use of his personal power. He subordinated his "own independence" to the "goals and purposes" of the revolutionary government. While his narrative explicitly states that he did not have a choice, a critical linguistic analysis of it implicitly exhibits the conflict between two manifestations of power,<sup>3</sup> and therefore a choice between the two.

On that historic day, May 10, 1897, institutional power prevailed over personal power, and Andres Bonifacio perished in the hands of Lazaro Makapagal who was, at some time in the past, his subordinate.

## NOTES

1. This paper was read at the *International Conference — 1898 and the World: Contexts and Actors, Transitions and Transformations* (UP Diliman, June 10, 1998) and at the *The Linguistic Society of the Philippines Annual Convention* (De La Salle University, 1998).
2. "From Aguinaldo's point of view, Bonifacio was a threat. He had to be eliminated. He therefore ordered Col. Agapito Bonzon to arrest Bonifacio and his brothers. They were charged with sedition and treason before a military court presided over by General Mariano Noriel. The trial opened on April 29, 1897 and was over by May 4 despite a change of venue due to military reverses. (It) was a farce from

beginning to end. Personal prejudice and the very fact that the man on trial was the enemy of President Aguinaldo made a verdict of guilty a foregone conclusion ... Bonifacio could not have been dangerous to the Revolution as a whole for he remained resolved to continue the anti-Spanish struggle. Neither was he a threat to the revolutionary movement in Cavite since he was planning to move out of Cavite. But he was a threat to the Cavite leadership that wanted to seize control of the entire Revolution, and for this reason he had to be eliminated. Given Bonifacio's prestige with the masses as the Katipunan Supremo, Aguinaldo's leadership could be stabilized only with Bonifacio's death.

... Up to the time of his death, Bonifacio had no record of compromise nor did he ever issue any statement of doubtful patriotism. His actions were uncompromising against the enemy and stern toward those who showed weakness before the Spaniards. On the other hand, the group that eliminated Bonifacio was the one that subsequently entered into a series of compromises with the enemy which negated the original objectives of the Revolution ..." (Constantino 1975: 189-91).

3. I am not presenting a dichotomy of power (its absence or presence), but two manifestations of it (institutional and personal).

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