

Convergences and Divergences of the Filipino *Ilustrados* and the ‘Biased’ Journalists: A Glimpse into Filipino Journalists’ Role as Counterpropagandists in the 1800s and the Present Era

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ABSTRACT

This article traces the convergences and divergences between the Filipino *Ilustrados* counterpropaganda of the Spanish colonial era to the present day’s so-called ‘biased’ journalists’ truth-telling through a comparative and historical analysis of the two instances of counterpropaganda. Counterpropaganda is used as a framework to link these two entities both working in countering mis- and disinformation spread by the authorities of each respective era. The *Ilustrados* were intellectuals who spread information, or counterpropaganda, against abuses being done in the Philippines to call for reforms in the colonial rule of the Philippines by Spanish authorities. Whereas the ‘biased’ journalists battle the spread of mis- and disinformation in the Duterte administration by speaking truth to power and holding those in power accountable. The *Ilustrados* and the ‘biased’ journalists share in the idea of countering mis- and disinformation in their respective eras. The *Ilustrados* and ‘biased’ journalists, therefore, share a commonality: their focus is to counter propaganda aimed at preserving the government’s image even at the cost of withholding the truth.

Keywords: *counterpropaganda; Philippine journalism; historical analysis; Ilustrados*

Introduction¹

Today, mis- and disinformation, commonly referred to as “fake news²,” is very rampant, not only in the Philippines, but in the whole world. This overhaul of showing less or no concern at all

¹ An earlier version of this piece was presented in the PACE Communication & Media Studies Conference 2018 held in Holy Angel University, Angeles City, Pampanga, 10-11 May 2018.

² Philosophers of language argue against the use of the phrase “fake news” brought by it being empty words. American philosopher, Michael Lynch looks at it as the “deliberate spreading of a mixture of true and false stories to confuse the public. Harry Frankfurt’s concept

for the truth is brought by what philosophers call the post-truth era. This is the period during which information is easily retrievable because these are but a click away; the problem is that these are sometimes taken from unreliable sources. The post-truth era, on one hand, is marked by the “abundance of fake news in the media, especially in online platforms” and the scenario where “public’s attitude towards fact presented” is a “willful self-deception and delusion when people continue to see lies as truth despite evidence against it.”³ This period shows what have been supposedly taken as facts written in our textbooks have become questionable, due to historical revisionism, or the act re-interpretation of historical events as brought by new evidence to alter what had been considered “historical”. Similarly, even politics has been much more corrupted by the concepts of “fake news” and “alternative facts.”

Politicians, after being elected, would rely on the power vested in their office, and, through propaganda, would tell the people that their hardships are “normal” and the flourishing of politicians are “normal” as well. As a result, the usual “rich get richer and poor get poorer” scheme is perpetuated.

But retrospectively in history, there have been significant efforts to counter this scheme. It can be asserted that the truth-telling efforts of journalists and their capacity to hold those in power accountable, is a form of counterpropaganda. For instance, the Spanish colonization of the Philippines is a notable era for counterpropaganda. During this time, a group of learned Filipinos, called *Ilustrados*, led a counterpropaganda movement against the disinformation spread by the Spanish authorities used to subjugate the Filipino isles, while at the same time promoting nationalism and patriotism among their fellowmen. The rest is history, as their efforts have significantly contributed to the awakening of the nationalistic psyche of the Filipinos in order to instigate the Philippine Revolution.

Fast forward to the Duterte administration – a regime shadowed with the rampancy of fake news proliferated by trolls and bots, which spread disinformation in order to maintain a clean slate for the government, despite its numerous controversies as of date. These pro-administration groups, who are self-proclaimed Duterte Diehard Supporters (DDS), have labeled the

of bullshit resonates more with fake news, which is seen in the comparison of a liar and a bullshitter: the former speaks what they believe is false, the latter says whatever is their interest, irrespective of its truth. See Michael Lynch, “Fake News and the Internet Shell Game.” *New York Times*, November 28, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/28/opinion/fake-news-and-the-internet-shell-game.html> and Harry Frankfurt, *On Bullshit*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009).

³ Anthony Le Duc, “Catholic Church Communication in the Post-Truth Era: Intra-Religious and Inter-Religious Dimensions,” *SSRN* (2019):1-12, 1-2, [url:http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3335641](http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3335641).

opposition or anyone criticizing or questioning the incumbent regime – be it opposition politicians, left-leaning activists, and even esteemed professors of universities, as “*dilarwans*” (“yellows”) or sympathizers of the previous administration.

But the most notable attacks of the DDS against the Philippine media to the point of death threats and harassments had Margaux “Mocha” Uson, a vocal supporter of the President, at the forefront of labeling journalists and media practitioners as biased, “*bayaran*” (people who can be bought), and the derogatory term fake news. The attacks have been so much that the reputation of respected journalistic institutions have been discredited in favor of bloggers, vloggers and other pro-government people who guise themselves as reliable sources of information.

The Philippine media is under attack brought by the very trade they do: good journalism, verification, and fact-checking. The supposed power that the Philippine media have in their act of truth-telling and holding those in power accountable is being challenged by opinions heavily influenced by anger and other similar emotions. Instead of being able to inform the public on what the government is doing, journalists are being attacked for reporting investigation reports and fact-checking government officials in what they say. Reports on abstract topics such as human rights, freedom, equality, and even justice are being labelled as anti-government pieces. The rise of mis- and disinformation diverted journalists from simple reports of events to more reports that involve fact-checking and verification. In the act of being fact-checkers, myth debunkers, and verifiers, journalists act as counterpropagandists against the mis- and disinformation machinery operating in the country. Similarly, the *Ilustrados*, in their own time, were counterpropagandists who wrote pieces that aimed to correct mis- and disinformation being spread in Spain and in the Philippines regarding the situation of the colony under the management of the Church and the State. While spread across two centuries from each other, both generations of journalists share the common goal of truth-telling against mis- and disinformation spread by a ruling group keeping a status quo of oppression.

A move forward from the early years of Duterte towards the end of his regime, to the new regime of the son of namesake dictator Ferdinand Marcos Jr., a particular hatred towards journalists has increased that even the very pillar of journalism is attacked: the objective truth. Yesteryear’s DDS have either been absorbed into a more rabid group, the Marcos apologists, who are loyal followers of Marcos relying on the numerous whitewashings done by the Marcos family to discredit the evils of Martial Law and the very essence of the EDSA People Power Revolution.

With that in mind, the researcher aims to present that political counterpropaganda done today in the Philippines, in the form of countering mis- and disinformation from the ruling government, bears similar characteristics to those done by the *Ilustrados* during the Spanish colonization. The study is important as it presents a historical occurrence of political counterpropaganda and compares it with the present situation in the country. With the study focusing on political counterpropaganda, it would present another dimension of today's era of mis- and disinformation. The study is also significant as it compares past occurrences of political counterpropaganda and brings to light its similarities with today's political counterpropaganda.

The study would then focus on the Filipino Propaganda Movement, analyzing its key figures, events, ideology, and will compare it with the present Philippine journalism and media in what aspects they share and differ. The study would be limited to political counterpropaganda in the Philippine context, and it would not delve into the Martial Law era, another era where Philippine journalists had become political counterpropagandists.

Throughout the paper, jargons related to journalism will be repeated over and over. It is, then, a necessity to give them an operational definition to avoid confusion while reading. Bias is the journalists' "irrational, his unexamined, his unacknowledged prejudgments in observing, understanding and presenting the news,"⁴ which had been supposedly called-out by people in what the masses are biased against. Using the term of the common folk, "unbiased" reports actually refer to journalistic works done objectively. The particular objectivity that journalism and its practitioners must possess is a call to "develop a consistent method of testing information – a transparent approach to evidence – precisely so that personal and cultural biases would not undermine the accuracy of their work."⁵ Bias became a part of discourses against Philippine journalists in the present era brought by the association of those in the journalistic trade with the political opposition under the Duterte administration. For the case of the paper, objectivity will refer to traditional journalism ethics which sees "the professional journalist as a neutral, nonengaged stenographer of facts," rather than journalists who are "active, interpretive, value-laden, an advocational."⁶ Lastly, truth has both metaphysical and political connotation, the former focuses identifying the

⁴ Walter Dean and Tom Rosentiel, "The lost meaning of 'objectivity,'" *American Press Institute*, <https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/journalism-essentials/bias-objectivity/lost-meaning-objectivity/>.

⁵ Dean and Rosentiel, "The lost meaning of 'objectivity'".

⁶ Stephen J. A. Ward, *Ethical Journalism in a Populist Age: The Democratically Engaged Journalist*, (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018).

truthfulness of a belief if it corresponds to a particular entity, while the latter is much more complicated than its metaphysical counterpart. The political connotation of truth which will be used in this paper is from Michel Foucault, who defines truth as “a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and functioning of statements”; it is linked “by a circular relation to systems of power which produce it and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which redirect it”.⁷ What Foucault means by this is the condition that particular statements are considered truth because of those who have power to do so.

Counterpropaganda, the Filipino *Ilustrados* and the ‘Biased’ Journalists

To many, counterpropaganda may seem as a very unfamiliar concept. What is usually discussed about combatting propaganda is defeating it through another form of propaganda. Simply said, counterpropaganda is a form of communication consisting of methods taken and messages relayed to oppose propaganda which seeks to influence action or perspectives among a targeted audience.

One author writes there are two leading types of counterpropaganda; strategic and tactical counterpropaganda, the first being only “a message or set of messages or activities deployed to push back against a specific message from an adversary” while the second is “an entire communication policy devised as a response to an adversary’s propaganda activity.”⁸ Moreover, Cull suggests five points in terms of counterpropaganda in the current era, which he believes should be done by the United States, and even the whole world:

1. The systematic study and discussion of media bias and propaganda is an important part of any counter-propaganda strategy and may be seen as equipping a population with an important tool of citizenship.
2. Rumors and fabrications need careful handling to avoid simply perpetuating them. A multi-tiered approach is necessary and explicit counter-messaging should be restricted to communities/ networks in which the rumor is already endemic.

⁷ Michel Foucault, “The Political Function of the Intellectual,” *Radical Philosophy* 17, no. 13 (1977):12-14, 14, url:<https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/the-political-function-of-the-intellectual>.

⁸ Nicholas John Cull, *Counter propaganda: Cases from US public diplomacy and beyond*, (London: Legatum Institute, 2015), 3.

3. More can be achieved by communicating good news than by grappling explicitly with the negative and sparking a ‘backfire effect’.
4. Well-chosen deeds can be more eloquent in rebutting propaganda and negative images than well-chosen words.
5. Sustained listening is an essential foundation of all public diplomacy, including counter-propaganda.⁹

Particular emphasis was given towards studying materials that may be used to counteract propaganda being released. When one is able to study how to effectively handle a media bias against propaganda, then one is able to counter the said propaganda. Moreover, other effective ways of counterpropaganda included action-based responses rather than the usual word response, outweighing a bad mis- and disinformation campaigns with true and factual news.

A history of counterpropaganda in the United States context can be read in Romerstein’s work. In his piece, he defines counterpropaganda as “carefully prepared answers to false propaganda with the purpose of refuting the disinformation and undermining the propagandist,”¹⁰ highlighting also the need to be prepared to counter any particular false propaganda with true information: which is basically the adage of conquering falsehood with truth.

In another context, Garfield gives an analysis of counterpropaganda as “an approach that does not focus on the eradication of such threats through force of arms alone,”¹¹ which basically posits the use propaganda to address the root cause of insurgency, without resorting to bloodshed. In ensuring a way to overpower the propaganda. Garfield also notes that to effectively counter propaganda, one must be able to grasp or have in their hands the propaganda and have it “analyzed by experts who actually understand what they are looking for, [like] experts from the intelligence and also professionals from all relevant social sciences [...]; and from the attitudinal and market research communities.”¹²

On another note, when speaking of counterpropaganda, propaganda journalism is a term used in Russia which highlights the early generation of

⁹ Cull, *Counter propaganda*, 8.

¹⁰ Herbert Romerstein, “Counterpropaganda: We can’t win without it,” in *Strategic influence: Public diplomacy, counterpropaganda, and political warfare*, ed. J. Michael Waller (Washington, DC: Institute of World Politics Press, 2005), 137.

¹¹ Andrew Garfield, “Recovering the Lost Art of Counterpropaganda: An interim assessment of the war of ideas in Iraq,” in *Strategic influence: Public diplomacy, counterpropaganda, and political warfare*, ed. J. Michael Waller (Washington, DC: Institute of World Politics Press, 2005), 194.

¹² Garfield, “Recovering the Lost Art,” 194.

journalists who act as state propagandists and organizers of socialist construction. Journalists who become state propagandist is brought by a “close alliance of the media with local government and economic groups striving for political power”¹³, a kind of journalism that becomes subservient to the state rather than to the people.

The counterpropaganda side of journalism is seen in what had emerged in America in the 90s dubbed as watchdog journalism. watchdog journalism is “by no means just occasional selective, hard-hitting investigative reporting.”¹⁴ The one engaged in watchdog journalism becomes a representative of the public, where one is “asking penetrating questions at every level, from the town council to the state house to the White House, in corporate offices, in union halls and in professional offices and all points in between.”¹⁵

Researches in the Philippines point to an era wherein the press had been involved in counterpropaganda against foreign colonizers controlling mainstream press most notably during the Japanese occupation. One article highlighted the vital service of Filipino journalists who went underground and worked in guerilla newspapers versus the choice of working for the Japanese propaganda mechanism, or idly waiting apathetically until the war was over.¹⁶ In deciding to go underground, the journalists ran guerrilla counterpropaganda against the Japanese propaganda; the latter focused on newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, posters, radio, movies, and theater plays to propagate positive things about Japan and project negative image of America and the Americans¹⁷; the former was to bolster the “spirit of the population and the guerrillas by countering the news and information disseminated by the Japanese” without directly harassing Japanese forces.¹⁸

For the purpose of this research, counterpropaganda will be defined as the act of providing objective information in order to refute regimes of truth

¹³ Svetlana Pasti, “Two Generations of Contemporary Russian Journalists,” *European Journal of Communication* 20, no.1 (2005): 89-115, 99, doi:10.1177/0267323105049634.

¹⁴ Murrey Marder, “This is Watchdog Journalism,” *Nieman Reports* 53-54 (2000): 78-79, 78, url:<https://niemanreports.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/99winter-00spring-opt.pdf>.

¹⁵ Marder, “This is Watchdog Journalism,” 78.

¹⁶ John A. Lent, “Guerrilla Press of the Philippines, 1914-45,” *Asian Studies: Journal of Critical Perspectives on Asia* 41, no. 2 (2005): 260-274, 261, url:<https://www.asj.upd.edu.ph/mediabox/archive/ASJ-08-02-1970/lent-guerrilla-press-philippines-1941.pdf>.

¹⁷ Florinda d.F. Mateo, “The Philippine Guerilla Movement and Counterpropaganda During World War II,” *Plaridel: A Philippine Journal of Communication, Media, and Society* 3, no. 2 (August 2006):75-122, 78-86, url: <https://www.plarideljournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/2006-02-Mateo.pdf>

¹⁸ Mateo, “The Philippine Guerilla Movement,” 89.

being spread by the government or a particular ruling power. Counterpropaganda, in this sense, is akin to the Foucauldian conception of *parrhesia* (truth-telling) wherein a *parrhesiastes* (truth-teller) must be (1) frank in what they (2) speak, (3) truthful, (4) placed in danger because of the truth they hold and speak, (5) a criticizing risk against himself or the target interlocutor, and (6) has a sense of duty to speak truth to power.¹⁹

Through Foucault's concept of *parrhesia*, Philippine journalism can be seen to possess a counterpropagandist stance against the mis- and disinformation machinery of the Duterte administration's regime of truth. Adhering to journalistic standards and the worldwide call for fact-checking and verification, Philippine journalism,

attempts to provide a critical take on the rampant disinformation wars in social media by practicing *parrhesia*. Despite the threat of danger in speaking the truth to power, the press continues to do so as it is their moral obligation. In telling the truth, they provide a critique against the ruling regime of the truth of Duterte and, in turn, try to awaken the masses who have been blindly following and enduring an oppressive regime.²⁰

That being said, the journalists, as counterpropagandists in the modern era focus more on the ability to counter the spreading of mis- and disinformation in the post-truth era.

But how do Filipino journalists perceive themselves in this era of mis- and disinformation? It had been discovered that Filipino journalists identify three roles that they perform in the current era: (1) the disseminator, (2) the watchdog, and (3) an interpretive role.²¹ Among the three roles they play, being counterpropagandists is seen in the disseminator and watchdog roles they play.

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, ed. Joseph Pearson (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2001), 11-24.

²⁰ Anjon Fredrick C. Mamunta, "Truth-Telling in Dangerous Times: The Practice of *Parrhesia* in Philippine Journalism," *TALISIK: An Undergraduate Journal of Philosophy* 8, no. 1 (2021): 16-31, 28, [url:https://www.academia.edu/68362650/Truth_Telling_in_Dangerous_Times_The_Practice_of_Parrhesia_in_Philippine_Journalism](https://www.academia.edu/68362650/Truth_Telling_in_Dangerous_Times_The_Practice_of_Parrhesia_in_Philippine_Journalism).

²¹ The disseminator role is mostly concerned in getting the information out there as swiftly as possible while the adversarial role is characterized by constant skepticism against people or institutions of power. While the watchdog role more specially relates to journalists' normative role to hold the political elites accountable. Lastly, the interpretive journalistic role ascribes a central role to journalists' own frames of reference in covering the news. Hon Sophia S. Balod and Michael Hameleers, "Fighting for truth? The role perceptions of Filipino journalists in an era of mis- and disinformation," *Journalism* 22, no. 9 (2021): 2368-2385, 2371, doi:10.1177/1464884919865109.

In Philippine history, the earliest conception of counterpropaganda goes back to the *Ilustrados* of the Spanish colonial era. The *Ilustrados*, who worked hard to spread information about the abuses of the Spanish to the Filipino people, can be considered as the first mainstream counterpropagandists of the country because they have fought tirelessly to counter the mis- and disinformation spread by the Spanish authorities in the Philippines isles to keep it under their subjugation.

The Filipino Propaganda Movement is best known as the *propagandista* or the *Ilustrados*. Teodoro writes that the main concern of the *Ilustrados* was “[to work] hard to correct racist images drawn by Spanish writers about the Philippines and the Filipinos. Together with progressive Spaniards, they presented their demands for assimilation, good governance, and representation in the Cortés.”²²

Constantino explains that the movement for reform was formed by three groups, first, the suspected *filibustero*, (*Espanoles-Filipinos* and *Spanish mestizo* who were exiled), second, the young men who were sent to Spain for studies, and third, the refugees who left the islands to escape persecution.²³

These propagandists undertook their reform movement to counter mis- and disinformation spread by the Spanish through the use of literary works, satires, and even newspaper publications. Similarly, these propagandists share a certain similarity to our era’s so-called ‘biased’ journalists.

The so-called ‘biased’ journalists are in truth, all media personnel who “speak against” the government. This labeling of being biased is actually a bit problematic, as the term biased applies not only to journalists, but to everyone who has the ability to formulate and state opinions. Everybody has his or her own biases; as such, it is only up to him or her as to the manner of presentation of facts, as well as the receiver’s bias upon reception and reaction toward the facts presented.

The history of ‘biased’ journalism can be traced back to the campaign period of the 2016 national elections, specifically for the presidency, during which supporters of respective candidates would harshly react regarding sensationalized news about their candidates, either positive or negative, and

²² Noel V. Teodoro, “Rizal and the *Ilustrados* in Spain,” *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 8, no. 1-2 (1999): 65-82, 65, doi:10.1177/011719689900800104.

²³ Renato Constantino, *The Philippines: A Past Revisited*. Vol. 1, (Quezon City: Tala Pub. Services, 1975), Retrieved from <https://siagrey.files.wordpress.com/2014/09/the-philippines-a-past-revisited-renato-constantino.pdf>, 148.

making them think that the media outlets and networks have a certain bias for such a candidate.

It cannot be denied that journalists have indeed shown bias at one point or another. One author writes that:

Journalists – admittedly –are not perfect. Neither is media as an infallible institution. But what is important is that journalists remain focused in their objectives and confident in their methods [...] journalists are biased, as all human beings are –but their stories should not be. No, bias is not the most important characteristic of journalism. Accuracy, fairness, and yes, truth are — and readers must understand this.²⁴

But where is this idea of important journalism characteristic coming from? To contextualize it in the Philippines, one particular work used in journalism is Kovach & Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism* (2021). In this work, there are ten elements of journalism which journalists should follow to uphold the highest standards of journalism:

1. Journalism's first obligation is to the truth.
2. Its first loyalty is to citizens.
3. Its essence is a discipline of verification.
4. Its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover.
5. It must serve as a monitor of power.
6. It must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise.
7. It must strive to make the significant interesting and relevant.
8. It must present the news in a way that is comprehensive and proportional.
9. Its practitioners have an obligation to exercise their personal conscience.
10. Citizens have rights and responsibilities when it comes to the news as well—even more so as they become producers and editors themselves.²⁵

These elements are most familiar to young budding journalists which highlight importance on truth, to whom journalists' loyalty must side with, and particular ethical values in reporting, which do not only involve what journalists must do, but also cite the need for citizens having rights and responsibilities in distributing news and information as well.

²⁴ Ryan Macasero, "Is the Media 'Biased?' Journalism in the Time of Duterte," *CDN*, January 7, 2017,

<https://cebudailynews.inquirer.net/118273/media-biased-journalism-time-duterte>.

²⁵ Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism, Revised and Updated 4th Edition: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect*, (New York: Crown, 2021).

In the Philippines, local journalists adhere to a Code of Ethics, promulgated by the Philippine Press Institute, the National Union of Journalists in the Philippines, and the National Press Club in 1988. The code includes guidelines on fact-checking and verification, the need for balanced reporting, maintaining confidentiality, using proper identification, maintaining professional integrity, disclosing sources, and many other topics that touch on the close connection between journalism and the truth.²⁶

Counterpropaganda during the Spanish Colonial Era: Truth-telling for Colonial Reforms

Most history books would tell us that the *Ilustrados* were part of the Propaganda Movement which helped agitate the Filipino people into revolting against the Spanish rule. This is factual. But one author writes that instead of calling it the Propaganda movement, it should have been called the 'Counterpropaganda Movement' as "their essential task was to counteract the campaign of [mis- and disinformation] that certain Spanish groups were disseminating in Spain, and later in Rome," he also adds that "[it] was essentially a campaign of information, as well as a bid for sympathy."²⁷

Schumacher, in his landmark work, *The Propaganda Movement: 1880-1895: The Creation of a Filipino Consciousness, The Making of the Revolution* (1997) reveals out the Philippine background that prompted the birth of the Propaganda Movement including upheavals in nineteenth-century Spain, which subsequently had repercussions in the Philippines, the Filipino Clergy and the Cavite Mutiny, together with the infamous GomBurZa execution, the administrative organization of colonial Philippines, and the religious, education, and economic situation of the Philippines.²⁸

After the execution of GomBurZa in 1872, an influx of Filipino students going overseas and enrolling in universities of the Peninsula grew. *Creoles*, *mestizos* (both of Spanish or Chinese descent), and *indio* children of well-off families, were the ones sent to Spain to study.

²⁶ Philippine Press Institute, "Journalist's Code of Ethics", *Philippine Press Institute*. June 6, 2017. <https://philpressinstitute.net/journalist-code-of-ethics/>.

²⁷ Miguel A. Bernand, Review of *The Propaganda Movement, 1880-1895: The Creation of a Filipino Consciousness, the Making of the Revolution*, by John N. Schumacher, *Philippine Studies* 22, no. 1-2 (1974):210, url:<https://philippinestudies.net/ojs/index.php/ps/article/view/1854/4921>.

²⁸ See more on the in-depth discussion of each element in Schumacher, John N. SJ, *The Propaganda Movement: 1880-1895: The Creation of a Filipino Consciousness, The Making of the Revolution* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2009).

The birth of the Propaganda movement can be traced with Rizal's letter to Mariano Ponce and the editorial staff of *La Solidaridad* regarding the events of 1872, particularly the execution of the three priests, Mariano Gomez, Jose Burgos and Jacinto Zamora. The letter written goes:

If it were not for the events of 1872 there would not have been a Plaridel, or a Jaena, or a Sancianco or the great and noble Filipino society in Europe would have not been formed. If not for the events of 1872, Rizal would have been a Jesuit and instead of writing the *Noli Me Tangere*, he would have written the opposite of it. The reign of injustice and wickedness opened my mind and I vowed to myself to someday avenge for the victims and the aggrieved.²⁹

The *La Solidaridad* became the peninsula's most regarded Philippine newspaper, voicing reformist demands and attempting to expose to the eyes of Spaniards to what was happening to the colony in the Philippines. Its foundation is traced on February 15, 1889, in Barcelona with Galiciano Apacible, Jose Ma. Panganiban, Mariano Ponce, Pablo Rianzares Bautista, and Santiago Icasiano, as its founders,³⁰ its pool of writers included Jose Rizal, Mariano Ponce, Marcelo H. del Pilar, Antonio Luna, and Jose Maria Panganiban, who were “among the best of the intellectuals in the Filipino community in Spain.³¹ The identity of the *La Solidaridad* was seen to possess similarities with those of its Spanish counterparts. The tendency of the newspaper publishers to be subjective in their writings earned them the title of being “*periodicos personalistas*” for they serve as “a media to convey and herald the opinions, views, sentiments, and positions of individuals and different sectors – politicians, businesspeople, Church, and labor groups.”³² These opinion pieces targeted mis- and disinformation that were being spread during the Spanish. Constantino enumerates the earliest propaganda that the Filipino had done was through Graciano Lopez Jaena's satirical tale *Fray Botod* which revealed the abuses and immoralities of the friars. Despite being circulated in a manuscript form, it had reached the Spanish friars which led Jaena to leave the Philippines.³³

While in Spain, the *Ilustrados* called for reforms in the manner of Spanish rule in the country. At this time when the *Ilustrados* were calling for reforms and not for secession, de Viana explains that the Propaganda movement first

²⁹ Teodoro, “Rizal and the *Ilustrados* in Spain,” 65-66.

³⁰ Jose Victor Z. Torres, ““Our Little Newspaper”: The *La Solidaridad* and Philippine Journalism in Spain (1889-1895),” *Luz y Saber* 11, no. 2, (June-December 2017):44-51, 46, url:https://ejournals.ph/article.php?id=12109.

³¹ Torres, ““Our Little Newspaper”, 47.

³² Cornelio Bascara, *Stories from the Margin: The Other Narrative of the Philippine-Spanish Revolution*. (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2002), quoted in Torres, ““Our Little Newspaper”, 47.

³³ Constantino, *The Philippines: A Past Revisited*. 148-149.

focused on calling for reforms in the Spain for the Philippines, but these reformists were “all loyal Spanish subjects and they called Spain as the mother country,”³⁴ and that their call to the Spanish government included recognition of the Philippines as a province of Spain, equal status for both Filipinos and Spaniards, Philippine representation in the Spanish Cortes, secularization of Philippine parishes, and recognition of human rights.

Isabelo de los Reyes, who became a contributor of *La Solidaridad* from 1889 to 1893, wrote six articles that contain sentiments on the relationship between the Iberian Peninsula and the Philippine Archipelago. His articles included *Disputados a Cortes por Filipinas* (Delegates to the Cortes for the Philippines) (1889), *La Unidad de Fueros* (The Equality of Rights) (1890), *El Registro Civil* (Civil Registration) (1890), *El Matrimonio Canónico y el Civil* (Church and Civil Marriages) (1890), *El Código Penal y la Censura* (Penal Code and Censorship) (1892), and *Representación en Cortes: La Verdad Histórica* (Cortes Representation: A Historical Truth) (1893).³⁵ According to Liwanag and Chua, six discourses were seen scattered in these six articles including (1) the strict censorship of the press, (2) the metaphor of the Philippines as a legitimate child of Spain, (3) advocating for representative of the Philippines in the Spanish Cortes, (4) criticisms against social systems, (5) the power of the Spanish and the Catholic Church, and (6) responses to other journalists.³⁶ These discourses written by de los Reyes were provocative instead of methodological, hesitant instead of direct, tentative instead of definitive, probably due to censorship, political persecution, and the satisfaction of achieving quick results³⁷ but clearly, de los Reyes is not promoting independence, but the Hispanization process in accordance with his published essays in *La Solidaridad*.³⁸

In relation to Don Belong's writing, it is concurred with De Viana's writing that these propagandists also advocated the conversion of the Philippines from a colony to a province, the expulsion of the Spanish friars, as well as the right to free speech and education. They made these calls

³⁴ Augusto V. de Viana, “The Saga of the Philippine Reform Movement from Provincia to Independencia,” *National Historical Commission of the Philippines*, September 6, 2021, <https://nhcp.gov.ph/the-saga-of-the-philippine-reform-movement-from-provincia-to-independencia/>

³⁵ Leslie Anne L. Liwanag and Michael Charleston B. Chua, ““Ang Pilipinas Bilang Lupain ng Kabalintunaan:” Si Isabelo De Los Reyes Bilang Tagapag-Ambag sa Pahayagang *La Solidaridad* (1889-1895)”, *Plaridel: A Philippine Journal of Communication, Media, and Society* 16, no. 1 (June 2018):75-122, 73-102, 81 url:<https://www.plarideljournal.org/article/ang-pilipinas-bilang-lupain-ng-kabalintunaan-si-isabelo-de-los-reyes-bilang-tagapag-ambag-sa-pahayagang-la-solidaridad-1889-1895/>.

³⁶ For an in-depth discussion of said discourses, see pages 84-95 of the article of Liwanag and Chua.

³⁷ Liwanag and Chua, ““Ang Pilipinas Bilang Lupain””, 96.

³⁸ Liwanag and Chua, ““Ang Pilipinas Bilang Lupain””, 95.

through the use of publications, like the *La Solidaridad*, allegorical novels, most notably Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, which "aimed to awaken the Spanish authorities on the conditions of the Philippines," and through letters "to remind the Filipinos of the greatness of their race buried by centuries of colonization and the shameful habit of the Filipinos to discard their own culture."³⁹

José María Panganiban, a former medicine student of the University of Santo Tomas, who later continued his studies in Spain, was another figure in the propaganda movement often left to the side. He was a regular contributor in *La Solidaridad* with his first work *Pensamientos*, under the *Artes y Letras* section of the March 15 1889 issue. Writing under the name Jomapa, the article focused on "the importance of a free press," and advocating "the abolition of censorship in the Philippines", and while this was well-received, his greatest contribution in *La Solidaridad* was his column *La Universidad de Manila*, an elaborate and incisive critique of the state of higher education at Santo Tomás.⁴⁰ In Panganiban's column, it revolved around five salient criticism against the university which included:

- a) the religious orthodoxy of the Dominicans and the consequent lack of academic freedom,
- b) the system of filling professorial chairs done without examinations,
- c) the faculty and how they were teaching too many courses,
- d) the Thomistic pedagogical paradigm, and
- e) the lack of facilities for clinical practice.⁴¹

While these are obviously reflective of the state of the university's higher education in the late nineteenth century, contextualizing this in the Propaganda Movement reveals a campaign for reforms in Philippine higher education where both Filipinos Propagandists (through their writings in *La Solidaridad* and their correspondence) and Spanish liberals (Bercerra and Morayta) campaigned for the secularization of the University of Santo Tomás.⁴²

But the real arena of the counterpropaganda of the *Ilustrados*, was not in the Philippines, but in Spain. Teodoro enumerates that the Filipino community in Spain were mostly "from the Tagalog region and Manila, which was the center of the colonial power," that is why it is notable that the

³⁹ de Viana, "The Saga of the Philippine Reform."

⁴⁰ Javier Leonardo V. Rugeria, "José María Panganiban's "La Universidad de Manila" and the Liberal Campaign for Reforms in Philippine Higher Education", *Philippine Studies* 69, no. 2 (June 2021):221-257, 228, doi:10.1353/phs.2021.0014.

⁴¹ For an in-depth discussion of said aspects, see pages 229-238 of Rugeria's article.

⁴² Rugeria, "José María Panganiban's," 249.

Mindanao Island revolts are usually not simultaneous with revolts in Luzon and Visayas.⁴³

But despite their efforts, the Filipino propagandists failed to achieve their desired reforms, brought by certain personal interests of some members of the Filipino *Ilustrados*. Teodoro explained that after a series of events, Rizal was dismayed with Filipino students who focused more on fashion and gambling rather than on education. This prompted him to leave Madrid since:

[He] did not want to waste his time in a project that had no relevance to cure the cancer which was destroying Filipino society [...] Rizal said the remedy or medicine must be brought to the patient. The remedy was not in Madrid, which was what *La Solidaridad* asserted, but in our own country, the real arena of battle.⁴⁴

Upon arriving in the Philippines, Rizal founded *La Liga Filipina*, which shared similar ideals to the ideals set by the *Ilustrados* in Spain but was short-lived since *La Liga* was labeled as a subversive organization. This was the precedents for his condemnation and later execution.

What is interesting in this point of history is the identity of these counterpropagandists as journalists. There is an intertwining of the counterpropaganda movement with journalists whose aim were “to raise the level of consciousness with respect to oppressive conditions prevailing in the country then,”⁴⁵ this is despite of the tendency of tracing back the origins of these movements as elitist. The shift from being identified as elitist towards a more mass-oriented is traced during the rise of translation of works into the vernacular which was taken:

so that they could become potent tools in awakening mass consciousness, [...] the use of the power of the pen by the early heroes to expose colonial exploitation and seek independence is perhaps the most important non-violent strategy for social and political reforms.⁴⁶

⁴³ Teodoro, “Rizal and the *Ilustrados* in Spain,” 70.

⁴⁴ Teodoro, “Rizal and the *Ilustrados* in Spain,” 76.

⁴⁵ Florangel Rosario-Braid and Ramon R. Tuazon, “Communication Media in the Philippines: 1521-1986,” *Philippine Studies* 47, no. 3 (1999):291-318, 294, url:<https://philippinestudies.net/ojs/index.php/ps/article/view/1854/4921>.

⁴⁶ Rosario-Braid and Tuazon, “Communication Media in the Philippines,” 295-296.

The Filipino *Ilustrados* way of fighting against the propaganda by the Spaniards was a counterpropaganda of opinions and idealism against the prevailing corruption and abuses being perpetrated in the Philippine colonial society. The beginning of the counterpropaganda was collegial, attempting to reform the human rights abuses being done, among which the legitimacy of the conquest, tributes, slavery and forced labor were the leading abuses being done by the marriage of the power of the church and state.⁴⁷ The primary purpose of their counterpropaganda was not secession, but in fact a fairer treatment from “Mother Spain” to the Philippines as a legitimate colony. While the prevailing journalistic standards of this era focused more on a subjective lens in doing journalistic pieces, it can still be considered as truth-telling against powerful individuals challenging their prevailing regime of truth. Despite the apparent risk the truth-telling they do, the *Ilustrados* see it as a moral obligation to speak truth, not for themselves but for their country. The counterpropagandist tradition of the *Ilustrados* continues in the present era, but takes a more complex and dangerous arena especially for the present-day journalists and truth-tellers.

Counterpropaganda during the Post-Truth Era: Truth-telling Against Mis- and Disinformation

The present is a world of post-truth. It is a time where what you thought were true, were actually not, and time where even people, whose trade is to propagate verified and accurate news, are labeled as biased and fake.

Presently, Philippine journalists (together with their respective media outlets) are currently under attack. This is brought about by their reporting of news that is “destabilizing” the country, or their so-called “biased” news. It would be useful to delve into the history of these attacks and analyze them.

But before anything else, at present, Philippine journalism and media can be categorized into two, the mainstream media and the alternative media. The mainstream media is a journalistic collective that offers news and information to a big audience. Conversely, what doesn’t get covered by the mainstream media falls under alternative media where:

Alternative media are sources that differ from established or dominant types of media (such as mainstream media or mass media) in terms of their content, production, or distribution. Alternative media and advocacy journalism are not neutral;

⁴⁷ Even before the eruption of the Propaganda Movement, the recorded abuses began even as early in the 16th century. See James Loreto Piscos, “Human Rights and Justice Issues in the 16th Century Philippines”, *SCIENTIA: The International Journal on the Liberal Arts* 6, no. 2 (December 2017):11-43, 16-36, doi:10.57106/scientia.v6i2.77.

they are purposely selective, presenting views different from those held by people in power and with means.

Alternative media also reject those news conventions that prioritize coverage on the basis of prominence and wide interest. Moving away from these standards, these media present the lesser known, ignored and perhaps even excluded sectors from discussion by the established communities and institutions of society.⁴⁸

It is actually interesting to note, that the tradition which continues the legacy of the *La Solidaridad* is actually those who are in the alternative media, rather than those who are in mainstream media, where “Philippine history shows us passages when the “alternative media” presented the populace with such alternative news and commentary, slowly forming a critical mass which caused change.”⁴⁹

Amidst distinction between the two, both mainstream and alternative media faced attacks which led to a decline in trust towards such media and shifting to influencers who support the government, but are actually propagandists masquerading as digital influencers or key opinion leaders.

The campaign and subsequent election of Rodrigo Duterte as the 16th President of the Philippines became the grounds for the impoverishment of the ivory tower of Philippine media. In his electoral campaign, he had framed himself as a nationalist with a “will-get-the-job-done” attitude. Brought by this, he would oftentimes get much media exposure by his nonconformist attitude as a politician, numerous media outlets would cover his stunts. From cursing the Pope⁵⁰, to catcalling women⁵¹, to even vilifying the media⁵², Duterte has had a number of moments where the media had covered the most.

⁴⁸ CMFR Staff, “Understanding alternative media and their purpose”, *Center for Media Freedom & Responsibility*, July 7, 2022, <https://cmfr-phil.org/in-context/understanding-alternative-media-and-their-purpose/>.

⁴⁹ CMFR Staff, “Understanding alternative media”.

⁵⁰ Pia Ranada, “Duterte Curses Pope Francis over Traffic during His Visit,” *Rappler*, November 30, 2015, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/politics/elections/2016/114481-rodrigo-duterte-curses-pope-francis>.

⁵¹ Paterno Esmaque II, "Catcalling: Duterte Broke the Law in Own City." *Rappler*. June 2, 2016. <https://www.rappler.com/nation/135111-duterte-catcalling-mariz-umali-ordinance-davao>.

⁵² Yuji Vincent Gonzales, "Threatening Journalists Criminal–NUJP." *Inquirer News*. October 4, 2016. <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/821510/threatening-journalists-criminal-nujp>.

In a study, one author cites that the Philippine media today is battling with the emergence of this anti-media movement and that the rise of this movement is brought by the easy access to the internet, tools in the internet used to spread propaganda, and the freedom to access these tools.⁵³ He further expounds that “[the anti-media movement] are part of a grass roots movement composed of ordinary, interconnected people, acting to set the agenda powerful, traditional, mainstream media would otherwise not present.”⁵⁴

The veracity of the ‘biased’ media can be measured in the attacks being done against the media under the Duterte administration. Even during his campaign, Duterte has received extensive social media promotion, to the extent that rival social media news outlets have emerged. The way Duterte's followers use Facebook, the most popular social networking site, as well as "trolls" or false accounts that were bought, as well as "influencers" on social media—basically, users or accounts that had a large following—led to the creation of these alternative "media outlets." In turn, both the trolls and influencers

“seed” messages taken from blogs and pages, and which are then amplified by other trolls and spread through members of bigger groups. The messages are beneficial to various political camps and interests, creating a false notion of what is true and what is real.⁵⁵

Most of the time, these messages were portrayed as fake news and either exaggeratedly praised Duterte and his administration or blew up a problem against the opposition who criticized the government's actions. The Philippine press, who continually sought to preserve their responsibility to the truth, was placed at the epicenter of these mis- and disinformation warfare. This was accomplished by offering an objective truth in opposition to the administration's currently enforced regime of truth.⁵⁶

On the other hand, the alternative media as can be seen by the news outlets *Bulatlat* (www.bulatlat.com), *Manila Today* (www.manilatoday.net), *Kodao Productions* (www.kodao.org), and *Pinoy Weekly* (www.pinokweekly.org) exist, and attempt to cover news and stories that mainstream media do not

⁵³ Jermaine V. Beltran, “The Emergence of the Philippine “Anti-Media”: the Duterte Factor,” *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi* 14, no. 1 (2017):61-74, 72, doi:10.24002/jik.v14i1.833.

⁵⁴ Beltran, “The Emergence of the Philippine “Anti-Media,” 73.

⁵⁵ Chay Hofileña, “Fake Accounts, Manufactured Reality on Social Media,” *Rappler*, October 9, 2016, <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/investigative/fake-accounts-manufactured-reality-social-media>.

⁵⁶ Francis Wakefield, “No press freedom curtailment –Roque.” *Daily Tribune*, May 8, 2020, <https://tribune.net.ph/index.php/2020/05/08/no-press-freedom-curtailment-roque>.

cover widely, and can even appeal to the Filipino masses. These news organizations emphasized people-oriented reporting. Despite being considered left-leaning institutions, these provided us with a different viewpoint on issues than the mainstream media. Those in the alternative media who practice critical journalism strive to be neutral and fair in their reports.

Two mainstream media outlets which suffered against standing up to Duterte are Rappler and ABS-CBN News network. The major attack⁵⁷ that Rappler experienced was when the Securities and Exchange Commission charging the media outlet with breaking the Constitution's prohibition on foreign ownership of local media, as well as the anti-dummy law, the Corporate Code, and the Securities Regulation Code.⁵⁸ This came after Rappler was deemed as critical in their investigation of the extrajudicial killing campaign against people suspected of dealing or using drugs⁵⁹, the documentation of the spread of government disinformation on Facebook⁶⁰ and the reports on malfeasance among his top advisers.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Another attack was on Maria Ressa, Rappler's CEO and Reynaldo Santos Jr., a former researcher, which was a cyber-libel case filed against them implicating a businessman in illegal drug smuggling and human trafficking. See Barnaby Lo, "Maria Ressa and Reynaldo Santos' convictions of cyber libel upheld by Court of Appeals," *CBS News*, July 8, 2022, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/maria-ressa-rey-santos-convictions-of-cyber-libel-upheld/>.

⁵⁸ Doris Dumlao-Abadilla, "SEC Orders Closure of Rappler Site," *Inquirer.net*, January 16, 2018, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/960631/sec-orders-closure-of-rappler-site>.

⁵⁹ See data from Rappler.com, "IN NUMBERS: The Philippines' 'war on drugs'," *Rappler*, September 13, 2016, <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/iq/145814-numbers-statistics-philippines-war-drugs/> and Rappler Research Team, "TIMELINE: The PNP's use of the term 'deaths under investigation'," *Rappler*, March 30, 2017, <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/iq/165534-timeline-philippines-pnp-deaths-under-investigation/>.

⁶⁰ With the rise of mis- and disinformation, Rappler launched a Fact Check section in their articles where they "correct at the first instance inaccuracies spotted in our own reports and false claims made by public officials, key public personalities, and other accounts on social media." See Rappler.com, "FACT CHECK", *Rappler*, <https://www.rappler.com/section/newsbreak/fact-check/>. The major fruit of their fact-checking initiative was the shutdown of a spam network, both pages and accounts, that contribute to the degrading social media environment. See Alex Evangelista, "LIST: False news shared by PH-based pages taken down by Facebook," *Rappler*, October 23, 2018, <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/fact-check/214986-false-news-shared-philippine-based-pages-taken-down-facebook-october-2018/>.

⁶¹ The first time Duterte publicly attacked Rappler was when the news organization wrote on Bong Go, the president's closest aide, and his intervention in steering the Department of National Defense's \$289 million dollars for a defense system to a favored Korean manufacturer. See Carmela Fonbuena, "Bong Go intervenes in P15.5-B project to acquire PH warships," *Rappler*, <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/investigative/193733-duterte-philippine-navy-warships-controversy/>.

The case of the renewal of the franchise of ABS-CBN has been denied by congress brought by disputes around the terms and conditions of the franchise renewal agreement and the National Telecommunications Commission issuing a cease-and-desist order to immediately cease the network's broadcasting.⁶² Surprisingly, the reason for this was related to the 2016 electoral campaign period on two grounds: (1) an alleged political agenda in airing an anti-Duterte campaign material paid for by then-Senator Antonio Trillanes III, and (2) the network swindling him by not airing his campaign ads and failing to return the money.⁶³ Moreover, he has been offended with news reports on his "alleged secret bank accounts with P211 million and speculations about his health."⁶⁴

For the side of the alternative media, in their pro-people reporting, they have not only been red-tagged as fronts of communist insurgents but have also been attacked with cyber libel cases and cyber-attacks. The prominent cyber-attacks included blocking access to such media outfits, and a cyber-attack on Bulatlat in 2021 had been linked to the Department of Science and Technology and the Philippine military. Those who are in the alternative media concluded that "[it] would seem that the government finds danger not just in the alternative media, but in any news content that is critical of the government."⁶⁵

While the critical nature of those in alternative press is apparent, those in the mainstream media focus more on giving out reports that are only subtly critical of the government, and these are done through the disseminator role the Filipino journalists perceive themselves to practice.⁶⁶ But those in the media industry have their work cut out for them, as not only do they face attacks from the government but also from the people they are supposed to be serving. The objective truth in the post-truth era is a bitter pill to swallow for those who live in lies and allow their imaginations, and emotions take control of them, rather than a rational and even empirical approach to information. More and more, the Philippine media, both those in mainstream and in alternative, must be able to continue speaking the truth to power.

⁶² Ralf Rivas, "NTC shuts down ABS-CBN's Sky Direct, TV Plus channels," *Rappler*, July 1, 2020, <https://r3.rappler.com/nation/265299-ntc-orders-sky-cable-stop-operating-satellite-tv-service>.

⁶³ Apparently, the president got hurt and offended in the campaign ad paid by Trillanes as it looks like black propaganda against him. Nevertheless, ABS-CBN defends it by invoking press freedom and journalistic objectivity. See Melissa Luz Lopez and Glee Jalea, "TIMELINE: ABS-CBN franchise," *CNN Philippines*, February 13, 2020, <https://www.cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/2/13/ABS-CBN-franchise-timeline.html?fbclid>.

⁶⁴ Michelle Abad, "TIMELINE: Duterte against ABS-CBN's franchise renewal," *Rappler*, January 17, 2020, "<https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/iq/249550-timeline-duterte-against-abs-cbn-franchise-renewal/>."

⁶⁵ CMFR Staff, "Understanding alternative media and their purpose".

⁶⁶ Balod and Hameleers, "Fighting for truth?" 2371.

Speaking truth to power reveals the Philippine media's *parrhesiastic* identity especially against fascistic regime. During the time of Duterte, it was a challenge to attack the prevailing regime of truth imposed by Duterte where:

the rationality of fascism which makes one crave power, is seen in how Filipinos continue to support Duterte; thus, they still fall victim to the lies and deceit imposed by the regime of truth Duterte and his machinery of disinformation and fake news continue to peddle.⁶⁷

This kind of prevailing narrative legitimizes the impunity and injustice being done by the Duterte administration which in turn delegitimizes the Philippine press brought by the idea of attacking Duterte's actions as an attack against the regime of truth imposed. It is brought by the Philippine press' watchdog journalism stance that they must

uphold the journalistic obligation to objective truth-telling against Duterte and his machinery of disinformation and lies found in the many faux news outlets in social media. Despite numerous attacks and the threat of being endangered, the Philippine press continues to fight for the truth as espoused by their moral obligation to truth-telling.⁶⁸

What must be done by the present-day journalists who experience the problem of being discredited and the continuing wars against mis- and disinformation? In a discussion, one author sees the current era as a "transition in history where journalism is challenged by changing news consumption patterns, technology, and criticisms that threaten its authority."⁶⁹ Amidst such change transition is the twofold need of "strengthen their roles to distinguish themselves from disseminators of mis- and disinformation" and "defend themselves against accusations of spreading mis- and disinformation,"⁷⁰ especially in a media environment that deems critical truths against the government as destabilization attempts. It is more apparent that the today's media and press have to be more of counterpropagandists against mis- and disinformation. It is already obvious that the government is able to create propaganda that will justify the occurring abuses. But journalists must find ways to reclaim the trust from the masses who are blinded by the countless propaganda spread online. It is

⁶⁷ Mamunta, "Truth-Telling in Dangerous Times," 26.

⁶⁸ Mamunta, "Truth-Telling in Dangerous Times," 27.

⁶⁹ Balod and Hameleers, "Fighting for truth?" 2379.

⁷⁰ Balod and Hameleers, "Fighting for truth?" 2379.

one point to become counterpropagandists, but it is another to become effective ones.

Convergences and Divergences of the Filipino *Ilustrados* and the ‘Biased’ Journalists

Philippine media practitioners are to rediscover the long tradition of Philippine journalism as becoming mouthpieces that could trigger the downfall of power began as early the Spanish colonial period, with *La Solidaridad* as an influence for revolutionary sentiments against Spain. The next prominent period where crackdowns occurred against journalists who do their duty was the Martial Law where the rise of the mosquito press against Ferdinand Marcos’ machinery of censorship and crackdown led to the autocrat’s downfall.⁷¹

In this sense, one may consider the Philippine media as counterpropagandists to the disinformation and mis- and disinformation spread by government propaganda, to keep the status quo. With efforts from the Philippine media, followers of the administration are seeing a clearer picture of what is really happening in society.

The *Ilustrados*, through their education, have knowledge of what is right and what is proper. Seeing the injustice done to their fellowmen, they decided to push for reforms for the people by countering the propaganda spread mostly by the friars and even corrupt Spanish authorities in the Philippines to Spain about the Filipino people being native and uncivilized. Since there was little to no response from the government, they then spread propaganda to the Filipino people to agitate them from their passivity in the abuses done by the Spaniards, even at the cost of their lives.

The ‘biased’ media, on the other hand use their knowledge of what is really going on in the society and report it to the general public. This is also one of the characteristics of journalism, to quench man’s never-ending thirst for information. But the media not only do this, but they also adhere to the journalistic elements of truth, verification, and accuracy. Through their research, they fact-check the propaganda spread by the Duterte administration to keep the people believing in the government, despite the obvious violations of basic human rights, and counter them, despite of the backlash they encounter, the counterpropaganda they do is guided by the journalistic elements of verification and accuracy and the epistemic principles of understanding and certainty.

⁷¹ A. Lin Neumann, “The Philippines: Amid troubles, a rich press tradition”, *Committee to Protect Journalists*. August 15, 2005, <https://cpj.org/reports/2005/08/neumann-sidebar/>.

Since some of the *Ilustrados* were journalists and writers, Dr. Jose P. Rizal, Marcelo H. Del Pilar, Antonio Luna and Jose Ma. Panganiban, to name a few, followed a particular ethical code in doing whatever report and news article. In the same manner, the Philippine media is greatly challenged to continue upholding these journalistic standards with the rampancy of political propaganda, mis- and disinformation, especially during the previous, and even current, administration which is indifferent, if not apathetic towards the media.

Another key element which connects the *Ilustrados* and the 'biased' media is the reason for their persecution. The *Ilustrados* were persecuted because of their production of "subversive" materials against the Spanish, while the 'biased' media, through their "destabilizing" news articles against the Duterte administration.

The propagandists' "subversive" materials were nothing more than propaganda to let the Filipino people realize the oppression being done by the corrupt Spanish authorities and friars, and in turn rise against the government.

In the same way, the media's produce is nothing more than inconvenient truths that the administration's supporters do not accept as they are more comforted by the glory and promises of the administration, rather than on what is really happening in our society.

Yet, it is also seen that the amplification of attacks against each counterpropagandist differ as attacks against journalists in today's era vary more in scope and magnitude in contrast to the persecution the *Ilustrados* experienced. For starters, censorship may be present among two eras, but the censorship in the present-era can not only end in self-censorship or losing a job; it can go beyond attacks on journalists' life to truly silence them. Moreover, trolls and bots, who serve as proxies of the Duterte regime fueled the propaganda machine of the administration, existed today which continuously attack journalists from all sides just to defend the administration.

While this paper asserts the positive contributions of these counterpropagandists, it cannot be denied that there are also misconducts done by these groups of journalists in both era that can taint the image of their crusade against mis- and disinformation. The *Ilustrados* were also guilty of utilizing black propaganda against the Spanish colonial government and the friars. A particular example is the *Escandaloso, Horrendo Y Punible Delito*

Perpetrado en el Monasterio de Santa Clara por un Fraile Francisco, Vicario de la Misma (A Scandalous, Horrendous and Punishable Crime Perpetrated in the Monasterio De Santa Clara by a Franciscan Friar, Vicar of the said Covenant) which holds a historical veracity and occurred between 1869 to 1884, but was “exploited by the Propaganda Movement and was published as an anticlerical pamphlet filled with literary devices, inventions, allusions and presumptions.”⁷² The media under Duterte also saw media outlets allied with the administration. While media outlets should always attempt to be objective, fair, and balanced in their reports, two particular media outlets stand in being utterly pro-administration, even to the point of releasing what can be perceived as propaganda materials. The Duterte administration’s leading media network which “disguises propaganda as news, and uses its platforms to attack journalists and activists,” is Sonshine Media Network International (SMNI), owned by no other than Duterte ally, Pastor Apollo Quiboloy.⁷³ The network has become a platform for alternative narratives promoting the administration that are left out by “biased” media, and black propaganda against dissenters. SMNI has been a platform not only for red-tagging virtually anyone from journalists, press outlets, leftist groups (most notably from the Makabayan bloc) but by also airing commentary programs of known blogger/propagandist of the administration.⁷⁴ Another key media outlet that borders to becoming a propaganda machine is *Iglesia ni Cristo* (INC)-owned NET25. The Center for Media Freedom & Responsibility describes the pieces produced by NET25 as “one-sided, opinion-laden and blatantly biased pieces in the guise of news report,” mostly attacking former Vice President Leni Robredo and her supporters and other media outlets like Rappler and TV5.⁷⁵ NET25’s attacks are characterized to mimic vlogger’s style of reporting by using “partisan content, vulgar language, and poor sourcing” which have led to “more hateful posts from other social media users.”⁷⁶ It can be noted that these two media outlets are religious-owned and even pride themselves in being a “center of values”, “nation-builder”, and

⁷² Jose Victor Torres, “The Source of the “Mad Nun” Episode in Jose Rizal’s *Noli Me Tangere*,” *Philippine Studies* 41, no. 1 (1993):102-115, 107, url: https://www.academia.edu/50385598/The_Source_of_the_Mad_Nun_Episode_in_Jose_Rizals_Noli_Me_Tangere.

⁷³ Gaby Baizas and Pauline Macaraeg, “Quiboloy’s SMNI fuels disinformation, online attacks on gov’t critics”, *Rappler*, February 6, 2022, <https://www.rappler.com/technology/social-media/apollo-quiboloy-sonshine-media-network-disinformation-attacks-government-critics/>.

⁷⁴ Baizas and Macaraeg, “Quiboloy’s SMNI fuels disinformation”.

⁷⁵ CMFR Staff, “NET25 and SMNI propaganda provokes questions on their role in spreading disinformation”, *Center for Media Freedom & Responsibility*, June 5, 2022, <https://cmfr-phil.org/in-context/net25-and-smni-propaganda-provokes-questions-on-their-role-in-spreading-disinformation/>.

⁷⁶ Pauline Macaraeg, “Iglesia ni Cristo’s NET25 spreads hate with vlogger-style ‘reporting’”, *Rappler*, June 13, 2022, <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/iglesia-ni-cristo-tv-station-net-25-spreads-hate-vlogger-style-reporting/>.

“truth-teller”, but sadly they have “allowed themselves to go against basic morals and values and spread disinformation, misinformation, and hate speech”⁷⁷. Quite frankly this is already double the insult not only for the religious values their owners supposedly possess, but also to the journalistic profession; both of which value truth and honesty.

While it is clear that the *Ilustrados* were at the forefront of battling mis- and disinformation against the Spanish colonial government, they were not prone to delving into spreading propaganda, which includes mis- and disinformation, in efforts to dismantle the rule of Spain. At the same time, while many journalists under the Duterte administration were seen to battle mis- and disinformation, there are still some who also engage in the trade of mis- and disinformation. There is the sad reality of the existence of journalists who, both in the Spanish colonial era and the Duterte administration, do not truly adhere to journalistic objectivity to achieve political, professional, and personal ends.

Concluding Note

From the time of the Spanish colonization up to the present, mis- and disinformation and propaganda existed and are used by the government to continue subjugating the people, despite of the rampant abuses that the government is doing.

Knowing that the history of the Filipino people under Spanish colonization has been filled with abuses, injustices and impunity which they have passively endured brought by the disinformation of the Spanish authorities, one can see that a group of learned Filipinos led the way to counter this propaganda of the Spanish authorities through their publications which first aimed to call for reforms to change the corrupt ways of those who rule, but later became instrumental nationalistic inspiration which led to the Philippine revolution.

At present, it is still the same; the administration still uses propaganda to tell the people that what is supposedly immoral, unlawful and false is actually moral, lawful and true. Aided with technological advancements, the spread of this propaganda is just a click away and is received by a huge number of audiences. But instead of propagandists, today's era has the 'biased' journalists who, guided by the journalistic elements, counter mis- and disinformation through their reports which show both sides of what is happening in society; not only the pleasing truth, but the inconvenient ones,

⁷⁷ CMFR Staff, “NET25 and SMNI propaganda”.

as well. In turn, the supporters of the present administration are slowly realizing that what the administration has promised is not as true as it is.

The *Ilustrados* and ‘biased’ media then share the common goal of revealing to the people what is really happening in society by countering the propaganda of the government, by countering the mis- and disinformation, and propagandas in the government. They only differ in the sphere and method they use to battle mis- and disinformation; the *Ilustrados* used pen and paper, while today’s media, might still use pen and paper, but with the additional tool of the social media and the internet. Nevertheless, these two possess the passion to reveal the truth at the cost of their lives.

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