

Conference Paper

Media Engagement and Ethnic Identity: The Case of the Aeta Ambala of Pastolan Village

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Abstract

The article explores the engagement of indigenous group, Aeta Ambala, with different media and how this engagement affects their perception of their own ethnic identity. The researchers employed qualitative research as their approach and descriptive research method as their design. The article integrates two theories. These are communication theory of identity by Michael Hecht and the Uses and Gratification Theory of Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch. Among others, the article exposes that the engagement of the Aeta-Ambala with the various forms of media certainly affected the way they perceived the outside world and their own ethnic group.

Keywords: Aeta Ambala, culture, ethnic, media engagement, Philippines

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1. Introduction

Media is one of the businesses in the society, which does not perform entirely as a commercial enterprise. It performs and operates as either a support to and/or a watchdog of government functionality [6, 8]. What it should consider primarily is reputation and integrity. Profit only comes in second. This simply means that when reputation goes against commercial interests, the former shall always prevail.

It cannot be doubted that media is an enterprise that always involves and takes into consideration the public. It considers the welfare of the public utmost and this is where it draws its satisfied audience and beneficiaries, which provides little profit that it generates for continued and sustained operations.

In this ensuing paper, the author discusses some facets of public-society-government-media dynamics. It explains how media influences government and society. And it also elucidates how media performs functions that sometimes belong to government agencies, especially when government is on its verge of destruction and disarray. The paper likewise discusses how media forms and cultivates public opinion, which at times ushers guided political and social movements.

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The paper is organized in this manner: in the first section, the author discusses the essential roles of mass media in government; the second section explains how media influences public opinion; thirdly, a brief and comprehensive discussion on the role of media when government fails is made; and finally, drawn conclusions are made and elucidated in the final section.

2. Essential Roles of Mass Media in Government

There are three essential roles of mass media in government (Balkin, 1998). According to Balkin (1998), these roles are: first, mass media helps people understand the operations of government; second, mass media participates in political decisions; and thirdly, mass media holds government officials accountable.

2.1. Educative role of media

Balkin points out that media helps people understand the operations of government. According to him, the main objective of media is to inform the public about what is going in and out of government. During the height of the Estrada impeachment trial and that of Chief Justice Renato Corona, the media played a very vital role in conveying almost in their entirety these two impeachments trials. The public was hooked up to their radio and television sets following the trials as ordinary Filipinos followed their melodramatic telenovelas. Even non-lawyers and those with scarce education can comprehend the legal terms and procedures that are regularly used in the trials. This was because of the educative power of the media. Terms like *subpoena duces tecum* (The judicial process used to command the production before a court of papers, documents, or other tangible items of evidence), *subpoena ad testificandum* (This is a court summons to appear and give oral testimony for use at a hearing or trial.), contempt of court, etc. were easily consumed and easily understood by the public.

During investigations in-aid of legislations such as the controversial Napoles PDAF scams, the public was informed about the way government entities such as the Department of Budget and Management, Local Government Units, Offices of Congressmen, and private contractors were able to facilitate pork barrel releases and circumvent many government policies and rules in order to pocket these government funds (National Bureau of Investigations, Philippines, 2013). The public was also educated on how the PDAF system works and how it can easily be abused by corrupt officials. The same with the investigations done for the Makati City Parking Building which implicated Mayor Jun Binay and his Vice President father Jejomar Binay [9]. During the

investigations, the public was informed about the process of procurement, bidding, and construction project pricings .

Decisions of the Supreme Court with vital impact and with important social or political implications are also made public by media entities. The disqualification case of Grace Poe (Poe vs. Comelec, GRN 221697); the legality and constitutionality of pork barrel (Pork Barrel Case, GRN 208566); and the constitutionality of the Disbursement Acceleration Program (DAP) (DAP Case, GRN 209287) are only few decisions of the Supreme Court, which really made waves in various streams of media. The decisions enlightened the uninformed about, but not limited, to the following: the concepts of citizenship, fondling, qualifications of presidential candidates, history of pork barrel, functions and process of releases of pork barrel, and laws concerning pork barrel. The public was also informed about the hidden functions of the DAP which gave more leeway for the executive department to disburse billions of pesos to projects without necessitating Congressional approval.

Huge government projects are closely monitored and checked as to funding, bidding, completion, quality and possible irregularity and conflict of interests. This was the case of the bungled ZTE-NBN deal during the administration of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, where media exposed the possible corruption and bribery issues surrounding the project. Media did not only protect the whistle blowers, so to speak, but it also served as an easy venue for the testimonies of the witnesses to be made public and easily consumable by a larger audience. The MRT repair contracts, where cases of corruption were filed against former MRT General Manager AL Vitangcol now lodge before courts, also have been exposed by media entities for possible conflict of interests. Later, Vitangcol, refusing to be a fall guy, in an affidavit, implicated his bosses.

As shown, media can always convey significant information about the operations of the government for the consumption of the public with an end view of transparency and good governance. By making information available to the public, media assumes its important role of being an avenue for information and knowledge, albeit in a more obliquely and indirect manner compared to academic institutions such as universities.

2.2. Participative role of media

Balkin (1998) is clear about the participative role of media in making political decisions. Although, media organizations should always maintain impartiality in most political and governmental issues, there would always be a point where media should take a strong stance thereby manifesting its concern for the public. This (rarely) happens during the

time when a very oppressive and patently wrongful act is committed or about to be committed. The media should take a stand and create a venue for public discourses, which are purposely promoted in order to create noises and loud dissents.

Editorials and opinion columns and pages in newspapers are some of the ways by which the heart of the media company is reflected. These convey the stance of the media organization as regards a particular issue or political concern. Sometimes, this stance contradicts that of the government and it most usually contributes to the furtherance and expansion of discourses amongst the members of the public, the academe, industry players, stakeholders, politicians, and government officials.

When the discourses are already widespread and loud, the government could no longer take a blind eye not taking them into consideration. By this, media becomes a part of the dynamics that is- political and democratic decision- making. Concrete examples for this could be, but not limited, to the following: issues about the territorial disputes of the Philippines with the Communists Republic of China; the Mamasapano incident (SAF 44); and the pay hike for government employees.

The government seemed to be laidback and lame as to its position and stance about the territorial disputes with China regarding the West Philippine Sea. It took several years of media bombardments and months of attacks from media personalities and organizations before it finally filed a case before the International Court on the basis of the United Nations Conventions on the Law of the Seas. During the filing, China had already partially completed its reclamation projects in the disputed islands. Nonetheless, a governmental act was performed perhaps because of the pressures applied by the media and the public.

The Government also took a lot of blows from media organizations after more than forty well-trained soldiers died and were massacred on the ground of Mamasapano in the Southern Province of Cotabato, Mindanao, Philippines. Congress was forced to conduct series of investigations in order to shed light on the circumstances surrounding the incident. Commanders were either sacked, re-assigned, or even suspended. The Philippine President was almost impeached for what happened.

Another good example that shows the participative role of media is when the pay-hike of government employees was implemented. Media organizations were harping on government to raise the pay of government employees considering the ever-increasing cost of commodities. Congress finally acceded to the loud prayers of the media and organizations of government workers and passed a law to the effect of emending the salary standardization law. The Department of Budget and Management made huge releases to immediately implement the said law. The implementation is not

full though, but it's a good start and a good indication that the government is listening to the aches of the government employees.

As premised above, media has a participative role in the decision-making of the government albeit in the most indirect manner.

Approval ratings conducted by independent research firms and as openly broadcast and made public by media organizations are also important gauge of government's perceived performance. These trust and approval ratings are most of the times taken into consideration by the government officials and are utilized to perform better. There is no assurance, however, that the approval and trust ratings can easily go up once considered and attended to. Like in the case of President Aquino. Since 2014 and until 2015, his approval and trust ratings gradually declined despite efforts to address the same through targeted media promotions by trumpeting his and his administration's accomplishments.

2.3. Media's watchdog function

It has always been a common knowledge that the media is a watchdog of the government. This means that the media holds government officials and governments accountable. Media checks on government for possible corruption and/or wrongful or illegal act. This watchful function of media is what labels it as the fourth estate.

In the United States of America, this watchdog function of government even compelled an elected President to resign from office. This is now known in history as the Watergate Scandal.

In the Philippines, it has been through this function of media that many government wrongful transactions had been exposed. Such as the payolas during impeachment trial of the former Supreme Court Chief Justice Renato Corona where the Department of Budget and Management with the authority of no less than the President of the Republic distributed millions upon millions of pesos to Senators to ensure a guilty verdict for Corona. The issue of the PDAF scam was also a good example for this. Due to exposes of media filing of corruption charges were made, three senators of the Republic were put behind bars for these cases. The vigilance shown by media during the Makati Parking Building investigations also led to the filing of corruption charges against Mayor Junjun Binay and the contractors involved in the project.

3. Media: An Ideological Apparatus

In the 1971 seminal work of Louis Althusser, he explained how the system (capitalist), which he calls the 'Infrastructure' or the Status Quo is preserved through and by the dynamic interaction of the 'Political Apparatus' and the 'Ideological Apparatus' which he both classifies 'Superstructure'. The Political Apparatus includes executive, legislative, judiciary, police and military, while Ideological Apparatus includes family, church, schools, traditions, and media.

Regardless of the ideal functions of media as explained above, media can still be used by government or interest groups to favor their cause/s. The mass media is, oftentimes, used by government and politicians to champion their interest through rhetorical manipulation. During the inauguration of former President Estrada in 1998, the words –

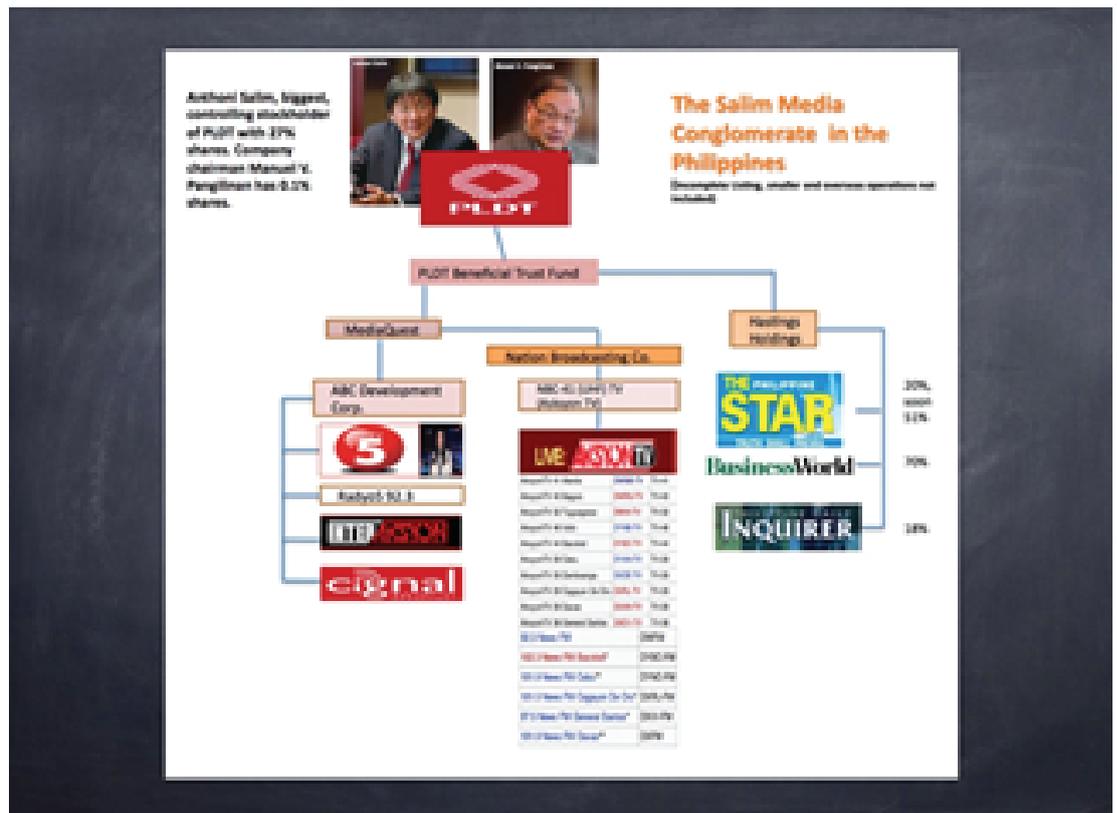
"Binabalaan ko sila Walang kaibigan, walang kumpare, walang kamag-anak o anak na maaaring magsamantala sa ngayon. At ngayon pa lamang sinasabi ko sa inyo, nag-aaksaya lamang kayo ng panahon. Huwag ninyo akong subukan."

reverberated in the airwaves and made the public and the entire Filipino populace hopeful for the change they are longing to have in government. This beautifully crafted statement, however, were proved to be mere rhetoric when the President was implicated in various corruption charges that included his involvement in the illegal numbers game-Jueteng. He was kicked out of office through a mob revolution now known as the EDSA 2. He was convicted and detained.

And during the inauguration of President Benigno S. Aquino, the Filipino people heard the words "*Kayo ang BOSS ko.*" Media over-highlighted these words. But the same words became merely rhetoric when in various decisions and acts of the President proved to have favored only his own caprices and whims or/and that of his friends and KKK (Kaibigan, Kaklase, Kabarilan).

In electoral debates, aired and broadcasted over televisions and radios, candidates take advantage of their time to convince the public to rally behind them through their well delivered and well thought of speeches. Grace Poe's *Galing at Puso*, Mar Roxas's *Tuwid na Daan*, and Rody Duterte's *Change is Coming* are just few rhetorical brands that inundated the airwaves in various forms of media.

Huge business conglomerates also used media to manipulate media so that their businesses would further flourish. This is obviously called media manipulation. With the current set-up, media organizations are being bought by businesses to favor their interest under the guise of transparency and impartiality. In the Philippines,



the business tycoons Manuel Pangilinan and Anthoni Salim own majority shares of ABC Development Corporation that includes TV 5, Radyo5 92.3, Interaksyon, and Cignal. Mr. Pangilinan also owns majority shares of Philippine Star (51%) and Business World (70%). He also owns minority shares of Philippine Daily Inquirer at 18%. This assured Pangilinan of favorable media mileage for his other businesses like Philippine Long Distance Company, Smart Communications, Philex Mining, and other business interests.

4. Public Opinion and Media

Public opinion refers to the attitudes held by significant number of people on different government issues and/or politics. Public opinion does not mean universal opinion, it only pertains to the sum of all opinions. It is assumed that public opinion is publicly expressed opinion that represents the majority of the citizenry [7]. This is “regardless of whether the notion of public opinion presupposed the public as a corporate social entity or merely as a (statistical) aggregation of individuals, or whether it considered public opinion as originating from rational discussion or merely as a widespread diffusion of elite opinion, (or) even by coercion” ([7], p.17). For the political scientist V.O Key Jr. [1], public opinion refers to the opinions held by private persons which the government

feels it prudent to heed. It is a powerful governing force in all civilized governments [4].

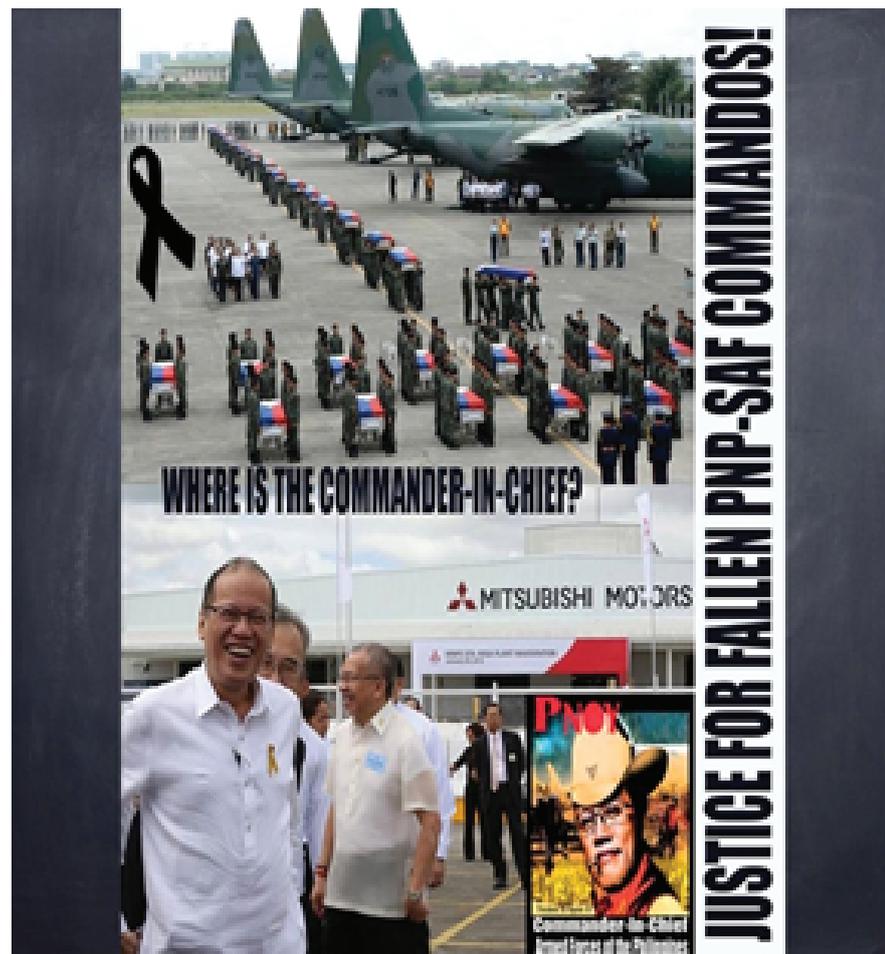
It is a bitter pill to swallow that truth is sometimes irrelevant, what matters is public opinion or what people think. Walter Lippman (1922) puts it by saying that,

Great men, even during their lifetime, are usually known to the public only through their fictitious personality. Hence the modicum of truth in the old saying that no man is a hero to his valet. There is only a modicum of truth, for the valet, and the private secretary, are often immersed in the fiction themselves. Royal personages are, of course, constructed personalities. Whether they themselves believe in their public character, or whether they merely permit the chamberlain to stage-manage it, there are at least two distinct selves, the public and regal self, the private and human ([3], p. 2).

Lippman's illustration indicates the role of media in the shaping of public opinion. Admittedly, mass media can reach a diversified and huge number of people, it can certainly influence and powerfully shape public opinion. Media can shape public opinion through the following manners: (1) Visual Images; (2) Information/Data Generated from Research; and (3) Appeal to Emotion (Adapted from the work of [3]).

During the height of the Mamasapano Massacre dubbed as the Heroism of the SAF 44, visual images that flooded the newspapers and Television sets really made the approval rating of President Benigno Aquino plummet disappointingly at 36% (Pulse Asia). Dramatic photos and footages about the arrival of the fallen bodies of the soldiers at the Villamor Airbase made millions empathized with the families of the victims of the massacre and at the same time angrily criticized the absence of the Commander-in-Chief during the arrival honors, who opted to attend an inauguration ceremonies of a car company. That actuation of the President apparently gave impression to the public of his apathy and lack of concern.

Likewise, public opinion can also be shaped by incorruptible data or research findings presented to the public. This was the case of the impeachment trial of the Supreme Court Justice Renato Corona. Public opinion turned against the Chief Justice because of the obvious violations he committed against the Statement of Assets Liabilities and Net worth (SALN) Law. Many documents acquired by the media that show his acquired properties and "wealth" of his family, which were not disclosed in his SALN. This negative publicity about him easily facilitated his removal from the highest court. The public was convinced that he was not the honest and truthful judge he was expected to be.



Thirdly, media is always instrumental in showing raw emotions to public thereby generating public opinion based on feelings rather than reason. For instance, during the eulogy of one of the wives of the fallen 44, everybody was moved into tears with her heartbreaking appeal for justice, which she directly addressed to the President who was in the audience. The public felt the pain and agony of the families of the victims. This all the more made President Aquino unpopular that cost the public's loss of confidence and trust in him as shown in the different approval ratings survey.

Undoubtedly, public opinion and media are inseparable. One influences the other and vice versa.

5. Media's Role When Government Fails

Media does not only investigate, monitor, and expose government's inefficiencies and corruptions. But it also assumes some of its responsibilities especially when the latter fails. There are two indications of a failed government. These are: 1. Vital institutions

are no longer functioning as they used to; and 2. Majority of the populace no longer trust the government institutions (see [2]).

To illustrate this more clearly, the tragedy that befell Tacloban during the wrath of typhoon Yolanda is used as an empirical case.

Tacloban’s local government unit literally was rendered immobile because the entire city was inundated by flood. All government instrumentalities in the area stopped their operations. Everybody was a victim, from the mayor of the city, down to the barangay captain. There was no clear leadership, no structure and most importantly there was no resources. In times when people do not know who or where to turn to, chaos is expected. Reports of looting, power struggle, invasion of territories and moral decline were presented to the public which strengthen the notion that there was no government functioning in the area.



First to arrive in the area were media organizations with clear and strong access to their principal networks. Other than reporting what is happening on the ground, they alongside helped minimize the effect of the tragedy. Since media is the only entity in the area having a strong structure, it kept the information flow active and dynamic.

Media also assumed the role of Social Services, providing free access to telecommunications, rescuing victims, feeding people, organizing fund-raising and all other needed services it may offer.

Media organizations also facilitated calls for international aids, thus an influx of donations in various forms came in until the national government was able to regain full control of the situation.

6. Conclusion

There is no doubt that media, government and public are basically intertwined because of the following relationship dynamics: Media to Government (Media Influences Government, Media Checks Government Accountability and Transparency and (At times) Media Takes on the Role of Government when the Latter Fails); Government to Media (Rhetorical Manipulation and Media Manipulation); and Media to Public (Shaping Public Opinion, Media's Educative Role, and Media's Participative Role).

Finally, it should be stressed that it is incumbent upon media practitioners to seriously observe the highest degree of ethical standards because of their vital role in the society.



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