

History, Sociology, Anthropology

Life, Food, and Health in Wartime Luzon: Experiences and Networks of Family Support During the Japanese Occupation

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Harsh conditions brought about by the realities of the Pacific War set in on the people in and around Manila from December 1941 to mid-1945. As events unfolded, Filipino and American forces ended up on the losing side. The demoralizing situation was worse for the ill-prepared civilians who had to deal with the exigencies of wartime emergencies and shortage of basic commodities. The most imminent of these shortages was that of food and medicine. The pre-war preparations by the Philippine Red Cross (PRC), then an affiliate of the American National Red Cross (ANRC), and those of other various medical establishments in the Manila area were not enough for people to face the realities of late 1941 and early 1942.

As civilians absorbed the negative effects of guerrilla insurgencies, inefficient political-economic policies, and Japanese military rule, the food and medical shortages gave rise to diseases such

as malaria, dysentery, and beri-beri. The entire population went through life-changing experiences produced by malnutrition and pathogenic diseases which afflicted them and decimated their numbers.

Despite generalized hardships, however, the people devised ways to cope with the dire situation. As families stepped up efforts to deal with food and medical shortages, medical workers in hospitals and related institutions did their part with great diligence despite the stresses created by the threatening Japanese presence. For an undetermined number of men and women, it was a time for volunteerism and social work.

This paper spotlights the adaptation patterns of affected civilians during the period, with special focus on health-related experiences.

Historiography of the Japanese Occupation

This paper first presents an overview of how Filipinos valued life and family as they sought to survive a desperate situation by detailing what life was like during the period. It further seeks to contribute to the burgeoning array of secondary sources on the social and medical aspects of Philippine history during the Japanese Occupation, utilizing primary sources like written accounts of experiences, diaries, and interviews.

Among the secondary sources already published, Ricardo T. Jose (1999) wrote extensively on food shortages in Greater Manila in “The Rice Shortage and Countermeasures during the Occupation,” published in *The Philippines under Japan: Occupation Policy and Reaction*. The work discusses food supply insufficiencies and their effect on the people. Thelma B. Kintanar presented an account of the nutritional difficulties of the period in “Food,” and Patricia B. Arinto wrote on wartime health care experiences in “Health and Health Care,” both published in *Kuwentong Bayan Noong Panahon ng Hapon: Everyday Life in*

a Time of War (2006). Maria Luisa T. Camagay (2006) also presented food and medical experiences in “Noong Panahon ng mga Hapon: Mga Kuwento mula sa Bulacan at Pampanga.” These works provide the empirical sources of food-health experiences in the Central and Southern Luzon regions during the period. Jose’s *The Japanese Occupation*, Vol 7 of *Kasaysayan: The Story of the Filipino People* (1998) is also an extensive study on the topic.

Much of the Philippine historiography on the Japanese Occupation is rooted on Teodoro A. Agoncillo’s two-volume *The Fateful Years: Japan’s Adventure in the Philippines, 1941-1945* (2001) and Morton J. Netzorg’s *The Philippines in World War II and to Independence, December 8, 1941–July 4, 1946: An Annotated Bibliography* (1995). Ricardo T. Jose and Lydia N. Yu-Jose’s *An Annotated Bibliography on Philippines-Japan Relations* (1998) and *The Japanese Occupation of the Philippines: A Pictorial History* (1997) provide general references to the Occupation. Gina V. Barte, Arminia B. Cabuay, and Pieta A. G. Verdadero’s *Panahon ng Hapon: Sining sa Digmaan, Digmaan sa Sining: Studies on Philippine Art and Society, 1942-1945* (1992) explores the cultural landscape of the period.

Resil B. Mojares in “Historiography of the Japanese Occupation,” (1982, 2-4) underlines the need to focus on the: (1) non-military aspects, (2) “patterns constituted by various phenomena and events,” and (3) a problem-based orientation. Although Mojares’ objective was to promote the use of local history for the period, he recommended paying attention to analyses similar to what he termed “shaking loose” from “established assumptions” in order to “advance in our knowledge of that period” (1982, 5).

A major follow-up to this call for a deeper and wider introspection into this period is Ikehata Setsuho’s (1999, 2) recommendation of “a study that attempts (1) to expand the narrow, fixed locus and focus of study characterizing the field to date, and (2) to overcome serious limitations on source materials by analyzing them further.” As part of the historiography of the Japanese Occupation,

this study presents an analysis of an aspect of the people's experiences, namely health and illness. This also follows from the contentions of Ricardo T. Jose (1999) and Nagano Yoshiko (1999) that political-economic policies privileging the interests of one group over another directly impacted on the public at large.

A more specific lens on the social history of the period is researched life histories which serve as a framework for analyzing the complexities of the period, such as what the *Kuwentong Bayan* project employed. "Life history or life story is primarily autobiographical in character and has been associated with the disciplines of anthropology and sociology" (Kintanar 2006, 5). Inasmuch as the research relies heavily on data from written and oral accounts, life history becomes a viable method of analysis under the umbrella of social history.

This research follows on the "kuwentong bayan" approach which integrates both written experiences and local narratives. For the written sources, Benito J. Legarda, Jr.'s *Occupation '42* (2003) and *Occupation: The Later Years* (2007) have recently been published. Autobiographies written by Victor Buencamino (1977), Joaquin L. Garcia (2001), Pacita P. Jacinto (1999), and Jose P. Laurel (1960) are classic accounts. For the religious, Michael P. Onorato's *Two Jesuits at Los Banos, 1944-1945: Leo A. Cullum and James B. Reuter* (1987) are compiled along with the accounts of Fr. Juan Labrador, O.P. (1987) and Fr. John F. Hurley, S.J. (2005). Ernesto Y. Lee's *World War II Philippines: A Boy's Tale of Survival* (2010) while Kiyoshi Osawa's autobiography (1981) is from a Japanese civilian's perspective.

The study then seeks to contextualize the people's collective experiences in the light of health—health policies, the activity of medical institutions, adaptation practices, dietary practices, procurement patterns, not merely reacting to the medical policies promulgated by the Japanese or Filipinos. This requires introspection into existing economic and social structures and into political activities as integrative factors in developing health-seeking behavior, focusing on the various forms of adaptation and negotiation.

Framework of Discussion

This study centers on health-seeking behavior as a social phenomenon that motivated the common search for health and well-being during the Japanese occupation. This behavior is evident in the bureaucratic level among the medical institutions and in individual activities.

For this research, health-seeking behavior may be defined as the attempts of persons or groups to address their health, optimal wellness, recovery, and rehabilitation needs.

All in all, this article hopes to integrate into the historical and anthropological frameworks various case studies giving witness to the harsh conditions of the Japanese occupation. Inasmuch as the research gives primary focus on people, frameworks and perspectives underlining human behavior and social phenomena are necessitated. The whole Japanese occupation is difficult to explain through just one theoretical framework, as the period is characterized by dysfunction, disjointedness, inconvenience, and non-linearity. It is the intention of this research to “translate” for the academic world an interpretation of notions of health and illness during the Occupation based on the testimonies of interviewed respondents. It was possible for the researcher to clarify specific ideas revealed during the interviews to present what life was really like for ordinary people during the Japanese occupation, particularly in matters of nutrition and health.

The perspectives of individuals during the Occupation may have changed after more than half a century later. Some memories are best forgotten, but oppressive conditions at the time remain eternally etched in the consciousness of individuals.

Hunger, illness, pain, and discouragement characterized the afflictions of many people, largely brought about by lack of food and shelter. The desire for health was a daily preoccupation, and wealth was readily given up for it. It is practically impossible to define the world experienced by the distressed populace. A social scientist can only present an etic perspective.

Political and economic activities were the backdrop of individual and familial survival and dictated the active, and at times desperate, health-seeking behavior of people whatever their personal circumstances. Their families, friends, relatives, and allies served as their connections and the immediate caretakers of their health.

Common to everyone during the war was the lack of stability—many respondents related their constant movement. Many Manila residents migrated to the provinces, but there were individuals who, for one reason or another, moved from one place to another. Thus, it is impossible to limit the scope of this research to a single locality. For purposes of this study, this researcher used geographic sequence, starting from the north of Luzon and moving to the south. As respondents lived and moved from one locality to another, so does the scope of this article.

Unprecedented Wartime Emergency

The “Last Supper” of the people of Manila came in December 1941 when majority were celebrating the feast of the Immaculate Conception and making normal preparations for the Yuletide season. By the end of the month, the Civilian Emergency Administration, the Philippine General Hospital, the Philippine Red Cross, and various other medical establishments in Greater Manila had their hands full with battle-related casualties and civilians injured by a series of bombings and cross-fires between the United States Army Forces in the Far East and the Imperial Japanese Forces. As casualties rapidly mounted, it became clear that the war had turned against the Filipino-American forces.

In late December 1941, before their withdrawal to Bataan, the U.S. Army opened their supply depots to the public to keep the goods from the Japanese. As the public took what they could from the storage facilities, massive looting of private stores also took place all over

the city (Camagay, 564). Although the incident became a police and security crisis, the supplies that the people took meant their survival in the uncertain weeks and months that followed.

Endemic Shortage in Food and Medicine

At that point in January 1942, it was already clear that there was a break from what the people enjoyed before the war—a reliable supply of food and medicine. The relative isolation of the Philippines from standard American supply chains also spelled the beginning of the public's journey to Calvary under the Japanese regime. For food, the people in Manila depended on the crops and livestock raised in the neighboring provinces and transported to Manila. For medicines, the people were on their own—to procure whatever was still available or to improvise with age-old herbal remedies often employed in the rural areas.

The major problem for the unfortunate Filipino political leaders left behind to deal with the occupiers was the policy of the Japanese Military Administration that “rice harvested and available in the Philippines would have to feed, first, the Japanese occupation forces, and second, the Filipino people” (Jose, 29-30). Unfortunately, rice and other food commodities in Manila were not enough for both the Japanese soldiers and the Filipinos, even with alternative measures and schemes throughout the entire Occupation. Despite the availability of food products in the provinces, these could not easily be transported to Manila because of endemic banditry and the Japanese-guerrilla fighting going on in the countryside. The people in and around the city of Manila ended up with a food supply crisis. Some provinces fortunately had substantial food supplies, but people suffered from hunger and disease in areas under constant military conflict.

Women During the War

Women were deeply affected by the hardships of war and foreign occupation. As numerous reports of rape and atrocities emerged, many women lived in constant fear. Women terrorized by war and the Occupation reported what was then called “war amenorrhea,” when they simply stopped menstruating (Hartendorp 1967, 2:154). In their paper, Dr. Frank E. Whitacre and Dr. Benjamin Barrera “concluded that the cause of this trouble was psychic . . . severe shock, worry and especially fear, acting through the sympathetic nervous system,” causing “the complete suppression of ovarian function” (Hartendorp, 2:154). Although this report concerned the women in the UST Internment Camp, the reality affected much of the female population of Greater Manila. Nervous breakdowns were also prevalent among mothers and daughters in a family (Arinto, 93).

Ironically, the general trend in Greater Manila was an increase in childbirth which exceeded death rates in many hospitals. At the Remedios Hospital, an indicator of increase in birth rate was the increase from four beds to twenty in the maternity ward (Picornell 1995, 27).

In Bulacan, the desire to avoid Japanese-guerrilla conflicts caused many families to abandon their houses in the towns and migrate to more isolated areas far from the comforts of hospitals or clinics. A personal account of childbirth in the boondocks goes:

May ipinanganak noon sa bukid. Eh, walang ospital . . . buti hindi namatay. Yung tiyo kong doktor . . . ang ginawa eh, dinukot na lang, finorcep yung [bata], tapos ang sabi, “naku, ang hirap-hirap nga naman . . . wala man lang mga[gamit] Hindi sterilized. Mabuti merong gyantes. . . .”¹

¹ Personal interview with Dator, 2010. “There was a birthing in the mountains. . . no hospital. A good thing the child did not die. My uncle who is a doctor delivered the baby with forceps. He said, ‘It was so difficult, there were no instruments at all, no sterilization. A good thing there were gloves.’”

At the PGH in Manila, the difficulties of childbirth seemed more pronounced. Marcial P. Lichauco (2005) relates that his wife Jessie gave birth in PGH twice during the war, the first on 29 July 1942 and the second on 31 August 1944 (Lichauco 2005, 54, 178). Both were challenging deliveries because towels, linen, and medicines could not be provided by the hospital and had to be brought in by the family.

Dr. Conrado S. Dayrit relates how, in 1942, author Edith Dizon, then about to give birth to her first child at the PGH, was in total panic because her husband had to pass the Japanese sentry outside the hospital. Mrs. Dizon's fears were allayed when she heard the violin music of Dr. Dayrit coming from the Interns' Dormitory, and she delivered her first-born aided by musical artistry and luck (Dayrit 2002, 260). Unexpectedly, an alternative to pre-natal calming was discovered for Mrs. Dizon, an example of adaptation to make the best out of a bad situation.

Mrs. Rosita Rolluda Ramos, a natural healer called *hilot* in the vernacular, remembers cases of women seeking abortion during the Occupation. Because of her Christian belief, she took to administering herbal medicines which strengthened rather than loosened fetal hold on the mother's womb, called *pampakapit*. They were normally used on pregnant women in danger of miscarriage.

*. . . para matigil yung bleeding. . . yung ugat [ng halaman] gaya ng kunlot-kunlot ipapainom Nagamot daw ng kunlot-kunlot ang pinsan nya sa Pangasinan na nagkaroon ng bleeding. . .*²

Violeta Robles Romana recalls observing multitudes of twin births in Albay and her mother almost dying from infection.

² Interview with Ramos, 2010. “. . . to stop the bleeding. . . they made them drink from the root kunlot-kunlot. . . [She said] that it healed her cousin in Pangasinan who was bleeding. . .”

*nagka-anak ang mother ko ng kambal. Maraming nagkaka-anak noon ng kambal. Siguro nire-replace ang mga namamatay, parang ganun. . . muntik nang mamatay ang mother ko sa impeksyon. Namatay din ang kambal. . .*³

Indeed, life was difficult for everyone during the Occupation. Based on data, however, women remained strong despite the adversities.

War Orphans

Successful childbirth coupled with ailing or dying parents meant more orphans. A record at the Remedios Hospital indicated that abandoned twins, Bobby and Jimmy Lovelady, were each adopted by Paling Aldanense and Manoling Gay (Picornell 1995, 27). So much was the incidence of abandoned children in 1944 that individuals and organizations volunteered to provide care to orphans. Dr. Fe del Mundo, then becoming a renowned pediatrician, established a home for orphans in early 1942 at the Holy Ghost College, in collaboration with the Philippine Red Cross (Hartendorp, 130). By 1944, the Philippine Red Cross had already established three more homes “which took in orphans, children of destitute parents and abandoned children” (Aluit 1972, 353).

More on del Mundo:

In 1945, facing imminent defeat, the Japanese herded del Mundo’s patients back into Santo Tomas, and she was denied access to them. In the span of nearly two years, the “Angel of

³ Interview with Romana, 2010. “My mother gave birth to twins. Many gave birth to twins then. Maybe it was to replace the dead. . . My mother almost died due to infection. The twins died. . .”

Santo Tomas,” as she came to be dubbed by grateful internees. . . had mothered 400 American and other children. Wrote one former woman prisoner to her: “I hope you will be decorated for extraordinary heroism in action. But that isn’t half of it – half of that had to do with a loving heart and a Pied Piper way with children.” (Lim 2007, 131)

Another account goes:

[The children] had very poor nutrition; beri-beri predominated. *Maraming [bagong panganak] ang madaling namatay.* With the elderly, there was cancer, *pero wala namang magawa.* There was TB and pulmonary diseases, trauma, stab victims, surgical cases, skin diseases, yaws. Very predominant *ang* skin diseases, *mga inoperahan walang anesthesia . . .*⁴

The Public Welfare Bureau, along with various charity organizations, made it its business to obtain food, medicine, and milk for the little orphans, and Dr. Del Mundo was just one person among many unnamed groups and individuals who looked after the health and welfare of the young ones.

Nutritional Survival and Family Support

Women and children were indeed more affected by the shortages, but people in general shared a common need for food and nutrition to survive. As wartime conditions hampered normal production and

⁴ Interview with Clemente, 2010. “The children had very poor nutrition, beri-beri predominated. Many newborn died. With the elderly, there was cancer, but nothing could be done [for them]. There were TB and pulmonary diseases, trauma, stabbing cases; surgical cases, skin diseases, yaws. Skin diseases were predominant. Operations were done without anesthesia.”

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distribution of goods and services, many people in the urban areas resorted to family connections in the rural areas. In some cases, they migrated to the provinces where food supply was more available.

In Ilocos Norte, Mr. Rufino L. Fres relates how the supply of rice was hampered by the inability of the farmers to bring their harvest to the rice mills and granaries:

It was the landowners who were the first to feel the difficulty. . . the farmers were afraid to bring the harvest to Laoag because of the difficulties. So, although they had plenty of *palay* in their fields, they could not stock the *palay* in the granaries.⁵

A parallel experience of difficulties was the plight of evacuees to Ilocos Norte in late 1941. The following was an account of Bibiano Arzadon (2009, 16), then a young seminarian.

Food supplies. . . dwindled to a bare minimum as people and farmers evacuated to far-flung areas in the tropical jungles, where wild boars, poisonous snakes, mosquitoes with *plasmodium vivax*, and amoebic dysentery bacteria abounded. Cash-crop plantations, rice farms, vegetable gardens, pig farms, and poultry farms were abandoned and neglected, hence, farm production was practically nil.

Accordingly, cooking became a tricky challenge for everyone seeking to avoid Japanese aerial surveillance, as the following testimony recounts:

To cook, use your imagination. Extinguish the fire immediately once you hear the drone of airplanes. Never cook at night, as the cinders and the fire would betray your whereabouts. Even

⁵ Interview with Fres, 2010.

during daytime, beware of the smoke that curls up into the sky
. . . (Arzadon, 97)

The earlier cited Rosita Rolluda Ramos shuttled between Villasis, Pangasinan and Caba, La Union where she had relatives. The Rolluda family was forced to evacuate to remote areas where food was different:

*Ubi . . . Magsaing daw ng ubi . . . mag-ulam daw ng ubi . . . Wala raw makain noon. Di raw sila makapagtanim sa mga bukid kasi babarilin sila ng mga Hapon . . . everywhere naman sa bundok maraming ubi . . . mga papaya . . . mga wild chickens, wild pigs, usa . . . Iniimbak na lang daw nila o kinakain agad. . .*⁶

The same Rosita Ramos gives another account of evacuees cooking at night to avoid being spotted by the Japanese who foraged for food in the forests:

*Di raw sila nagluluto sa araw kasi yung usok nakikita. Gabi raw sila nagluluto para di matunton kung saan sila nagtatago. Nung panahon daw ng Hapon, pinapasok ng mga Hapon yung mga kabundukan na iyan, pero kung maloloko yung mga Pilipino, di na raw sila makakalabas nang bubay . . . Wala raw gerilya. Sa ibang lugar daw nagtatago . . .*⁷

⁶ Interview with Ramos, 2010. “*Ube* [purple yam], cook *ube*, use *ube* as viand . . . There was nothing to eat during that time. They could not plant in the mountains because the Japanese would shoot them . . . Everywhere in the mountains there were a lot of *ube*, papaya, wild chickens, wild pigs. Deer was also abundant. They either stored it or ate it immediately.”

⁷ *Ibid.* “They did not cook in the morning because the smoke could be seen. They cooked at night so that their hideout could not be traced. During the Japanese period, the Japanese went to the mountains, and if the Filipinos there were not tolerant of their presence, they would not have been able to come out alive. The guerillas were hiding in other places.”

In Agoo, La Union, Ernesto Pangalangan's family was relatively well off but as a precaution, they hid their rice supply in the attic. Food supply in Agoo remained stable as evidenced by a lively marketplace. In 1943 however, when a Japanese officer was killed by the guerrillas, the Japanese threatened to kill all the males in Agoo until the culprits were turned in. Fearing for their lives, the Pangalangan family evacuated to Urdaneta, Pangasinan where they had relatives and ample food supply. Pangalangan recounts:

Food? We were prepared. *Di kami nagutom.* We were engaged in marketing rice. My parents were rice merchants. We had an attic—*punong-puno ng bigas*. [That rice] lasted the year. As usual [there was food]—*karne*—pork meat; [there were] fish ponds supplying *hipon* and fresh fish; vegetables . . . In Agoo town, [there was] a very big marketplace [alongside] buildings, schools. *May baon kami. Di kami nagutom. Masarap ang pagkain namin. Sa isang bayan ng Urdaneta, puro magkakamag-anak kami.*⁸

In Tarlac, friendship with the Japanese did not assure the family of Manuel Villaroman, Jr. (2006) sufficient food. His father was the town mayor of Tarlac, Tarlac and had close connections with the Japanese, the Americans, and the resistance. Yet, rice became scarce and they augmented their diet with *kamote* or sweet potatoes. From 1943 to 1945, people ate rice and kamote. They ate these with what was available—leafy vegetables like pechay and squash leaves.

⁸ Interview with Pangalangan, 2009. "Food? We were prepared. We did not go hungry. We were engaged in marketing rice. My parents were rice merchants. We had an attic filled with rice. [That rice] lasted the year. As usual, there was meat—pork meat; [there were] fish ponds supplying shrimp and fresh fish. Also vegetables. In Agoo, [there was] a very big marketplace, [alongside] buildings, schools. We had supplies. Our food was good. Most of the people in one town in Urdaneta were our relatives."

Like the Pangalangans of La Union, life was not too difficult for the Villaromans whose family livelihood was making native rice cakes which were labeled “Villaroman’s Native Cakes.” The local people were their avid customers. The family matriach was reputedly the best rice cake maker since before the war or “peacetime.” Nonetheless throughout the war, Billy Villaroman stayed with his parents in Tarlac where the usual fare was rice mixed with kamote, a concoction which people called *kisang kamote*.

The De la Fuente household in neighboring Nueva Ecija was not spared from Japanese confiscations. Despite living in a farm, they were not assured of a food supply:

We had to be vigilant and hide in houses so as not to be harassed by Japanese soldiers. In addition to that, they always stole our stocks. We used to take only water or milk, depending on the availability in the farm. Potato and *kamote* were the most common food since most of the livestock were taken by the Japanese.⁹

Families in Bataan joined the USAFFE defensive positions and obtained rations from the Quartermaster. But as the food supply dwindled, civilians joined the soldiers in the slaughter of horses and carabaos for food. Reynaldo Pacheco, whose home was in Balanga, Bataan, relates that at the time of the American surrender in April 1942, his family was malnourished and sick with either malaria or dysentery—common among the soldiers caught in Bataan.

My younger brother. . . *ang payat-payat, buto’t balat. Sa Bataan—kung anu-ano na lang [ang kinakain], rice, whatever, fish. Cabcaben was situated in the military camp. We had rationed food, but not all the time. Nagpapatay ng kabayo, kalaban, tinatapa, kinakain.*

⁹ Interview with Miguela D. Yusi, 2009.

Pero nung Death March, *wala nang makain; biskwit, naubos na rin yun. Maraming namatay—bata, matanda. Walang tubig, sira nang labat ang mapagkukunan Tubig dagat na lang. Meron kaming tableta para mawala yung dumi sa tubig . . .* then we could drink water.¹⁰

After the fall of Bataan, Pacheco's family fled in a boat to Malolos, Bulacan where they had relatives. From there, their family proceeded to Muñoz, Nueva Ecija where, in contrast to the conditions in Bataan, food was abundant. He continues:

We did not stay long in Malolos. We went to Nueva Ecija, Muñoz, *hanggang* Liberation. My parents, grandparents on my mother side owned land in Muñoz. We evacuated, the Pachecos, to Nueva Ecija at Villa Isla, [at the] mountain end, where we lived. *Ako, normal—kanin na may balong mais.* In our case, rice, fish, *maraming* fish *kasi may* fishpond *na pinupuntaban.* Life was getting better, not difficult. In Nueva Ecija, *may* vegetables. *May mga kamatis, ang gaganda!*¹¹

Love, for Carolina Reyes of Tondo, Manila, came at an unexpected moment because of a goat. Her father had bought a goat to provide milk for the family. One day, the goat wandered away and the neighbor's

¹⁰ Interview with Pacheco, 2010. "My younger brother was so thin, his flesh stuck to his bones. In Bataan, we ate anything—rice, fish, whatever. Cabacen was situated in the military camp. We had rationed food, but not all the time. We killed horses, carabaos which we processed into *tapa* [meat jerky]. During the Death March, there was no food, even biscuits. Many died, both children and adults. There was no water, all sources were polluted. Only saltwater was available. We used a tablet to remove the impurities from the water, and then we could drink it."

¹¹ Ibid, 2010. "We did not stay long in Malolos. We went to Muñoz, Nueva Ecija [and stayed] until the Liberation. My parents, grandparents on my mother's side owned land in Muñoz. The Pachecos evacuated to Nueva Ecija at Villa Isla, at the mountain end, where we lived. I ate normal food—rice mixed with corn. In our case, [we ate] rice, fish, a lot of fish because there was a fishpond. Life was better, not difficult. In Nueva Ecija, there were vegetables available. The tomatoes looked very good!"

male relative brought it back to her. They fell in love and subsequently married. She was eighteen. Her story:

Nakapag-asawa ako nang maaga. . . eighteen. Yung asawa ko, relative ng tumira across the street. May alaga ako noong kambing, Indian breed . . . tumawid [ng karsada], at ayaw umuwi. Ayun, doon kami nagkakilala.¹²

This is the same Carolina Reyes-Bautista who married a well-to-do Novo Ecijano from whose family her family obtained badly needed rice and supplies smuggled from Nueva Ecija to Tondo, Manila. She recounts:

Nung June 1944, umuwi na kami sa Nueva Ecija, nagdala kami ng bigas, kamoteng kaboy. . . doble banda green sa gitna ng sako ng kamoteng kaboy, kasi yung sentry ng Hapon at Hukbalahap, tinutusok ang mga sako. Yung tangke ng tubig, suka sa ibabaw, may false bottom. Bigas sa ilalim. Charcoal-fed yung truck, sa daytime lang ang biyabe dahil baka pumutok ang goma, luma na kasi, de-karga, two by five ang upuan. Halfway matutulog kami sa Baliwag bago makarating sa San Isidro, Nueva Ecija.

Yung asawa ko, member ng USAFFE. Yung pamilya nila, may-ari ng rice mill, family business nila, kiskisan ng palay at mais. May tindahan sila. Yung mga taga-roon, doon nagpapamolino. . . Yung kampo ng mga Hapon, nasa Cabiao sa San Isidro. Sa San Isidro, di ka magugutom. May rice, binlid, corn. May mga swamp na may isdang dalag, hipon. Kung

¹² Interview with Reyes-Bautista, 2010. "I married early, at eighteen. My husband was a relative of the resident across the street. I was taking care of an Indian-bred goat which crossed the street and did not want to come back to our house. [That's how] my husband and I became acquainted.

*tamad ka, magugutom ka. May malaking sari-sari store yung mother-in-law ko, at rice mill. Nagpapautang sila ng palay, bayad: doble.*¹³

Nenita D. Dator recalls her family's evacuation to San Rafael, Bulacan in this way:

*Marami nang taong nagpupuntahan sa San Rafael. Di nagtagal, marami nang nagpupuntahan sa bukid. . . Akala namin, masaya dahil maraming tao. Nagpunta muna kami sa isang baryo. . . . Humingi kami ng pagkain. Inivan namin labat ng gamit namin. . . . Dalawa ang kapatid ko noon, parehong lalaki. Suot lalaki din ako, so walang worry na makita ako ng mga Hapon. Pagdating namin sa bukid, naku, wala balos kaming makain. Wala ka namang madadalang pagkain noon. Di nagtagal, yung mga Hapon, tumawid ng ilog, pumunta sa next town. . . binaril sila doon. Sinunog ang buong bayan . . . Ang mother ko, principal [sa eskwelahan], pero nag-negosyo siya ng bigas. . . Maraming dumarayo sa aming taga-Hagonoy at taga-Paombong, may mga dalang bangus na malalaki para i-barter. Kasi, ang perang Hapon ang tawag ay Mickey Mouse money, kaya ang mas gusto nilang [bayad] ay bigas na lang.*¹⁴

¹³ Ibid, 2010. "In June 1944, we went home to Nueva Ecija, bringing rice and cassava. We double-wrapped the cassava because the Japanese sentry and the Hukbalahap would jab at the sacks. We put vinegar containers on top of the water tanks and the rice underneath the false bottom. We used a charcoal-fed truck, so we travelled only during the day because the rubber wheels were old and might explode because of the amount of cargo. Halfway, we slept in Baliwag before going on to San Isidro, Nueva Ecija.

My husband was a member of USAFFE. His family owned a mill as family business, where rice and corn were milled. They had a store . . . The people went there for their milling needs. The Japanese camp was in Cabiao, San Isidro. You didn't go hungry in San Isidro. There was rice, rice shavings, and corn. There were swamps with mudfish and shrimps. If you were lazy, then you'd go hungry. My mother-in-law had a big sari-sari store and a rice mill. They loaned out rice for which the payment was double.

¹⁴ Interview with Dator, 2010. "A lot of people went to San Rafael. After a while, many people went to the mountains . . . We thought it would be lively because there were many people. We first went to a barrio. The residents there helped us . . . We asked for food. We had no belongings. I had two siblings, both males. I also wore men's clothing, so as not to worry when the Japanese saw us. When we reached the mountains, we barely

Dator explains that her family did not suffer from hunger because her mother bartered rice with fish and other food supplies, apart from butchering hogs for the market.

*Nagba-barter ng bigas at nagpapatay ng baboy [ang aking ina], kaya marami kaming pagkain, dahil nga ang bangad niya ay malibre kami sa kakainin namin . . .*¹⁵

Nenita Escasa from Pasig relates that her family did not suffer from hunger and deprivation throughout the Occupation:

Well, my family was relatively well-off. We did not experience poverty. We ate the usual rice. We had plenty of money. My mom was very rich We ate meat during the war—pork adobo, beef adobo but we did not eat chicken because of the necessity of buying live chicken. You still have to kill it, dress it, clean it; *matrababo* [laborious]. We ate it as a delicacy. It was very difficult to eat chicken . . . *madalang* [rarely]. We had it though on special occasions—birthdays and fiestas. During the wartime occupation, there was shelling, but we lived a fairly comfortable life. It was later during the occupation when *nabirapan na kami sa bigas* [we had difficulty getting rice]. The Japanese were eating our harvest.¹⁶

It was through her mother's beauty salon that food for the family was assured because she asked for rice as payment. Mrs. Escasa relates also

had food to eat. You couldn't bring food there. Not long after, the Japanese crossed the river into the next town. They shot the people there and set the whole town on fire. My mother, who was a [school] principal, ran a rice business. A lot of people come to us, from Hagonoy, from Paombong, bringing with them big milkfish for barter . . . Because Japanese money was called Mickey Mouse money, they preferred rice for payment."

¹⁵ "[My mother] bartered rice and butchered pigs, so we had a lot of food. She made it a point that we did not have to buy food"

¹⁶ Interview with Escasa, 2009.

that her family obtained food from two sources: the Pasig market and her grandparents who frequently visited from Bulacan.

In the Pasig market, there was competition with the Japanese for the prime produce that the soldiers came for first thing in the morning.

My mother . . . had to go very early, before the Japanese came. Otherwise, the Japanese would buy off the choice fish or confiscate them. They had a comprador who kept on yelling at vendors . . . In Pasig . . . the *palengke* was in Barrio Wawa, close to the Marikina River . . .

From 1942 to early 1944, [there was] sufficient meat, fish, vegetables, chicken, but not much vegetables. We always ate rice. We always had one cavan [in stock]. My mom was from Calumpit, Bulacan, so she knew the fancy varieties of rice . . . Even if we had only *nilagang talong*, *suka*, and *bagoong*, *o.k. na* as long as we ate the fancy variety. Milagrosa was the fanciest variety . . . So, we had fancy rice, fancy food . . . *Kabit mamabalin* [even if expensive] . . . *isdang malalaki* [big fishes]. . . My grandparents visited from Bulacan, *maraming dalang pagkain* [they brought a lot of food].¹⁷

In Manila, the Tabora family owned the Quiogue Funeral Home. Leticia Teodoro relates that the family had some Japanese friends who turned out to be high-ranking colonels and generals in the Imperial Army, and they frequented their house with regular rations of Edam cheese. She laughingly recounts:

. . . *mas masarap nga yung pagkain nung aram. Mga Hapon, bibigyan ka ng queso de bola . . .*¹⁸

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Interview with Teodoro, 2010. “. . . food was better then. The Japanese gave us Edam cheese ball.”

In Binondo, Manila however, Kua Sun Hua suffered from malnutrition because of rationing:

For food, we had to have tickets to buy rice and other stuff. We had to dig holes for water.¹⁹

It was common practice for many families in Manila to do backyard planting. Benito Legarda, Jr. (2009) recounts that his family ate *talinum* and *kangkong* from their Sta. Mesa backyard. Carolina R. Bautista's father and brothers planted *kangkong* in a part of their property in Tondo. She recounts:

Ang parents *ko may kaunting kabuhayan*. Part ng property namin na Lakandula Elementary School ngayon, malapit sa J. Luna at taniman ng damo para sa kabayo, ay ginawa ng tatay at mga kapatid kong lalaki na kangkungan. I have four brothers, nagbukay sila ng pilapil. . . pinitak, ginawang parang fish pond, six to eight fishpens na malalaki para sa white type kangkong. . . Sineyuban yun ng mga Hapon, kinamkam noong 1944. Mula 1941 to 1943, yon ang pinagkukunan namin ng pagkain. Yung kangkungan, may tubig [kaya] palaging may dalag. Yung kangkong ginagawang adobo at ensalada.

Sa Manila, rasyon [ang pagkain], mahal ang karne . . . yung, scrambled egg, manipis lang, tinatagilid, hinabati-hati, hinahalo sa sinangag na kanin at kamoteng kaboy na nabibili sa palengke. Naghabanap-hanap [kami] ng stock ng bigas. Yung father ko, pinag-aralan [ang] extermination of termites. Naglagay siya sa platito ng oro de cloro benzene para di magkaroon ng insekto ang bigas. Ang baboy, meron pero mahal. Kumakain kami pero madalang lang. Gutom

¹⁹ Interview with Kua Sun Hua, 2009.

*na gutom ang mga Pinoy noon, 1,500 pesos [isang] kilo ng baboy, 300 pesos isang salop ng bigas.*²⁰

In the same Tondo area, Rizalina Lomotan (now Oropilla) helped her parents stock up on goods obtained from the Quartermaster depot. Because the family owned a variety store, the government tasked them with distribution of rations. Lomotan relates:

*Bago pumasok ang mga Hapon, binuksan ang bodega ng Quartermaster. Bago sila umalis, ipinamigay nila ang mga de lata. Ang father ko, may dalang kotse [kaya] marami siyang nakuba sa free-for-all, kaya [rin] mayroon kami noong stock ng pagkain – asukal, iba pa. Ang father ko, pinagtayo ng federation, nagbibigay sa Hapon, pinipilahan noon ang posporo at sabon. Kung may kailangan ka, kailangan mong mag-apply sa Federation.*²¹

The Oropilla family was another case of “circumstantial fortune.” The father obtained stocks from the federation rations apart from those obtained from the Americans.

²⁰ Interview with Bautista, 2010. “My parents had some means of livelihood. A part of our property which is now the Lakandula Elementary School near J. Luna. was planted with grass for the horses. My father and male siblings converted it into a swamp cabbage garden. I have four brothers who dug out partitions and watered it like a fish pond, six to eight fishpens for white type kangkong. The Japanese sealed it off and expropriated it in 1944. From 1941 to 1943, that was our source of food. The kangkong garden had water and that’s why there was always mudfish. We made the kangkong into adobo and salad.

In Manila, there was rationing . . . meat was expensive . . . the scrambled egg was thinned out, turned on the side, halved and cut into small pieces, then mixed with fried rice and cassava from the market. We kept looking for stocks of rice. My father studied the termites. He put benzene in a saucer so that insects will not infest the rice. There was pork, but it was expensive. We ate pork but rarely. The Pinoys starved. A kilo of pork was P1,500, a ganta of rice P300.”

²¹ Interview with Oropilla, 2010. “Before the Japanese arrived, the American Quartermaster opened the warehouse and gave away canned goods. My father who

The general conditions however were not favorable. The following is an account of the widespread malnutrition:

*. . . panay adobong kangkong [ang pagkain namin] dahil kabit saan [ito] tumutubo. Sa Maynila, maraming nagugutom. Ang presyo ng pagkain, kontrol ng Hapon. Gutom ka kung wala kang koneksyon sa probinsya.*²²

This statement sums up the socio-economic reality that determined survival during those times—the need of connections in the provinces to survive. As the Oropillas testified,

*Hindi kami apektado dahil may bigas kami mula sa Bulacan. Ang lolo ko nagbibiyabe ng bigas galing Bulacan papuntang Divisoria. May “sisid rice” din sa likuran ng Divisoria galing sa lumubog na barko . . .*²³

Life turned sour for the Oropilla-Lomotan family in Tondo when the father was brought to Fort Santiago on trumped-up charges. He was falsely accused after he refused to give additional rations to someone the family knew. After his family successfully negotiated his release with the Kempei tai, the family relocated to Bulacan.

Yung babay inivan namin, may bantay lang. Nasunog yun. ’46 or ’47 na namin binalikan. Ginamit yun ng mga Amerikano na depot kaya may nabukay pa ngang mga de lata doon. Sagana sa pagkain sa

had a car with him was able to get a lot from the free-for-all, and that was why we had a stock of food—sugar etc. My father was ordered to set up a federation, and give to the Japanese. People lined up for matches, soap. If you needed anything, you applied to the Federation.

²² Ibid., 2010. “. . . stewed swamp cabbage was ubiquitous because it grew anywhere. In Manila, a lot of people starved. The price of food was controlled by the Japanese. You starved if you didn’t have connections in the provinces.”

²³ Ibid., 2010. “We were not affected because we had rice from Bulacan. My grandfather used to bring rice from Bulacan to Divisoria. There was *Sisid* rice from sunken ships was sold in Divisoria.”

*Hagonoy. . . walang nagkakasakit dahil maraming isda, magsasawa ka. Ang ginagawa namin e pagtatanim ng palay. May kamalig kami na malaki sa Hagonoy. Di naman ginagalaw ng mga Huk; nanghibingi sila pero mababait naman sila.*²⁴

The Lomotan family's contact with the Hukbalahap fared much better than the Bautista family's in Nueva Ecija. The Bautistas were coerced by the Huks to give daily morning rations—rice and fish individually wrapped in banana leaf and collected by a Huk runner on horseback for twenty Huks stationed nearby.

Back in Tondo, a medical student, Thelma Navarette (now Clemente), relates her recollections of obtaining food supplies:

We contracted a house along Herran, now Pedro Gil, to serve us meals in food containers. We needed to pay because we were not allowed the PGH free meals. Because of scarcity of food, we had to be content with *sinisid* rice which came from ships sunk at the start of the war. People retrieved this contaminated rice which did not taste good. There was no rice from Luzon, no oil to ferry the food. People had already raided the big bodegas at the start of the war.

[Cooked] food was the boiled type: [fish] *paksin* [stew], cooked with either vinegar or sour vegetables such as *sampaloc*. As the war continued, the workers at PGH started planting behind Floors 6, 21, and 22, behind the Cancer Institute and the College of Dentistry, and at the entrance at Padre Faura.

²⁴ Ibid. "We left our house with a caretaker. That house caught fire [later on] We returned there in '46 or '47. The Americans used it as a depot, so some canned goods were unearthed later. There was a lot of food in Hagonoy . . . No one became sick because there was a lot of fish, you grew tired of them. We planted rice. We had a big storehouse in Hagonoy. The Huks did not touch it, they merely asked for some, but they were nice."

There were *alugbati* tops and *talinum* tops, among others. . . *Walang mabiling karne*. Meat was not available. . . monggo was the source of protein. Vegetables—*mahirap ang dating* [delivery was difficult]. *Kung meron mang [sasakyan], nasa daan pa lang, nakukumpiska na* [where there was transport, the vegetables were immediately confiscated] . . . *Mahirap na ang pagkain, at mahal na mahal* [food was scarce and very expensive]. *Para bumili sa tindahan, kailangan mo ng isang supot na Japanese money. Saan kami kukuba noon? Walang sweldo sa PGH.* [To buy stuff from stores, you needed a bagful of money. Where would we get that? There was no salary from the PGH].

. . . Every Wednesday was half-day and I brought rice from Bulacan to Tondo. Natural *labat-pinya, talbos ng kamote, kangkong* . . . [only pineapple, sweet potatoes and swamp cabbage . . .]

We were provided with a small electric stove to boil *monggo* beans and *alugbati*, and *camote* tops, to augment our very poor food. Our free meals were served in *fiambreira* [tin containers].²⁵

Thelma N. Clemente adds that due to the severe food crisis, her family moved to Obando, Bulacan in 1942. She continues:

As a result, our family evacuated to Pangulo, Obando, Bulacan. The sad part was that food for Manila from the neighboring provinces was confiscated by the Japanese. The entrance to Manila was guarded by Japanese soldiers.

In rural Laguna, Alejandra Abad recalls that her family had to evacuate the town of Mabitac to take refuge in the mountains nearby where life was very difficult:

²⁵ Interview with Thelma Navarette Clemente, 2010.

Kamoteng kahoy, saging, langkang mura [ang] ginugulay namin. Maraming niyog doon, marami ring bigas. Sa umaga, tuyo at patis ang ulam sa kanin. . . . Sa tanghali, ginataang langka at asin. Pang meryenda, kamoteng kahoy. . . . Sa gabi, ginataang langka pa rin at asin. Hindi naman nauubos yung langka.²⁶

The *langka*, despite the monotony as staple diet nevertheless assured the small evacuee community in Laguna of a stable food supply. However, Abad also recalls that they could not cook freely for fear of being spotted by the Japanese. Violeta Robles Romana spoke of her family's experience. Her father, a police chief, was forced to evacuate to the nearby hills, while the rest of the Robles family lived in the lowlands. She relates that her family survived the ordeal because her family owned a store before the war broke out:

Yung auntie ko, may grocery noon sa loob ng palengke. Nung pumasok na yung mga Hapon, nung nagkakagulo na, pinasok [ang palengke] ng mga civilians, kinuha ang mga tinda, pero ang auntie ko . . . hinakot niya agad ang laman ng tindahan niya sa babay, kaya buong taon na nandun ang mga Hapon, hindi kami naghirap sa mga de lata at kung anu-ano pa.²⁷

²⁶ Interview with Abad, 2007. "Cassava, banana, young jackfruit—we ate them as vegetables. There was a lot of coconut and rice. In the morning, we had dried fish and fish sauce as viands . . . In the afternoon, jackfruit cooked in coconut milk and salt. For snacks, cassava . . . In the evening, it was still jackfruit and salt. Jackfruit never ran out."

²⁷ Interview with Romana, 2010. "My aunt had a grocery store inside the market. When the Japanese came during the chaos, they entered the civilian market and took the merchandise, but my aunt . . . immediately transported the commodities in the store to the house, and that's why during the year that the Japanese occupied the place, we did not starve because of the canned goods and other items."

Romana's father was forced to flee when he was accused of maltreating a detained Japanese civilian in late 1941 in a case of mistaken identity. A well-respected police chief, he was accommodated into the Sandiko guerrilla outfit. He was fortunate because according to Romana, food was readily available in the mountains. To save the Robles family from harassment, a passive collaborator, the chief's second-in-command who was a family friend, declared to the Japanese that the police chief was killed in an encounter. We read:

Yung ginagawa naman ng lola ko, kasi hindi pa naman kabisado ng father ko yung mga sulok-sulok ng bundok, nagbabayad siya ng guide para sa father ko sa kung saan siya nagtatago. Maraming pagkain sa bundok . . . Magdala ka lang ng asin, may niyog, may gulay, kakain ka na.²⁸

It was a challenge for the Robles sisters to negotiate the dangerous passes and cross three rivers to visit their father in hiding. Romana nonetheless claims that her present physical wellness is due to those long treks that she took as a young child with her family.

Kaya nga sinasabi ko, ina-attribute ko ang malakas na katawan ko, kabiti maliit pa ako . . . unang-una [sa] paglalakad ko . . . Pangalawa . . . sickly yung kapatid ko, kaya pinagbibigyan ko siya sa karne. Ako, basta't may gulay lang na inasnan, kain na ako . . . Kaya . . . malakas ang katawan ko kasi gulay ang kinakain ko nung panahon ng Hapon.²⁹

²⁸ Ibid. "What my grandmother did, since my father did not know the ins and outs of the mountain, was to hire a guide to help my father. . . There was a lot of food in the mountains . . . If you just brought salt, there were coconuts and vegetables, and you always had something to eat."

²⁹ Ibid. "That's why I always say, I attribute my good health to all the walking I did when I was young. Secondly, my brother was sickly and I gave all the meat to him. I was o.k. with salted vegetables. My body is strong because I ate vegetables during the Japanese period."

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In Sorsogon, genuine fright of Japanese brutality caused Virginia Macaluna's father to make her dress in torn and smelly clothes which were smoked and then like her, smeared with charcoal. Her father's ploy apparently worked as visiting Japanese soldiers stayed away from her.

*Kan maabot an Hapon, ginawa kan tatay ko: "Virginia, magbado ka kun su puraw!" An bado ko kadto su punit-punit na mababo. Di, sabi kan tatay ko, magsapna daw akong kamoteng kahoy ta ipapakaun kan ama ko. Maghilamos daw ako nin uring saka subado si mabata. Pinatukaw ako duman sa sinapnang kamoteng kahoy. Dinatnan ako kan bayoneta. Sabi, "beautiful, but very bad smell . . . very dirty."*³⁰

After the Japanese soldiers left, Macaluna's father hid his family underground, most likely in an improvised bomb shelter. Their town was coastal and frequented by disembarking Japanese soldiers. Macaluna recalls that at this time, they owned five hectares of corn fields from which Japanese soldiers ate the corn raw:

Pagharali, sabi kan tatay ko, magtago na daw kami. Magkuyan na kami sa irarum kan mga kalut . . . duman na kami nagtago. Yan mga Hapon, inurubos su gabos na tanum ming mais na nagburunga na, pirang ektarya. Siniriba kan mga lintikan na . . . Maski yan sinapna, siba sanang siba yan mga Hapon . . . Kasi, along the coast kami . . . Yang su barko, duman mababa. Kabit hindi na mag-ano an Hapon, pag-abot sa barko, baba sinda duman, along the coast kami. Mais, siniriba ninda, pig-arahit, haba. May pigluluto nindo. May limang ektarya an tanum ming mais, pigkurua, siriba sinda. Garo mga unas

³⁰ Interview with Macaluna, 2010. "When the Japanese arrived, my father ordered me to dress in torn and stinking clothes. My father asked me to boil cassava, wash my face with charcoal water, and sit near the smoke from the boiling cassava. When the Japanese arrived, they said I was beautiful, but smelly and dirty."

*yan, ay marautun kaya babo na ako na may giyera pa, Hesus! An panabon . . . nakakatakot.*³¹

Macaluna elaborated on the cruelty she witnessed in Makalaya, Sorsogon. Through her father's mediation, none of the residents was victimized by the Japanese, but non-residents accused of robbery by the Japanese were brought to their town and summarily executed. This explains Macaluna's detestation for war:

*Pero, erak nin Dios, ta an ama ko marbay makisama, ta siya sana man tatao makidulot sa mga Hapon, salbado an mga taga-Makalaya . . . Walang namatay na residente doon. Kun may gagadanun, duman pigdadara sa Makalaya, pero bako man na mga taga-Makalaya. Ta iyan na mga Hapon, babo kayan nin mga parabun. Ituro mo lang na parabun, putol tulos an payo. Dai nang imbistigasyon. Kaya babo na akong mag-giyera pa.*³²

Macaluna explains that in Sorsogon, despite the hardships, fish and shellfish were readily obtainable. For those families which chose to hide from the Japanese for fear of rape and other atrocities, it was difficult to cook as they had to make sure smoke did not give away their presence.

³¹ Ibid. "When the Japanese left, my father hid us in the dugout. They ate all the raw corn in the field. They ate all the time. Our place was along the coast, so their ships were always nearby. Our five-hectare corn plantation was eaten up by the hungry Japanese. I don't want war anymore! Those times were terrifying."

³² Ibid. "With God's mercy, my father's diplomacy spared our small town from Japanese atrocities. Those who were brought to our town and killed were outsiders. The Japanese hated thieves—they were beheaded immediately, without investigation. That is why I don't want war anymore."

Iyan mga shells baga . . . nanagapte. . . along the coast kami. . . marabay-rabay an sira mi . . . presko an sira mi. Ay, tanigue, bataway . . . gabos . . . ayan na sapsap, yan mga sira . . . Kan tiempo Hapon, an istaran mi kaidto. . . Magsapna ka, su dai magluwas an asu. . . Ta kun may asu, dudumanun, may tawo ngaya yan . . . Dios ko, an Hapon.³³

There is no generalization that can be made about the nutritional situation of the people sampled for their experiences of food. Living in the Manila area did not mean outright hunger and malnutrition.

As it turned out, personal and family circumstances determined survival. The role of family support such as networking to obtain food and medical supplies was an indispensable factor for survival. For the majority of Manila-based families, nutritional survival depended much on food supplies coming from friends and relatives in nearby provinces. In some rare cases like the Tabora family whose relatives were in far away La Union, their survival depended on their Japanese patrons.

Living in the province, contrary to popular perception, did not assure people of sufficient food. The presence or absence of hostile forces determined people's access to food. While some subsisted well under Japanese presence, others suffered because the Japanese frequently resorted to looting. Some Filipinos lived unmolested by guerrillas, while others were forced to give their food supply to those who were supposed to serve and protect them.

In all of these diverse personal revelations, one thing is common: everyone needed the family and family connections to survive. As will be discussed later, people's need to obtain consistent and sufficient food supplies was directly related to their pursuit of wellness.

³³ Ibid. "We gathered shells along the coast; we had abundant fish varieties such as *tanigue* and *bataway*. During Japanese times, we had to make sure that when we cooked, the smoke did not escape. Otherwise, the Japanese would come."

The Japanese southern area policy which mandated first priority to the Japanese Army left the Filipino civilians with limited supplies. The Philippine government could do little to remedy the situation.

Food was an emotional topic to the respondents. The lack of food directly contributed to vitamin deficiency disorders, including weakened immune systems. Among the unfortunate multitudes in Manila and in the lowlands of Luzon, people suffered and died from malnutrition and disease.

Health and Illness

Malaria, dysentery and beri-beri were common. Lack of access to medical-pharmaceutical supplies made worse the people's predisposition to illness due to malnutrition.

The next testimonies reveal how the same respondents perceived disease during those times. It must be noted that malaria was contracted from the anopheles mosquitoes as people evacuated into their lairs. Dysentery was contracted from drinking water infested with bacteria or amoeba. Many soldiers from Bataan and later Capas became sick from one or both of these ailments.

Many of the survivors rightfully connected disease and death to lack of medicine.

The Tagudin community to which Nelia Erese Cabico belonged was not spared from vitamin deficiencies which were manifested in beri-beri, skin ulcers, and dysentery—afflictions normally preventable and curable. Nelia recounts:

Ang kapatid ko nagkasakit ng infantile beri-beri, til-e ang tamag namin doon noong 1942. Meron din siyang ulcer sa paa—galis na di magamot-gamot. Nilagang dahan ng [bayabas] na may halong

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*dinikdik na dabon ng patani ang ipinantatapal. Mga kapitbahay namin ay nagkasakit noon [ng] dysentery [na ang pwedeng gamot ay] sulfathiazole.*³⁴

Bibiano B. Arzadon relates how a doctor among the evacuees helped them.

The medical doctor, Dr. Claire, used her expertise in botany and pharmacology . . . and decided on what herbs to use and the dosage. For instance, there were lots of cinchona trees growing wild in the forests, the bark of which, when brewed until the water resembles the color of tea, was the extract quinine, a good cure for malaria (97).

In the interiors of Caba, La Union, Rosita Ramos, the natural healer previously cited, remembers treating victims of rabies which was contracted from bats or dogs. There seemed to have been ferocious dogs all over Luzon. The shortage of food among humans caused many dogs to turn wild with hunting instincts and carrying rabies, from which humans were not spared.

*Yung mga sakit [sa] joints . . . dabon daw ng tandok ang gamot. Litalit . . . bilog-bilog ang dabon at dinidikit sa sugat. Gamot din sa ubo . . . at sa kagat ng aso . . . Patung-patong, tore-tore [ang paggamit].*³⁵

³⁴ Interview with Cabico, 2010. “My sibling had infantile beri-beri in 1942—we called it *til-e*. He also had ulcer on the foot that wouldn’t heal. We treated it with boiled guava leaves mixed with crushed lima bean leaves. Our neighbors got sick with dysentery which was treated with sulfathiazole.

³⁵ Interview with Ramos, 2010. “For joint pains, we used the leaves of the *tandok*, *litalit* . . . those are round leaves, applied on wounds and can also be used for coughs . . . For dog bites . . . it is applied in layers.”

Other than searching for remedies for common illnesses like typhus, respondent Nelia Cabico talked of illnesses caused by “unseen forces” which could not be dealt with through pharmaceutical drugs:

May mga arbularyong nanggagamot . . . mga atang-atang. Kapag may tipus o typhoid fever o may mga sumpung-sumpong, nag-aatang. Iniisip na baka may mga hindi nakikitang nang-away-ulnas.³⁶

Dator relates that in her family, disease was regarded by her dentist father as remediable by purgatives:

Isang araw ng Linggo, ang kapatid ko nagkasakit. Ang father ko, dentista. Kapag nilalagnat kami, binibigyan kami ng castor oil pangpurga.³⁷

An American soldier named Ray who was “adopted” by the Del Rosario family, was afflicted with malaria. Dator relates that quinine tablets helped in the American soldier’s gradual recovery. But Mrs. Dator continues that the recovery was difficult:

Mayroon isang Amerikano na galing sa Death March, nakatakas siya . . . Nung nasa bukid, [nagkaroon siya ng] malaria . . . Malala na siya . . . [Ang iginamot sa kanya ay] tableta . . . Kinina yata [Kung minsan] nag-chi-chill [siya] . . . may mga gabing gising siya, di makatulog. Naaalala raw yung comrades niya na nangamatay. Nagkaroon siya ng

³⁶ Interview with Cabico, 2010. “There were some healers called *atang atang* [who made offerings to the spirits]. Whenever there were cases of typhoid fever or different behavior, they made offerings, thinking that the sick person may have offended unseen beings.”

³⁷ Interview with Dator, 2010. “One Sunday, my sibling got sick. My father who was a dentist gave us castor oil as purgative whenever we had a fever.”

trauma. *Nang lumaon, bumuti naman siya. Nung mabusay na, pagka-nagluluto ang nanay ko ng maja blanca, o kaya . . . adobong manok, naku, gustong-gusto niya. . .*³⁸

Escasa claims that there were no epidemic cases in Pasig at that time.

Two of my neighbors encountered medical emergencies: two appendectomies at the Rizal Provincial Hospital. There really were no medicines at the time. Before the war, such things were imported from the U.S.—sulfathiazole and sulfadiazine. It was a good thing that there were no epidemics back then during the Occupation. Aside from the usual medical and surgical cases, there were no outbreaks of cholera.

Escasa's father was wounded in battle in Bataan, and she recalls:

My father fought in Bataan but he was shot, one eye [became] blind, [and he was] disabled. His officers told him to flee [rather than] surrender. He swam from Bataan to Bulacan until he was rescued by a fishing boat. They gave him civilian clothes. *Nilakad niya hanggang marating [ang] bahay ng grandparents ko sa Bulacan. Akala pa nga pulubing namamalimos lang. Nung bibigyan sana ng abuloy, ayun nakilala siya. We were reunited later, pero disabled na siya.*³⁹

³⁸ Ibid. "There was an American who escaped the Death March. He contracted malaria in the mountains and his case was serious. They treated him with tablets, perhaps quinine. Sometimes he had chills, sometimes he was awake all night, couldn't sleep. He was remembering his dead comrades. He was traumatized. He eventually became better. When he got well, he loved the corn pudding and chicken adobo that my mother cooked."

³⁹ Interview with Escasa, 2009. "He walked until he reached my grandparents' house in Bulacan. They even thought he was a beggar. They recognized him only when they were about to give him something. We were reunited later, but he was already disabled."

Reynaldo Pacheco remembers malaria and dysentery cases in Bataan:

*Karaniwang sakit [ang] malaria. Noong Death March, yung dysentery naayos na . . . gumaling din. I don't know kung paano . . . dugo, kukuba. [Malaria was common. During the Death March, dysentery was curable, I don't know how, with drawing of blood.] My brother and uncle were all sick with malaria. Other people were sick [with] dysentery. In Malolos, there was a doctor who treated dysentery. . .*⁴⁰

In Pasig, Escasa remembers that there was only one case of edema, although beri-beri was common in the Greater Manila area. “*Lagnat with aspirin [which] was available. Maraming pulubi [na] namamanas ang paa.*”⁴¹

Bautista relates her observation that many people in her Tondo neighbourhood died from vitamin deficiency and malaria:

*Sa Tondo, [nasa] middle class area kami. Yung ipinapakain sa mga aso, hinibingi pa ng mga [pulubi] . . . Harapan, [may] namamatay sa manas, edema . . . yung akala mo mataba lang. . . . Malapit sa Tondo Church, marami doong mabibirap . . . sa Herbosa Street, Tondo, doon mismo sa harap ng Cine Gloria, namamatay, nakabiga na lang, manas na manas. Malaria [ang] ikinamamatay nila. Yung mga minamalarya, naninilaw . . .*⁴²

⁴⁰ Interview with Pacheco, 2010.

⁴¹ Interview with Escasa, 2009. “Fever was treated with aspirin which was available. Many beggars had swollen feet.”

⁴² Interview with Bautista, 2010. “In Tondo, we were in the middle class area. Beggars asked for food meant for the dogs . . . [Some people] had edema, which made them look fat . . . There were a lot of poor people near the Tondo Church . . . On Herbosa Street, Tondo, right in front of Cine Gloria, people died, and lay there, bloated. [Some] had died of malaria. Those looked yellowish.”

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Consuelo Reyes talks of the situation in the PGH and on the streets on the way to Tondo:

Nursing student *ako noon sa PGH hanggang mga 1943 Napakaraming pasyente noon sa PGH. Humina ang baga ko. Ako mismo ang nagkasakit dahil [kulang] ang pagkain. . . .Higpitan na noon Matindi ang kakulangan. Nang uuwi ako ng Tondo, nagkakamatayan ang mga tao sa daan—mga nasa kariton, tinatakepan na lang ng diyaryo, lalo na doon sa tapat ng Limcaoco Plaza. . .*⁴³

In Manila, Rizalina Oropilla remembers that children were prone to skin disease.

*Usong sakit noon [ang] bakukang — [ang sugat] sa binti [na]lumalaki. Karamibang nagkakasakit [sa kakulangan ng gamot] [lalo ang] mga bata, Bakukang ang naging sakit ng mga bata . . . [Ang] gamot doon ay] ang muyot [ng] mga matatanda. Yung tingga, lalagyan ng nganga, itinatapal [sa sugat] . . . yun ang panggamot nila.*⁴⁴

Carolina Bautista was infected with dysentery after drinking polluted river water in Nueva Ecija. Miraculously she was cured by half a tablet of sulfadiazine when the recommended dosage was several tablets for a few days.

⁴³ Interview with Reyes, 2010. “I was a nursing student in PGH until 1943 . . . There were a lot of patients in PGH. My lungs weakened. I myself became sick because of lack of food Supply was tight, the shortage was severe. Going home to Tondo, I saw people dying on the streets, some in carts, covered only by newspapers, especially in front of Limcaoco Plaza.”

⁴⁴ Interview with Oropilla, 2010. “Leg ulcers were prevalent—wounds festered usually because of lack of medicine. This was common among children. The treatment was what old folks called *muyot*—chewed betelnut on lead and placed on the affected area.”

. . . *na-disinterya ako noon [kasi] walang source of safe water . . . di malinis [ang] tubig sa San Isidro Central Plain. Nasa irrigation canal kami noon . . . Nung 1944, naglabanan ang Huks versus Hapon. Pagdating ng gabi, yung mga Huk tatawid papuntang San Antonio River; may caravan naman ang mga Hapon. Yung mga Huk, para di makatawid [ang] mga Hapon, naglagay ng haystack sa tulay [at] sinunog. Sabi ng Japanese officer, pag sinunog daw uli, pupugutan daw ng ulo [ang] mga residente. Nung second time, nag-alisan na kami. Iniwanan na naming labat ang kabubayan . . . Ang asawa ko, pumunta sa USAFFE camp para makahingi ng isang tableta. Kalahating tableta lang, gumaling na ako.*⁴⁵

Alejandra Abad recalled that in Laguna, there was widespread death due to malaria and lack of medicines.

*Malaria ang sakit ng mga tao dahil sa lamok. May lagnat na mataas, giniginaw, nagchi-chill, at sa bundok itinatakbo. Maraming nangamamatay [dabil] walang gamot.*⁴⁶

Violeta Romana remembers her youngest sister in rural Albay, where a case of witchcraft (*kulam* in the vernacular) was offered as explanation. Their parents clashed on belief of this matter.

⁴⁵ Interview with Bautista, 2010. “I contracted dysentery from lack of safe water in San Isidro Central Plain. We were in the irrigation canal . . . In 1944, a battle broke out between the Huks and the Japanese. At nightfall, the Huks were crossing the San Antonio River while the Japanese were in a caravan. So that the Japanese could not cross, the Huks piled a stack of hay on the bridge and set fire to it. The Japanese officer threatened to behead the residents if a second attempt was made. So we left our entire livelihood behind. My husband went to the USAFFE camp to ask for a tablet. One-half tablet of sulfadiazine was all it took to cure me.”

⁴⁶ Interview with Abad, 2009. “People got sick of malaria because of the mosquitoes. [They had] high fever, chills and [they were] brought to the mountains. Many died because there was no medicine.”

. . . *yung youngest namin, pang-apat namin na sinundan ng kambal, five years old nang namatay, doon mismo sa inebakweytan namin. . . Sabi nila . . . na-engkanto. Kwento ng pinsan kong nag-aalaga . . . yung inebakweytan namin na babay, may bulaklak na Rosal. October noon, di naman season ng Rosal. Pinitas niya, pagka-paligo, inilagay niya sa ulo [ng bata], dinala sa babay ng nag-kakaingin. Pagkagabi, nilagnat na siya at 15 araw na hindi gumigising, tulog lang nang tulo g. . . [Yung sumapi] malakas siya. Pag-ayaw niya kainin, tatadyakan ka, matutumba ka . . . Di man kumakain, pero napakalakas niya. Alam niya yung nangyayari sa loob ng babay. Di na raw pinabintulot [ang arbularyo] kasi ang father ko, di naninivala sa albulario. Yung mother ko, paninivalang-paninivala naman, kaya . . . nag-aagawan ng ganyan, hindi na pinahintulutan . . .*⁴⁷

The world of disease and the perceptions regarding illness were explored by the respondents, and popular and traditional models for cure were presented. Medical institutions and the names of professionals were recalled. Finally, adaptation strategies were discussed in the anecdotes of the respondents. In all of their statements, it was very clear that life was preserved through a series of health-preserving actions. Similar stories of family support ensuring survival were told.

As the Japanese occupation progressed, hyperinflation and shortages aggravated the poor health of the people. A strong typhoon that flooded the Central Luzon plains in mid-November 1943 spelled

⁴⁷ Interview with Romana, 2010. “Our youngest, the fourth [in our family] who was followed by twins, died when she was five years old, in the place where we evacuated. According to accounts, she was a victim of witchcraft. The cousin who took care of her placed an out-of-season gardenia on the child’s head. That night, the child became feverish and did not wake up for 15 days. She ate nothing but was physically strong. My father did not allow an *herbolario* to examine her. He clashed with my mother who believed in those things.

a worsening of the Philippine economy. Active counterinsurgency campaigns stepped up by the Japanese Army within the same period caused further disruptions in food production and distribution. More people suffered from malnutrition and diseases.

Despite the odds, many survivors saw a beacon of hope from within their own family circles that allowed them to survive this tumultuous period. Lack of medicines created illnesses of epidemic proportions which people treated with traditional healing remedies from provincial sources. Many more experiences remain untold as of this writing, but it is clear that addressing health and wellness problems was central to survival. Networks of support and family connections were vital opportunities for people to obtain badly-needed food and medicines. Beyond physical and material support, what truly ensured survival during those harsh times was the emotional support which the Filipino family system provided in abundance.

Conclusion

The Americans returned to the Philippines in October 1944, with MacArthur's historic landing at Palo, Leyte. The Battle for Liberation continued as the Japanese Army in Luzon retreated north while the Japanese marines remained in Manila. In February 1945, thousands of Filipinos were massacred and countless women were raped. Buildings were razed to the ground, and people lay dead on the streets. Hospitals were inundated with casualties, and thousands were reported dead or missing. It would take years before the resurrection of the country from the ashes of war would take place.

This paper attempts to provide an overview of the situation pertaining to health and medical activities in and around Greater Manila, and up to Ilocos in the north and Bicol in the south. It is unfortunate that available published histories of public and private

hospitals are very limited. Nonetheless, piecemeal information from a few published accounts and the oral accounts in this paper reveal how generally tough life was during the Occupation. Women and children were the first victims of war, but everybody else was affected by the shortages. It was commonly perceived that food was abundant in the provinces, but people who moved to the rural areas discovered that intermittent fighting and banditry in some areas hampered food production and distribution. As expected, health care delivery was severely affected. The lack of food made people prone to illness and malnutrition. The respondents interviewed revealed how alternative measures were undertaken in the absence of regular medical supplies.

Most of the respondents believed that the presence or absence of pharmaceutical drugs determined a person's relief from illness. Others were reluctant to explain illness in terms of "personalistic causes" or witchcraft. Either they did not consider their experience "medical," or they were afraid of being dismissed as superstitious.

This article sought to give voice to the heretofore silent in history. There was no attempt to collect a comprehensive oral history of medicine during the Occupation. From a selection of more than 20 randomly chosen respondents, similarities and diversities of experiences were obtained.

Although the testimonies of the interviewed respondents seem consistent with materials previously explored, it does not mean that everything said is 100% accurate. Oral history has limitations. However, the strength of oral history lies in giving voice to people who would have ended up not ever revealing their perspectives and experiences to the rest of society. The history of the Second World War and the Japanese occupation in the Philippines will not be complete without the poignant human elements revealed in the personal accounts. They bring to light historical realities previously unconsidered or often taken for granted. But it is in giving voice to the human spirit that history as a discipline uncovers important facets of the past.

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