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***Gaceta Del Superior Gobierno:* The First Philippine Newspaper**

Maria del Carmen Pareja Ortiz



In 1823, during a session of the House of Commons, the well known English parliamentarian Macauley called for the first time the press as the "fourth estate." Uttered in a country steeped in parliamentary tradition, these remarks clearly reflect the importance for social communication of the press.

The European press had its beginnings with the seventeenth-century Gazettes. Thanks to the Enlightenment, they improved in quality and quantity. Outstanding at this time were the "published periodicals which begin timidly—as a product of a mechanical art characteristic of the Ancien regime—but sharpened and spreading, thanks to the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century" (Piñal 1976, vii). The regularity of publications is a relatively modern phenomenon, usually connected with the apparition of the modern urban nuclei where they are utilized as important vehicles for mass communication. The influence exercised by a newspaper on the opinion of the public sector needs to be evaluated. They show a concrete and spontaneous vision of many contemporary happenings (Perez Guilho 1981, 119).

A faithful thermometer of the vitality of the public, the newspaper reflects the society in which it is born, the factors giving it life, and the needs it satisfies. We are thus aware that matter included in the newspapers—official or private, censored or free—offers to researchers elements of priceless value for the reconstruction of the past.

In this article, we shall study some aspects of the birth of the first Filipino newspaper, the *Del Superior Gobierno*. It is an unmistakable replica of the *Gazeta de la Regencia de España e Indias* published in Cadiz. Both are prototypes of the so-called official press. The *Del Superior Gobierno* was born in Manila, 8 August 1811, under the impulse of the political events occurring at the time in the peninsula. A datum to keep in mind is the almost universal omission of

the Philippines, an integral part of the colonial territory, from the existing works on this theme (Labra 1912, 382; Berruenco [1986] in no instance mentions the Philippines).

The Press in the Face of Political Developments

It is an impossible task to give a thorough view of the political situation in the peninsula in these years. We shall merely give a few tentative strokes about those political incidents which in some way fall within the ambit of the press.

Five months after the start of the war of independence, the Madrid government issued a circular to the Indies. Dated 7 October 1808, it announces the creation of the *Junta Central Superior* in these terms:

Act of Installation in Aranjuez of the *Junta Central Superior* which will govern Spain and the Indies until the restoration to the throne of our King and Lord, Ferdinand VII, and of other declarations made by this Junta.¹

While the Central Junta assumed the reins of the nation, the French were invading the peninsula and installing themselves in Madrid. This allowed them to use the *Gaceta de Madrid*, published since Charles II, to serve the French cause and seek popular support by means of the news spread through this medium. In such circumstances the *Gaceta de Madrid* will be described as:

Under the primitive denomination, in Spanish clothes but in the French spirit, its staff entrusted to ingrates and venal sons of Spain to delude the inhabitants of the captive cortes and the oppressed peoples, and reduce the free and the threatened (Heras 1961, 478).

Because of the French advance, the Junta Central transferred to Sevilla where till then the *Gazeta Ministerial de Sevilla* had been published. With the arrival of the Junta, a new paper, the *Gaceta del Gobierno*, began publication. This was printed with the well known imprint of the Calle de la Mar. We know some details of this publication—that it continued publication from 6 January 1809 until the 23rd of the same month the following year and that each issue was a broadsheet in *cuarto*, except one of five pages. Don Antonio Capmany y Montpalau was the editor (Gomez Imaz 1910, 156).

The French attack on Sierra Morena obliged the Central Government to transfer precipitately to the Isla de León. A new invasion by the French army, naturally, interrupted, among other official activities, the publication of the *Gaceta*. Since there was no printing press in Cadiz, they could not revive the official *Gaceta del Gobierno* until the arrival by sea of the workers with their machines and other equipment. Only then did the royal press began to function (Heras 1961, 478).

After occupying Sevilla, the French, as in Madrid, took advantage of the printing establishment on the Calle de la Mar, and continued publication of the *Gaceta* to serve the French cause, as was to be expected. It became the official crier of the invading government in the Andalusian capital. The anti-British attitude was seconded by all the publications of the "afrancesados" and Bonapartists. The majority of their articles were aimed at showing that English action tended to definitively despoil Spain of all its overseas possessions (Perez Guilhou 1981, 137, 121).

In Cadiz, the movement started in Sevilla to break up the nation was on the brink of success with the dissolution of the constituted government. Then the Junta Central established the *Consejo de Regencia de España e Indias*. They justified this decision, alleging that it was

In consultation regarding the common good, the need and the desires of the nation, to entrust in other hands the noble exercise of sovereign authority (Rumeu de Armas 1940, 153).

Created by a decree dated 29 January 1810, the *Consejo de la Regencia*, according to its mandate, was expected to accommodate itself to what the Junta had approved. It was explicitly mentioned in the mandate that one of the five members of the Regency should be an American:

The Supreme Central Board, establishing the *Consejo de la Regencia* composed of five councillors, one of whom for the Americas, all appointive, except members that make up the Junta.²

Thus all the formally constituted organs of government were concentrated in Cadiz.

The future, opening before the eyes of the people, was full of promise and great confidence in the new rights to be recognized. This is shown in the defense of freedom explicit in the nineteenth chapter, which reads:

The Regency will propose before the cortes a basic law which projects and assures freedom as one of the more convenient means, not only for spreading general enlightenment, but also for preserving the civil and political freedom of the citizens (Rumeu de Armas 1940, 153).

Conforming to this general aim of freedom, the legitimate sovereign authority, began the publication of the *Gaceta de la Regencia de España e Indias*. This was the official government organ and fulfilled the basic aim of defending the dynastic interests of a monarch whose dominions were going through a crisis leading to their disintegration (Heras 1961, 478). But, what was the policy of the press established in Cadiz?

Towards Freedom of the Press

In this period of effervescence, when men felt the need to accelerate the nation's political, economic, and social pace, see it prosper and be happy, each sector was convinced it had the truth and sought to impose its methods and theories. In the case of the legislation on the freedom of the press, there was in general a tendency towards freedom (Palencia 1934, I: vi). Prior to the decree on press freedom, the words of Arguelles reflect this social preoccupation:

Whatever the reforms intended for approval by the cortes, press freedom should take priority over them. A representative body without the support and guidance of public opinion would soon find itself isolated, soon reduced to its own lights (Reino y Carrota 1977).

After the mutiny of Aranjuez, one of the first decrees by Ferdinand VII was that of 27 March 1808, suppressing the exclusive Tribunal of Printing Presses, and transferring this power to the Council of Castilla. But political developments would inhibit the latter in exercising this power (Rumeu de Armas 1940, 125; Perez Guilhou 1981, 37).

Notwithstanding, on 15 September of that year, the Council issued an act banning the unlicensed sale of newspapers. But aware of the impotence of this body, both bookdealers and the public continue unrestricted buying, publishing, and distributing of materials (Perez Guilhou 1981, 38). On the other hand, in July of the same year, Ferdinand VII established, in article 145 of the Constitution of Bayonne,

the right to a free press. It was never implemented, because it needed a minimum of two years for the constitution to be valid.

When they occupied Madrid, the French troops favored an excessively free press in the occupied zone, taking advantage for their own cause, as already noted, of all the instruments of communication which traditionally had been at the service of the crown.

The decree on freedom of the press was signed in Cadiz on 10 November 1810. It would continue in vigor until the return of Ferdinand VII in 1814. This decree received much praise from the defenders of this right. For example:

Never has Spain enjoyed an epoch of greater freedom than what followed the decree of 10 November 1810 (Rumeu de Armas 1940, 154).

We are then faced with the first free *cortes* of Spain, in which the sovereignty of the nation was defended. Within this political limitation, legislation on press freedom was a fact won on paper. The first article of this decree says:

All corporations and individual persons, regardless of their condition and state, enjoy the freedom to write, print, and publish their political ideas with no need for a license, review, or approval whatever, prior to publication, under the restrictions and responsibilities expressed in the following decree (Roca 1985, 235).

At this time, with the press freedom guaranteed by the new constitutional regime, a high number of periodicals appeared mainly in Cadiz. In this city alone, at that time, fifty-six periodicals were published, five of them in Isla de Leon. This was the base of operations from where they sought "to conquer the spirits of the rest of the Peninsula" (Gomez Imaz 1910, 26; Berrueco 1986, 125).

In less than a month, this decree on freedom was curtailed by the law on censorship of newspapers (16 December 1810). The publication of newspapers without official license was banned. One of the reasons for this decision was the growing increase in the number of newspapers appearing contrary to the established system.

With the change of the seat of the sessions of the Cortes, once the yellow fever epidemic that had desolated the city had ceased, the meetings were transferred to Cadiz, where legal restrictions imposed on the press at the end of 1810 were removed anew.³

This constitutional atmosphere would allow the proliferation of newspapers interpreting the most diverse ideological theories, but

always with a common note, faith in the constitution. To cite an example, a letter published in the *Gazeta de Valencia*, talked of "a magnificent tree which should cover with its shadow the metropolis [and reaching] as far as the farthest town of our colonies" (Perez Guilhou 1981, 41).

The columns of the publications were oriented towards a discussion of the great themes formed by the national opinion. The war against Napoleon and the debates in the Cortes monopolized attention. The American question, from the moment the first notices of the uprising were received in Spain, also provided a cause of principal interest in the press, especially the reformist press which, because of its libertarian claims, was more committed to the theme (Perez Guilhou 1981, 41).

All of these factors contributed to the birth of the political press. Yet, if we analyze the newspapers, we shall see the first began by publishing patriotic declarations and noting items that could be described as simple announcements of the news. Despite press freedom, the official newspapers played at this time a very important role.

Gaceta de Regencia de España e Indias

Let us first make some notes related to the *Gaceta de Regencia de España e Indias*, the official organ of the moment. Its pages contain very rich materials for the study of the period during the fight against Napoleon and the beginning of the disintegration of the Spanish Empire, as well as the progressive rooting of a new order of ideas in Spanish society.

As for its specific aim, it sought basically to serve as a vehicle of information, which would bring together foreign news as long as these

... bring proof of being true, culled from the more respected newspapers of Europe, and will take account of the events in the provinces, successful or not, for the history of our sacred revolution should be composed of both fortunes (Heras 1961, 478).

The reality is that the *Gaceta* would not succeed in remaining true to its promise of impartially supplying information, and providing favorable or adverse news on equal terms. It quickly changed into

an organ to cement the policies of the "Consejo de Regencia" as the exclusive representative of national sovereignty. Above all it was a source of informative material, but carefully chosen, as we shall see, to keep up public morale and avoid discouragement. It was, therefore, a tool to transmit the official "truth" of the cause of the Regency. The existence of this newspaper would be tied to the seat of the Supreme Government and "would suffer as many transfers as the fate of arms will occasion." Besides it would not be limited to the narrow limits of the city and Isla de Leon, but would include all the Spanish provinces, overseas dominions, and the rest of Europe (Heras 1961, 478).

The first sixty-nine issues of the *Gaceta*, from 4 March to 31 August 1810, were published on Tuesdays and Thursdays; from 1 January 1811, also on Saturdays. Printed by the royal press in *cuarto*, it was priced at sixty-four *rials* for a semester's subscription (Gomez Imaz 1910, 156).

From the first assembly on 24 September, there appeared in Cadiz a movement to air liberal ideas which little by little influenced the initial physiognomy of the *Gaceta*. Certain instances reflected, unintended apparently, the ideological clash given the atmosphere of the epoch.

Besides the aspects touched on, it is important to analyze the structure of this newspaper in order to observe its similarity to the South American press.

Ordinarily, the publication depended on the *news from the parliament*, usually occupying the front page, if not filling the entire issue. Here the entire proceedings in the sessions of the Cortes were reported, so that the people were aware of everything in all its rich details. Quite faithfully, the inaugural ceremonies of the Cortes were reproduced and described in the extraordinary issue of the *Gaceta* of 27 September 1810 (*Del Superior Gobierno* 13, Manila, 25 January 1812, AGI, "Ultr." 588).

The *Gaceta* merely mentioned without any commentary the matters brought up by the Cortes, which did not enjoy the support of the Consejo; for example, the decree on press freedom approved by the Cortes on 10 November, was announced in the newspaper on the 15th following. This served as a clue to the neutrality of this publication.

After the parliamentary news, foreign news was included. The change in the policies of Spanish international politics begun in May 1808 were reflected in the treatment of international affairs. The

peninsular governments maintained only friendly relations, described also as diplomatic, with England and Portugal. The first sought to weaken the continental blockade because of the military danger it imagined and the crisis it occasioned for its insular economy. For this reason, England would definitively support Spain and would negotiate by all the means at hand, that the latter enjoy the greatest success in its enterprises. Both nations had surprisingly common interests in Europe (Perez Guillo 1981, 119).

The *Gaceta* would be a faithful megaphone of the political activity of the Cortes. This included those happenings beyond the frontiers, which in some way were favorable to the cause of the Regency or inimical to the enemy. The defeat of the French at the Sicilian and British fronts were commented on in the *Gaceta* of 12 November 1812.⁴

It is not surprising that during the parliamentary sessions, the *Gaceta* described the celebration of the English king's birthday in the following way:

... recently on June 4, the court is decorated in full gala in honor of the birthday of our close ally, the King of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, George III, and a triple gun salute is fired (Cadiz, 3 May 1811, AGI, "Ultr." 795).

The section "News from Spain" followed closely, inserted in chronological order, referred mainly to the military operations in various provinces. At times, these were mere informative bulletins, instruments of communication to transmit official letters to every group in the Cortes, (*Suplemento de la Gaceta de la Regencia*, 16 March 1813, AGI "Ultra." 795) or the manner of celebrating various events, like that of 2 May, as a national holiday,⁵ and that of the feast of Corpus Christi.⁶ News from overseas territories was included in this section. Although generally favorable to the cause of the Crown, a certain separatist restlessness surfaced at times.

Overseas News in the *Gaceta*

To win the good will of the overseas possessions, the *Junta Central*, reviving the Hapsburg thesis, declared in its session of 22 January 1809 that such possessions are "integral parts of the Spanish empire." They were considered an integral part, but with token treat-

ment that on many occasions would lead to a more pronounced division.

Following a debate on the eighth point, the part about including America in the sessions of the Cortes, the Consejo de Regencia decreed representation by proxy of the American deputies "so that the provinces of America and Asia which, due to the constraints of time, cannot be represented by the deputies they themselves have appointed, may not be totally without representation in these cortes" (Perez Guilho 1981, 65). Here appears one of the main problems related to the American theme: that of their parliamentary representation.

America was intent on this convocation of the Cortes during which it hoped it would be granted equality with Spain, in the manner and to the extent it had been affirmed in decrees. Besides, the peninsular rulers decided to reject the representation of those countries whose revolutionary juntas did not recognize the authority of Spain.

In a similar way during the session of the Cortes on 15 October 1810, the well known decree V was enacted, by which the long-standing thesis was repeated and confirmed:

The Spanish dominions in both hemispheres form one sole and identical monarchy, one and the same single nation and one family. Likewise, the inhabitants native to these European or overseas dominions are equal in the law to those of the peninsula.⁷

Aware of their responsibility, the American and Asian deputies submitted some propositions concretizing in detail the implementation of what was expressed in the decree of 15 October 1810. Their eleven points would be the matter of parliamentary debate (Caro de Delgado 1969, 139).

From the proposition would follow, among other results, decree XXXI and XXXII during the sessions of 9 and 13 February 1811. But these constitutional measures arrived too late to avoid the rupture. Arguelles has this to say:

To give witness to the desire which animates them to provide whatever is useful and beneficial to those natives, it anticipates the premise that the basis for national representation would be the same in the Peninsula and in America (Cortes de Cadiz, "Session n° 140," I: 541).

The Cortes of September 1810 expected much from America. Lacking information about what was happening in Bogota and Chile, they

thought the rebellion, which arose at this time, was confined to Caracas and Buenos Aires. The oath before the Consejo de Regencia of Montevideo, Paraguay, and Cordoba; the profound division caused in Venezuela; the continued notices of loyalty from Peru, Mexico, the Antilles and the Philippines—all these contributed to optimism with regard to the American situation. The Cortes believed that the foci of revolution could be isolated by proceeding with leniency.

It is interesting to note the observation voiced by the vice-president of the Cortes, the American, Power, on the contemporary American situation and the means to be adopted. They reflect a general sentiment:

The government agents have sought no other thing than to soar to opulence by all imaginable means and, if any heads have claimed the authority of the law, they have been the victims of their zeal. Hence, the origin of much injustice; hence, the start of diverse movements which unfortunately have disturbed the order in Caracas, in Quito, in La Paz, in Buenos Aires; and hence, too, the germ of discontent sowed in other American provinces. Let them not say the causes of those lamentable incidents were different. Your Majesty, I repeat, I shall abstain from considering the events in Caracas as rebellion, since I have seen that illustrious city and all its provinces give the most significant proofs of their true patriotism and loyalty (Caro de Delgado 1969, 143)

For these reasons, the American question was given priority when the Cortes opened in 1811. During the session of 2 January, they decided that Wednesday and Friday would be reserved for the affairs of the New World. A logical result of this problem was that the American theme was immediately reechoed by the press.

Again Power would try to prick the conscience of the deputies with the following words:

Let us examine, sir, the public spirit of our brothers in America. Study their desires, for they are just, and let us obviate lamentable results, lest one day we may have to weep over them . . . Finally, let us observe there are in America enlightened peoples and a nation, complaining of having been forgotten, humiliated, and of the painful scorn with which they have always been looked on (Caro de Delgado 1969, 153).

In the face of the serious problems now appearing, we can say that at this moment was born in all the colonial territories what Labra

would call the "Ibero-American intimacy or coming together of the peoples of hispanic stock" (Padron 1983, 63).

How nuanced was the news from America in the *Gaceta*? The news was previously censored by the government, a censorship that promoted two types of information from the overseas possessions. The first included all the news characterized by fidelity and love for the crown. Mentioned were donations sent from the overseas provinces in support of the metropolis. Many distant lands sent substantive donations to the peninsula when they received the news of the incidents at Bayonne, and the uprising against the French. The Count of Terreno reported no less than 284 million rials coming into the hands of the central government in 1809, almost half of this offering was from voluntary donations or advances. This generous and uninterested sacrifice, according to the author, occasioned the decree of 22 January 1809 with which the government thanked the exemplary American gesture (*Gaceta de Regencia*, N° 129 [Mexico, 8 October 1811]: AGI, "Mexico" 3011).

Also of this type of news were all those items referring to the manifestations of adhesion and official recognition of the *Consejo de Regencia* by the American authorities and institutions. Most important were those from Mexico, Montevideo, the Antilles, and the Philippines. A clear example was the letter which the Governor of the Philippines sent to the supreme junta, about which the central government would say:

Have this letter publicized in the official *Gaceta*, for the enthusiasm it implies, and which the vassals in the farthest dominions of our Lord King, Don Fernando VII have proven (Manila, 25 April 1809: AGI, "Ultr." 588).

We find little information on the American revolution in the *Gaceta* until it was irreversible. If adverse and beyond remedy, news of the events was sent without commentary. The first notice on the Caracas revolt in the *Gaceta*, for example, considered it a "regrettable and dire" movement (Perez Guilhou 1981, 80; *Gaceta Extraordinaria de Regencia*, 8 August 1810).

The *Gaceta* on *Del Superior Gobierno*

We wish to emphasize that we are showing only some aspects of the climate of opinion in the Philippines created by the dispositions

of the insular government, and which led to the birth of the first Philippine newspaper.

The Philippine population at the end of the eighteenth century totaled more than 1.3 million (Labra 1912, 383). According to Arguelles in his *Diccionario de Hacienda*, Spain had a population of 10,262,150 at this time. Its peculiar geographic situation made these islands the farthest and most isolated from the metropolis. The *de facto* distance between the peoples would make the governor in Manila say:

Spaniards treading the soil of [the several] Spains from which we are separated by the immense distance and the seas which divide us (letter from the governor, dated at Manila, 25 April 1808: AGI, "Ultr." 558)

The population was disseminated along a string of islands forming the archipelago. Communication among them inhibited a unified and clear reaction to the events in the peninsula.

Acapulco, the traditional contact linking the Philippines with Spain, was the way by which the *situado*, official and private correspondence, and, naturally, news about events taking place in the peninsula reached the Philippines. This means of contact with the rest of the hispanic world would be broken at this moment. The following reflects the people's degree of isolation in the face of the lack of news, their uncertainty, and their malaise:

In the meantime, some days passed by with not a single bit of information about the fate overtaking the peninsula to calm the natural restlessness of the colonists (Retana 1895, 540).

We shall briefly explain the official reaction of the authorities and residents of Manila, culled from correspondence about the events between the governor and the *Junta Central*, and from publications in Manila at this time. Naturally, the first notices arrived from Acapulco through the galleon, and were received on 15 February 1809. It is one more evidence of the difficulty of communications, considering the arrival at this moment of such transcendental news as the king's abdication, the war with France, or the peace signed with England.

This was the reaction in the assembly to the reading of the royal provision from the central government communicating the momentous events:

DEL SUPERIOR GOBIERNO.

N.º XIII.

Manila 25. de Enero de 1812.

Las dos grandes atenciones à que la Nacion tenia puesto su conato y eficacia, y que esperabamos por momentos, gloriosamente las vemos en el predicamento más sublime para confusion del tirano, y admiracion de todas las Potencias del Orbe. La instalacion de un Gobierno legitimo, y la dispersion y de-orden de los exercitos Franceses; empresas ambas que si se contempla su necesidad, no havra ningun politico, que no las confiese absolutamente indispensables para la conservacion del estado y defensa del iniquo imbasor que intentò apoderarse de la Patria.

La primera que deve llenarnos de inexplicable júbilo, ès la instalacion de las Cortes; èsta ès por ahora la que ocupará nuestra atencion, trasladando al Publico los mejores papeles relativos à tan importante asunto y de que copiamos el primero en el numero anterior; y en e' entretanto que nos llegan recientes progresos de las victorias, no podemos cumplir con satisfacer los ardientes deseos del segundo obgeto que hace el entusiasmo de la Nacion en la justa y gloriosa lucha que honrradamente sostenemos.

GAZETA EXTRAORDINARIA DE MONTEVIDEO
del 20 de Diciembre de 810.



DEL SUPERIOR GOBIERNO:

N.º XV.

Manila 7. de Febrero de 1812.

Se ha copiado ya quanto se ha visto reimpresso en Gacetas de la fiel Montevideo, que es á lo mas que puede extenderse nuestro amor y zelo patriótico, guardando la mas debida consideracion á las insinuaciones del augusto congreso nacional; pues en los quadernos mano escritos de los diarios de Cadiz, que se han visto, leemos hacerse una absoluta prohibicion en 16. de Diciembre de 1810. de que se puedan reimprimir dichos diarios sin expresa licencia de las Cortes; y así en tanto que S. M. nos los dirige originales, solo presentamos en este numero el prospecto literal con que se manifiestan, pues que hace una pieza sublime y eloquente del grande objeto y plan que se propone abrazar el periodico del referido diario.

CADIZ 16. de DICIEMBRE DE 1810.

PROSPECTO

Del Periodico intitulado

Diario de las discusiones y actas de las Cortes que se ha de publicar bajo de la Soberanía, autoridad é inspeccion del Congreso nacional (*)

(*) Este Diario no podrá ser reimpresso por persona alguna sin expresa licencia de las Cortes.



It ended with all the councillors expressing impatience, calling for their respective votes dictated by the most unmitigated sincerity in our hearts, demanding that without wasting any moment our beloved and cherished King our Lord Ferdinand VII be proclaimed, that the dispositions of Your Highness be exactly acknowledged and carried out (Manila, 25 April 1809: AGI, "Ultr." 588).

Following this solemn reading, a session was immediately convoked, composed of all the ecclesiastical, civil, and military authorities to inform them of the developments:

heroic events in our fatherland, as the energetic and glorious dispositions taken by Your Highness, and the unanimous resolution of the *real Acuerdo* that the people be informed through a proclamation about the events taking place and the measures adopted in Spain and in this capital, in keeping with fealty, loyalty, and love we profess for the august house of the Bourbons (Manila, 25 April 1809: AGI, "Ultr." 588).

We have detailed information about the recognition in the city of Manila of its adherence to the Crown. Three proclamations were issued, in which it was explained how they would manifest this sign of fidelity to the Crown. In one of these, the manner of carrying this out was described in the following terms:

In sincere demonstration of the general rejoicing which is felt by everyone for such plausible motives, let all drape and illumine their houses at night that day, and the two successive nights of the 19th and 20th of this month (Manila, 18 February 1809: AGI, "Ultr." 588).

Besides, parades, gun salutes, the raising of the colors, military marches, etc. were readied, together with stage presentations at the city's main plaza joined in by the entire city—a clear vestige of ephemeral baroque celebrations.⁸

Three months later, on 21 May 1809, a French galliot was captured in Mindoro. It had aboard letters the governor of the Ile de France was sending to the Philippine authorities. The entire packet was introduced by a communication from the island's Captain General, with a box of ten bundles of French gazettes published from January to October of the previous year of 1808.

The governor was aware the French ship was coming with the intention of sowing doubts about the English, for which purpose they had broadsheets to distribute among the people. In his report of the incidents, he says:

They sought to direct us to their new system and to seek that these dominions of the Spanish crown in Asia renounce their loyalty. With the people excited, the galliot was apprehended with its crew. But the people became extremely impatient on knowing the contents [of the papers], although with the noblest sentiments of fidelity to the king (Manila, 8 August 1809, 22 December 1811: AGI, "Ultr." 588).

Thanks to the information brought by the French gazettes, the Governor decided to publicize the news they contained. This was a good political move. With regard to public affairs, Fernandez Folgueras did not want mysteries, nor cover-ups. He wanted the public to be aware of developments which concerned them, to recognize and prepare themselves to receive bad news until the good arrived (Retana 1895, 542).

That is why the *Aviso al público* was published containing extracts from these newspapers. In it was a note which said:

Articles from the gazettes translated into our idiom and considered the more interesting will be published in succession so that the public may be aware of them (*Aviso al público*, Manila, 2 June 1809, AGI, "Ultr." 588).

The *Aviso*, published on 11 September that year, had news brought by another French brig, the "Empereur," with information about French and Spanish relations. The governor summarized the incidents provoked by the second arrival of this enemy boat:

As usual with that nation, some setbacks suffered by the peninsular forces were publicized in the French monitors and gazettes. However, in the English gazettes, although these were not omitted, mention is made of the energy and enthusiasm of our dear fatherland to carry on the just and holy cause of our King, of religion, and of the independence of the monarchy (*Aviso al público*, Manila, 11 Nov. 1809, AGI, "Ultr." 588).

Aware of the developments in Europe, the governor rejected the idea of submitting to the rule of France, and informed the governor of the Ile de France about the unbreakable loyalty of the Philippines to its legitimate monarch, Fernando VII. The people, on learning of the French pretensions after reading the above papers:

... curiosity ended and strong and fervent expressions only were heard, with which each one manifested, condemning the despicable suggestion, perfidy, and cunning with which the governor of the Ile

de France sought to have this government align with him (Aviso al público, Manila, 11 Nov. 1809, AGI, "Ultr." 588).

Such was the indignation of the Filipinos that Fernandez Folgueras did not want to transfer the prisoners "since it was quite probable they would be insulted by the populace and suffer consequent harm" (Cadiz, 11 Nov. 1814, AGI "Ultr." 588).

News of the reaction in Manila reaching the Cortes provoked such a great admiration that the Consejo de Regencia answered the Philippine authorities in these terms:

Rooted in the purest sentiments of love for religion, for the king, and for our fatherland and our constitution . . . our lord Ferdinand VII being convinced, and in his royal name, the Consejo de Regencia of the general rejoicing which ought to occasion the knowledge that in the most distant points of the Spanish dominions have come vivid sentiments of patriotism and execration of the felony and attack of the emperor of the French (Isla de Leon [18 Feb. 1810]: AGI, "Ultr." 588).

From February 1808, the month the Acapulco galleon had arrived in Manila, no more news were received from Spain. This led the merchants in the city to charter a boat to obtain information directly from the peninsula through Acapulco. As the governor would say, due to the "uncertainty prevailing in the colony and the very serious discouragement demoralizing the residents, unable otherwise to explain things satisfactorily except to presume the complete destruction of the fatherland" (Retana 1895, 548).

Notwithstanding the dispatch of a boat to New Spain, it was a foreign ship, this time English, an ally, that brought in news inserted in European gazettes. They would again be the source of information for the first Philippine newspaper. In words of profound joy, the governor adduced the need to publicize the good news:

Fighting and feeling this way, with no material to be able to speak of when the provinces were beginning to believe [we have reached] the extreme of unhappiness, I receive from India gazettes from London until November 1810. Finding references to the Spanish cortes and Lord Wellington's victory in Portugal, I release answers to the press without any preparation or apparatus other than the brief mention of their arrival (Manila, 22 Dec. 1811, AGI, "Ultr." 588).

This is the seed of the first Philippine newspaper.

The First Philippine Newspaper

Till now we have spoken of *Del Superior Gobierno* as the first in the Philippines, and we wish to show it is not a totally correct statement. We now know that on 2 August 1809 a sheet of information called *Aviso al público* appeared in Manila, and it came out a second time on the following 11 September. But because it was not regularly published, even if it was a printed document, we do not think it merits inclusion in the category of regularly published newspapers.

In explaining the appearance of the first American papers, researchers usually do not take into account various factors that motivate them, such as the interest which events in the peninsula provoked and which affected the life of those countries, or the literary spirit, the needs of commerce, or even on occasion, ideas of emancipation (Retana 1895, 537).

As for the birth of *Del Superior Gobierno* (the complete title, of course, was *Gazeta del Superior Gobierno*), we could suppose it was to neutralize the revolutionary propaganda of the gazettes from territories like Brazil (Heras 1961, 486). But this is not true. Rather, its appearance was due to the desire people felt for some inkling of the happenings in the peninsula during the critical circumstances we have already mentioned.

We know, as Retana affirms, that various newspapers without any kind of previous permits appeared in that country. Unmuffled and uninhibited, the Filipinos were then able to express their thoughts. But certainly, not one page, small or big, existed which included concepts contrary to the sovereignty of Spain over those islands (Retana 1908, 2). This was due to the eminently patriotic, loyal, and faithful character this people felt towards the monarchy, undeniable, as a letter the Governor sent (with seven copies of the publication) to the *Regencia* clearly shows, justifying the gazetta in the following terms:

Since Manila has no Gazette or the means to promote it, the present government should not be expected to report proclamations or propagate harangues that would occasion commentaries or expose them to doubts, meanwhile that the regrettable leaflets and reports through India and China do not go beyond a hundredth part of the city, and even if each guild, body, or society issued tentative opinions, plans, or desires, there would never be enough fodder to maintain them.

He continued to explain the efforts he exerted to keep within political orthodoxy, for which reason he would say that he published it "without ever transgressing the limits prescribed by the *Suprema Junta Central*. He republished nothing ambiguous or prejudicial, even if someone complained about what he had left out (which I have not seen)" (Manila, 22 Dec. 1811, AGI, "Ultr." 588).

These common interests were clearly reflected in the initial words of the *Gaceta*: love, fidelity to the Crown; applause for the actuation of the English allies; revulsion towards the enemy of the Crown. Words of the hoped for salvation expected from the action of the Cadiz Cortes were never missing.

The Superior Government, in its desire that all the inhabitants of that kingdom of the Philippines who have constantly proved their fidelity, love and patriotism share in these optimistic news included in the English gazettes coming from India (*Del Superior Gobierno*, 1, 8 August 1809, Manila: AGI, "Ultr." 588).

From the contents of the news summed up in the newspaper, we note the same three types of information as those in the *Gaceta de la Regencia*, but with a difference. Now there were numerous references to the European colonies in Asia, of great interest to the Philippines. In the first issue there was an account of a French frigate apprehended in Mauritius. Likewise, it noted that on 15 May celebrations were held in Calcutta to inaugurate a new Catholic church (*Del Superior Gobierno* 1, 8 August 1809, Manila: AGI, "Ultr." 588).

Most of the notices come from the *Gazettes* already issued in other territories, but their source was not always cited. On the first pages of the issue for 30 September 1811, the line of information is explained in these terms:

The editor offers the most interesting news found in the different gazettes from Madras, and will continue to choose what is more worthy of being known and appreciated (*Del Superior Gobierno* 7 Manila, 30 Sept. 1811: AGI, "Ultr." 588).

Issues 13 to 15 reproduced practically in its entirety information in the *Gazeta extraordinaria de Montevideo*, a newspaper otherwise a model for its fidelity to the crown, in contrast to that published in Buenos Aires. The Manila editor wrote:

Everything reprinted in the Gazettes of loyal Montevideo has now been copied, the extreme of our patriotic love and enthusiasm, reserving the greatest respect for the indications of the august national congress (*Del Superior Gobierno* 15 Manila, 7 Feb. 1812, AGI, "Ultr." 588).

The costs of the newspaper would be charged against the goods of the governor, who, despite the expense it occasioned, said; "In my great generosity I shall continue at the expense of my meager salary." Farther on he explains how "both in this case as in the second it was distributed free to as many as could have it" (Letter from the governor, dated at Manila 22 Dec. 1811: AGI, "Ultr." 588). The distribution of the copies was quite widespread all over the divided the extended archipelago. We know their distribution:

. . . officially addressing himself to all the *corregidores*, *alcaldes*, and curates who acknowledged having reanimated the provinces, for they had been of the belief that Spain and Fernando were already dead; expressing their appreciation for the favor to the province through a novel, and never before tried means; how my aim is better styled that of a translator more than is usual; continuing as long as there was material from the gazettes with which to entertain and to cajole (Letter from the governor dated at Manila, 22 Dec. 1811, AGI, "Ultr." 588).

The newspaper continued publication from 8 August 1809, the date of the first issue, until 7 February 1812, its last. It ceased when on this date the decree banning republication of gazettes without approval by the Cortes reached Manila. In its fifteenth issue, the matter was explained:

. . . considering that in the manuscript *cuadernos* of the Cadiz dailies which have appeared, we read the passage of an absolute prohibition, on 16 December 1810, against the cortes of Cadiz (*Del Superior Gobierno* 15, Manila, 7 February 1812, AGI, "Ultr." 588).

The issue ended with a note we do not wish to pass over:

If no new matter of interest is found, the weekly will continue publication; otherwise, it is going to be suspended until the bulletins and the correspondence are received (*Del Superior Gobierno* 15, Manila, 7 February 1812, AGI, "Ultr." 588).

The allusion brought to end the publication of the newspaper. There are two reasons. First, under the law of 16 December 1810, the main source of notices of interest to the people was cut off; second, without bulletins and the official correspondence, there was no reason for the paper to continue to exist.

In this way the first newspaper in the Philippines came to an end. It was born out of the desire to know the political reality of the peninsula, and its disappearance was in loyal fulfillment of the norms enacted by legally constituted authority—everything, in contrast to the rest of the colonies, infused with a spirit of love for the fatherland, which would lead this territory to maintain its ties with Spain until the end of the century.

Notes

1. Circular letter dated Madrid, 11 October 1803: Archivo General de Indias (henceforth, AGI), "*Indiferente General*," 826.

2. Provisión del Consejo, Isla de León, 29 January 1810: AGI, "*Ultramar*," 796.

3. "Las cortes declaran su traslado de la Isla de León a Cadiz en la Iglesia de San Felipe Neri por la fiebre que reinaba y habiendo cesado ciertamente esta causa han reinado y habiendo cesado ciertamente esta causa han decretado y decretan trasladarse a Cadiz sin ceremonia ni aparato alguno y que la última sesión que se celebre en esta Real Isla de León, sea en la noche del día 2 del corriente, y la primera en al Iglesia de San Felipe de Cadiz a las diez de la mañana del 24 de dicho": AGI, Isla de León, 18 February 1811.

4. *Gaceta de la Regencia de España e Indias* (Nº 151): AGI, "Cuba 1830, 1836"; *Gaceta extraordinaria* Nº 82 (Cadiz, 2 July 1813).

5. "Las cortes generales penetradas de los tristes y gloriosos recuerdos que en todo buen patriótico no puede menos de renovar al presente día y deseando que mientras haya en los dos mundos una sola aldea de españoles libre, resuenen en ella los cánticos de gratitud y compasión que se deben a los primeros mártires de la libertad nacional decretan que sin embargo de ser pasado el día dos se celebre en todos los pueblos de la Monarquía, el aniversario de las primeras victimas de Madrid. Sea su estímulo de los esforzados, aliento de los débiles, vergüenza de los insensibles y sempiterna afrenta de los infames que cerrando los oídos a los clamores de la Patria se afanan en balde por verla sujeta a la coyunda del Tirano y que en lo sucesivo sea precisamente el mismo dos de mayo con la pompa y solemnidad prevenida en el decreto que se acompaña (Cadiz, 21 May 1811: AGI, "*Ultr.*" 795).

6. In the beginning of June, details of the participation of the Cortes in the procession to be held during the feast of Corpus Christi were explained, and the order to be observed by the actual forces marching behind the cortege (Cadiz, 11 June 1811: AGI, "*Ultr.*" 796).

7. The decree continues: "Ordena asimismo las Cortes que desde el momento en que los países de ultramar, en donde se hayan manifestado conmociones, hagan el debido reconocimiento a la legítima autoridad soberana que se haya establecida en

la Madre Patria, haya en general olvido de cuanto hubiese ocurrido indebidamente en ellas, dejando sin embargo a salvo el derecho a tercero" (Isla de Leon, 15 October 1810): AGI, "Ultr." 796.

8. "Puesto el ayuntamiento en el lugar citado se situó el alférez con su alcalde padrino en el tablado. Este era de forma: una sala alta de figura cuadrada de 4 lados iguales y sus cuatro ángulos rectos los cuatro reyes de armas se hallaban repartidos por los ángulos del edificio adornados de esta forma: estaba vestido de ricos damascos carmesí, todos floreados en las manos una bara larga a modo de cetro con peluquinas redondas y una gorra colorada de figura circular. Dichos reyes de armas empezaron a decir en grito todos a una las siguientes voces: Silencio, silencio, silencio, oid, oid, oid, y luego que dieron a una pausa y que el concurso se puso en expectación y silencio el señor alférez real habló." ("Testimonio," 18 February 1809: AGI, "Ultr." 588.)

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