

LESSON 12

Mga Talang Pangkultura¹ Mga Pahayagan sa Panahon ng Kolonyalismo

Newspapers During Colonial Rule

How do you get the news? Do you listen to the radio, watch television, use the internet or read newspapers? Before these technological innovations, many relied on newspapers. You might wonder, what was newspaper publishing like during the American colonial period in the Philippines? Were journalists and editors allowed to publish what they wanted?

During the first decade of American colonial rule, several newspapers continued the struggle for independence through print, among them *El Renacimiento*, first published in September, 1901, *Muling Pagsilang* and *El Grito del Pueblo/Ang Kapatid ng Bayan*. *El Renacimiento* was established by Rafael and Jose Palma, Fernando Ma. Guerrero and Cecilio Apostol, all of whom, except for Palma, had studied law at the University of Santo Tomas and unlike the **ilustrados** during the Spanish colonial period, had not gone abroad. It was only Palma, however, who had joined the Katipunan. All four had earlier joined Antonio Luna’s revolutionary newspaper, *La Independencia*.

The editors of *El Renacimiento*, also called “the consistent nationalists,” believed in the following: that the Federalistas did not represent the Filipino people; that there is a need to oppose the penetration of American culture in the Philippines, specifically the imposition of the English language, and Spanish influence in Philippine culture that should be idealized.

On October 30, 1908, *El Renacimiento* published the editorial “Birds of Prey,” by Fidel A. Reyes. Although Dean Worcester, Secretary of the Interior, was not named as the target of the editorial’s criticism, it obviously alluded to him, with references to his inclination for zoology and ethnology, his interest on the natural resources of the Philippines and his links to capitalists. Worcester sued the writer Reyes, the newspaper director Teodoro Kalaw, the owner Martin Ocampo and the journalists Faustino Aguilar and Lope K. Santos. After six years of trial, on January 9, 1909, Ocampo, and Reyes were sentenced to six months of imprisonment and a fine of 2,000 and one fifth of legal costs, and Kalaw to nine months imprisonment and a fine of 3,000, while the cases against Aguilar and Santos were dismissed. After appeals, the Supreme Court on December 22, 1909 upheld Ocampo’s conviction, cleared Reyes, and increased Kalaw’s sentence to twelve months. The US Supreme Court upheld this decision in 1914. They were, however, pardoned by Governor General Francis Burton Harrison.

¹ These notes are from *Ilustrado Politics: Filipino Elite Responses to American Rule, 1898–1908* by Michael Cullinane, Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1989.

Worcester also filed a civil suit and was awarded 60,000 by the defendants, effectively running the newspaper out of business. Ocampo later put out another newspaper in 1910 called the *Renacimiento* and Kalaw effectively ran for the Second Philippine Assembly.

For you to fully understand why the editorial incensed the American colonial government and why this was a significant moment in the history of Philippine journalism, here is the editorial:

The Editorial:

BIRDS OF PREY²

‘On the surface of the globe some were born to eat and devour, others to be eaten and devoured.

‘Now and then the latter have bestirred themselves, endeavoring to rebel against an order of things which makes them the prey and food of the insatiable voracity of the former. At times they have been fortunate, putting to flight the eaters and devourers, but in the majority of cases they did not obtain anything but a change of name or plumage.

‘The situation is the same in all the spheres of creation; the relation between the ones and the others in that dictated by the appetite and the power to satisfy it at the fellow creature’s expense.

‘Amongst men it is very easy to observe the development of this daily phenomenon. And for some psychological reason the nations who believe themselves powerful have taken the fiercest and most harmful creatures as emblems; it is either the lion, or the eagle, or the serpent. Some have done so by a secret impulse of affinity and others in the nature of simulation, of infatuated vanity, making themselves appear that which they are not nor ever can be.

‘The eagle, symbolizing liberty and strength, is the bird that has found the most adepts. And men, collectively and individually, have desired to copy and imitate the most rapacious bird in order to triumph in the plundering of their fellow-men.

‘There are men who, besides being eagles, have the characteristic of the vulture, the owl, and the vampire.

‘Ascending the mountains of Benguet to classify and measure the skulls of the Igorots and study and civilize them, and to espy in his flight, with the eye of the bird of prey, where are the large deposits of gold, the prey concealed amidst the lonely mountains, to appropriate them to himself afterwards, thanks to legal facilities made and unmade at will, but always for his own benefit.

² The English version was taken from the court case proceedings. http://www.lawphil.net/judjuris/juri1910/dec1910/gr_1-5527_1910.html

‘Authorizing, despite laws and ordinances, an illegal slaughtering of diseased cattle in order to derive benefit from the infected and putrid meat which he himself was obliged to condemn by virtue for his official position.

‘Presenting himself on all occasions with the wrinkled brow of the scientist who consumes his life in the mysteries of the laboratory of science, when his whole scientific labor is confined to dissecting insects and importing fish eggs, as if the fish of this country were less nourishing and less savory, so as to make it worth the while replacing them with species coming from other climes.

‘Giving an admirable impulse to the discovery of wealthy lodes in Mindoro, in Mindanao, and in other virgin regions of the Archipelago, with the money of the people, and under the pretext of the public good when, as a strict matter of truth, the object is to possess all the data and the key to the national wealth for his essentially personal benefit, as is shown by the acquisition of immense properties registered under the names of others.

‘Promoting, through secret agents and partners, the sale to the city of worthless land at fabulous prices, which the city fathers dare not refuse, from fear of displeasing the one who is behind the motion, and which they do not refuse for their own good.

‘Patronizing concessions for hotels on filled-in land, with the prospects of enormous profits, at the expense of the blood of the people.

‘Such are the characteristics of the man who is at the same time an eagle who surprises and devours, a vulture who gorges himself on dead and putrid meats, an owl who affects a petulant omniscience, and a vampire who silently sucks the blood of the victim until he leaves it bloodless.

‘It is these birds of prey who triumph. Their flight and their aim are never thwarted.

‘Who will detain them?

‘Some share in the booty and the plunder. Others are too weak to raise a voice of protest. And others die in the disconsolating destruction of their own energies and interests.

‘And then there appears, terrifying, the immortal legend: MANE, TECEL, PHARES.’³

³ MANE: God has numbered your kingdom, and has finished it. 27 THECEL: you are weighed in the balance, and are found wanting. 28 PHARES: your kingdom is divided, and is given to the Medes and Persians—writing that appeared during Baltasar’s feast.