

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Media and History

History and journalism are closely interlinked, for both are attempts to record events for posterity. History records past events, and journalism, those of the present. Journalistic accounts are a vital source of information for the historian.

Journalism has played an important role in Philippine history, particularly in the Filipino struggle for liberation from 300 years of Spanish colonial rule, US colonization, Japanese occupation during the second world war, and in the ongoing struggle for authentic independence.

Accounts of the 1896 Revolution cite the important role of *La Solidaridad*, *Ang Kalayaan*, *La Independencia* and other revolutionary newspapers during the reform movement and the revolutionary period. Accounts of the Japanese occupation mention the guerilla press, just as any recollection of the martial law dictatorship brings to mind the so-called “alternative” or “mosquito press” while the role of radio and television in EDSA I in 1986 and that of television and texting in the impeachment trial and ousting of then President Joseph Estrada in EDSA II have to be acknowledged whenever these important events in the nation’s history are recounted. What invariably emerges is the crucial role of the mass media – whether print or broadcasting, film or the Internet – as a vital source of information, as well as its power and potential as an expression of domination and resistance to oppressive colonial administrators, homegrown dictators or corrupt leaders. Media are sites of struggle and negotiation.

However, academic studies of how precisely Philippine media have played their crucial roles as instruments of domination and resistance are still very limited. The articles in this issue examine the dynamic interaction between history and media, using various research approaches and perspectives. They also seek to fill in the numerous gaps in the historiography of Philippine media.

In the lead article for this issue of *Plaridel*, whose theme is “Media and History,” Ricardo T. Jose points out that both history and journalism place a lot of importance on primary sources such as documents and interviews.

But the fundamental difference between the two is that journalists have to contend with deadlines, which makes it imperative that they gather facts and immediately write their stories under pressure from editors.

Historians, on the other hand, have more time to do research, hypothesize, examine various angles, and interpret documents. They pay more attention to citing sources and pursuing “logical, academic lines of thought.” Some historians spend years following up their leads, accumulating information, and trying to piece these together until they believe that they have got it right. Timing is not that crucial and the desk editor is non-existent.

Because journalism is such an important source of information in the writing of history, the essay “Fragments from the Past: Towards a History of the Philippine Press” presents a historiography of the Philippine Press. Jose observes that the history of the Philippine press is very vibrant and a source of pride to Filipinos, but only fragments of this history have thus far been written. Most of what has been written tends to be either too specialized or too general. A comprehensive history of the Philippine press that can deepen our understanding of how media have shaped and been shaped in turn by our history has yet to be written and is long overdue.

Jose examines the chronological framework and highlights of journalism books, articles and studies of each period starting from Spanish times to the present, pointing out what has been written as well as the gaps in the history of the press and the questions scholars of press history could address. It also appends a selected bibliography that will most certainly be useful for scholars of press history.

Michael Hawkins’ “The Colonial Past in the Postcolonial Present: Eddie Romero’s *Cavalry Command*,” on the other hand studies a fictional film account of the successful US Army pacification of a Philippine village during the Philippine-American war which was shown in movie houses all over the United States in late 1963. Hawkins compares it with other contemporaneous accounts of the American colonial period in the post-colonial era. *Cavalry Command* was a joint production of an independent US film studio and Eddie Romero, the “doyen of Philippine cinema,” and a cast of both American and Filipino performers. Romero, considered an expert on Philippine-US film relations because he traveled to the United States in the late 50s to establish himself in the US film industry, wrote the screenplay for *Cavalry Command*, which was intended to be shown to US viewers. Now a National Artist, Romero worked on dozens of film co-productions with US companies in the 60s and 70s.

Hawkins examines the ways in which *Cavalry Command* presents the colonial past in relation to other contemporaneous texts that revisit this history, such as, for example, Robert Shaplen's account of his experience in the Philippines as a member of the Peace Corps published by *The New Yorker* in 1963 and the second edition of *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (1962) published by William Appleman Williamson.

As the product of the joint efforts of an independent US film studio and of a Filipino filmmaker as well as a cast of Americans and Filipinos, *Cavalry Command* is a site of negotiation with the past, a point of intersection and exchange between the Philippines and the United States where the past is revisited to address the demands of postcolonial times, especially the demand for mutual benefit, with Filipinos taking the initiatives and options for their development instead of continuing to allow the United States to take the dominant role. Hawkins concludes that *Cavalry Command's* distinct account of history is a function of both the production process and the subjectivities of its director, Eddie Romero, and that as such, his fabrications and interpretation can always be reinterpreted, rejected, or questioned.

Joyce L. Arriola's "The Impact of American Colonization on the Rizalian Tradition in Cinema and Literature: A View of the Popular Arts as Postcolonial Historiography" examines the historical and cultural impact of the American occupation on popular culture, especially on films inspired by the national hero, as instruments of assimilation and as venues for the native response of the Filipino artists to the imaging of Rizal as national hero. She contends that the US colonizers, whose primordial interest was the pacification of the Filipinos, used indigenous popular cultural forms by appropriating Jose Rizal and making him the national hero.

In this systematic process of pacification, Rizal as a national symbol who stood for peaceful reform was crucial, for his reformist beliefs supposedly complemented US democratic ideals. Arriola contends that so much of the image of Rizal, from which filmmakers and literary artists derived their representation of him, was based on the historiography on Rizal, or from secondary biographies which emphasized what she calls "white love and native subjugation."

Arriola shows how the literary and cinematic productions inspired by Rizal bear the imprint of US influence through the mythmaking of

Rizal's image, found in the different films and literary works from US colonial times through the Commonwealth, the postwar years, and the present. The tendency of filmmakers to portray Rizal as a romantic figure – focusing on his execution, his pacifism, or on his romance with Leonor Rivera or Josephine Bracken, his retraction and return to the Catholic faith prior to his execution, or to Rizal as an antithetical figure to Bonifacio, rather than on Rizal as a human being with all his complexity and contradictions – all these can be attributed to the US colonial influence.

This, according to Arriola, is a manifestation of how US colonial influence has lingered on in the nation's consciousness of Rizal, with its emphasis on him as a romantic figure and a hero committed to peaceful reform. Whether consciously or not, Filipino filmmakers have colluded with US hegemony in their romantic portrayal of Rizal, instead of depicting him as a fitting and progressive symbol of our national aspirations and identity. It strongly suggests a need, as Ambeth Ocampo emphasizes, to veer away from the dominant historiography on Rizal and instead to go back to primary sources so we can better understand Rizal in all his complexity and thus appreciate Rizalian productions as indicative of the degeneration of the Filipino sense of national pride.

Florinda D.F. Mateo's "The Philippine Guerilla Movement and Counterpropaganda During World War II" analyzes the role of the guerilla newspapers during the Japanese occupation from 1942 to 1945 as an integral part of the resistance to the Japanese waged by guerilla forces. The paper seeks to deepen the appreciation of the courage, resourcefulness, and ingenuity of the Filipino journalists who persisted in countering the highly efficient propaganda machinery of the Japanese Imperial Forces.

Mateo conducted a content analysis of three guerilla newspapers from the Visayas where resistance to the Japanese was strongest – the *Leyte Samar Free Philippines* in Tacloban, Leyte, *The Coordinator* and *Ang Tigbatas*, both in Panay. The content analysis showed that the dominant content of the guerilla newspapers consisted of news, meant to refute Japanese propaganda and to satisfy the people's hunger for news, as well as boosting their morale.

Elizabeth L. Enriquez's "Media as Site of Social Struggle: The Role of Philippine Radio and Television in the EDSA Revolt of 1986" contends that while the mass media are often thought of as a force for the status quo, they are also an arena of struggle for change and people empowerment.

Enriquez examines how this was dramatically shown by the significant role of the media, especially radio and television, in what she calls “the 1986 revolt.” The essays provide a detailed chronological account of how radio and television became especially important during the snap elections on February 7, 1986 and its aftermath which led to the February revolt and the ouster of Ferdinand Marcos. During the repressive martial law years, radio, despite strict regulation by the government through the Kapisanan ng Mga Brodkasters ng Pilipinas (KBP) and Broadcast Media Council (BMC), became a crucial source of information. Because of its wide reach and capacity to cover events on the spot, it became a rallying point of protest in February 1986 as it kept people in the metropolis and regions informed about what was going on during the snap elections and the defection of some military people led by then Secretary of National Defense Juan Ponce Enrile and Philippine Constabulary Chief General Fidel Ramos.

Television also assumed a crucial role later. The turning point in the EDSA Revolt was the capture of Channel 4 and the subsequent takeover of the other television stations by rebel troops and civilians. Enriquez contends that although the February revolt has been criticized for not having radically changed the social structure which threatens press freedom and creates inequities and injustice, the events in February 1986 demonstrated the potential of media, especially broadcasting, for social change which both broadcasters and their audiences are still struggling to negotiate.

Given the importance of popularizing and making history more accessible to laymen, especially for journalists, Ambeth Ocampo as the subject of the interview in this issue was a logical choice. In “Linking the Past and the Present” by Evelyn O. Katigbak, Ocampo, a history professor who writes a popular history column entitled “Looking Back” in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, explains his motivation for writing historical pieces in a popular journalistic style and the journalistic techniques he uses to make history interesting reading. Although he hails from academe and has spent years of painstaking research on primary resources, Ocampo says that his passion is to write historical pieces that would convey the richness of Philippine history and lessons that could be learned from them to large audiences in a popular style.

Ocampo is sometimes criticized by traditional historians who believe that history should concern itself only with grand events and movements and who accuse Ocampo of trivializing history by writing

about very specific episodes and personalities. His columns, which have been compiled in several books, have gained him a huge following, indicating that laymen can also appreciate history if it is reader friendly. Ocampo emphasizes in the interview that he always looks for a “hook” – the “news peg” in journalism – which would connect the past to the present and thus make the “unpopular, popular and interesting”, as Katigbak describes it.

This issue has Danilo A. Arao’s review of *Hello Garci, Hello Ma’am: Political Humor in the Cellphone Age* (2005) published by the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ). The 90-page compilation of selected political jokes that were circulated through short messaging system (SMS) and the Internet after allegations of massive cheating in the May 2004 elections were raised in May 2005, according to Arao, serves the purpose of providing light and creative entertainment regarding the political situation, although it was initially intended to raise funds for the PCIJ’s investigative reports.

Rounding off this issue are the Filmography of Filipino Films in 2005 compiled by Lucenio Martin L. Lauzon and Berinice I. Zamora and the CMC Thesis/Dissertation Abstracts compiled and edited by Violeda A. Umali.

The contents of this issue hint at the richness of history and media as a special area of academic inquiry. They show how Philippine media are an important source of basic information for the historian and how they have fallen short of their tasks of truth-telling and keeping their audiences informed, and their being sites of struggle for domination and resistance even under the most adverse conditions like war or repressive military dictatorships.

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