

TRAVEL LITERATURE

A NEWSPAPERMAN AND A BOLSHEVIK

Maria Paz Mendoza

*This translation consists of the first chapter from Maria Paz Mendoza's book, **Notas de Viaje** (Manila, 1930). Mendoza's work is a travel book, that is, a narrative/descriptive account of the author's travels to the United States, Europe, and the Middle East. It is a form of autobiographical writing, a genre which has only recently come to be regarded as literary rather than historical.*

The author, better known as Maria Paz Mendoza Guazon, was a member of an educational mission under the auspices of the Supreme Council of the Philippines. Her objective in writing this book, as indicated in its first chapter, was to render an accounting to her countrymen of what she had learned in the course of her trip.

Although I spent for my trip myself, it was made possible by the Alumni Association of the University of the Philippines, which proposed my name to the Supreme Council of the Philippines, and by the generosity of our leaders, who agreed to include me in the list of members of the Educational Mission, headed by Judge Jose Abad Santos. For this reason, I feel it is my duty to report to my colleagues and to my country, not on my performance as a member of the Mission, for this was insignificant, but on what I have learned from the trip.

In order to be able to accomplish this task which I have eagerly imposed upon myself, this being the only way that I can convey what I have observed and learned, I shall begin these notes with an account of an interview I had here (in Washington D.C.) with a reporter of the *Boston Transcript*, after which we shall understand the idea some Yankees have of us. We must never refuse to face up to this idea, no matter how unjust and cruel it may appear, because, when our national pride is wounded, we shall be forced to

try to improve ourselves, and will love and yearn for our independence even more.

The reporter began by inquiring about the activities and progress of the Filipino woman; I told him that we have women journalists, physicians, lawyers, pharmacists, dentists, optometrists, professors of science, the arts, and literature, nurses, in short, that the Filipino woman has learned to take advantage of the opportunities which the old Spanish regime offered, as well as those which have presented themselves with the imposition of American sovereignty.

With regard to what they refer to as "social work" or "charity work," I told him that this is nothing new to our islands, due to our Christian religion, whose underlying principle is love of one's fellowman, and which has been established in the islands for the past three and a half centuries. Consequently, "social work" has existed in my country to the extent that in the past, women like Doña Margarita Roxas, who donated La Concordia College to the Sisters of Charity so that they might educate the Filipino woman, the Tuason sisters, Esperanza and Isabela Tuason and others, practised charity quietly and unobtrusively. I told him that in the early days, every house in which lived a woman who had received formal education, became a veritable "mini school." For the lady of the house felt obligated to teach, at the very least, the Christian catechism to the servants of the house in the evenings, and to the children of the neighborhood in the afternoons.

These days, what was previously a private activity of the Filipino woman, something which she considered her Christian duty and practised quietly and modestly, has been transformed into a civic duty under the American dispensation. Like all American projects, which are based on organization, what is termed "social work," but is nothing but the practice of charity in a more organized fashion, has here found fertile soil and has flourished.

With regards to social life in Manila, I informed him that the Charleston had arrived. He asked me about the University and "compulsory education". About the latter, he was surprised to learn that in our country, there was no need to establish this, because we lack the personnel and the buildings to accommodate all those who would like to attend school. This eagerness of the Filipino to educate himself is manifested in the prosperity enjoyed by all private schools, which now constitute a lucrative business in the country.

He wanted to know whether we have epidemics such as cholera, typhoid, small pox, etc. in these islands. I informed him that the Philippines is a semi-tropical country, and that now and then, such diseases may break out, but that, thanks to immunization, to the work of the Department of Health and Sanitation, and to the cooperation of the people, it can be said that epidemics of these diseases are no longer prevalent in the Philippines.

Upon which the reporter very rudely sprang on me: "The thing is, your country is a country of savages. Consider China, which to this day is an

uncivilized country. I was in China a few years ago, and that's the impression I got."

"Well," I said, "I too was in China a few months ago, and comparing what I saw with what I saw seven years ago when I was in the same parts, I can assure you that there has been great change there, as indeed in the Philippines. The orient of today is no longer the same as that of a half century ago. In the universities in America as well as those in Europe, I have met young Chinese men and women who have been studying for some seven years, and you yourself will admit the tremendous influence they must have exerted in their country upon their return."

The reporter then began to perorate lengthily and forcefully on the benefits of education, while I listened in silence, but when he had finished his speech, I said in turn: "With regards to my country, let me tell you frankly that your assertion about its being a land of savages does discredit not only to the past Spanish regime, but a greater discredit to the educational system imposed by both the Americans and the Filipinos during this period of American sovereignty. The problem is that there are certain individuals who, after a stay of two or three days in Manila, pick up a pen and write abominable things about my country. These gentlemen's motives are incomprehensible. Would you know what they might be?"

The reporter was a bit disconcerted, and after a while, told me this: "It is because the agitation for independence which you are conducting has become unpleasant for us here." This was my opportunity to toss the ball back at him. "My friend," I said coolly, "the anxiety and clamor in my nation for independence is clear proof that it is not a land of savages, and that it is a cultivated and educated nation. An uncivilized nation will not aspire to become independent because it fears the unknown, acts according to tradition, and is totally ignorant of what independence means. We, who have been educated in your schools, where you have taught us your principles and ideals, have blind faith in them, and we expect that the American nation will be true to those principles."

Humbled, my interlocutor muttered, "You are right, I believe you will get your independence someday."

Thus ended our interview. In the newspapers of this nation of freedom and speech, some items appeared after a few days, quoting me as saying that in the Philippines there are 400 women's clubs, and that the Charleston is danced in them, and that the girls have adopted "bobbed hair". Nevertheless, one newspaper, the *Boston Transcript* published an article in the form of an interview, prepared by our Press Bureau in Washington, as authorized by me.

Incidentally, the reporter had also asked me if I know Governor General Wood and Senator Osmeña; I told him I know them as every Filipino knows of prominent people, but that I hardly had any personal dealings with them, as I had never been involved in politics.

He further inquired about Mrs. Wood; and I said I knew her well and found her very intelligent, refined and charming.

And now, I shall tell you, my dear reader, about another interview with a Bolshevik in Washington D.C. One day I was in a store and while the salesman was wrapping what I had purchased, he asked where I was from, and when he learned I was from the Philippines, he told me: "There's a war going on there." I replied that he was misinformed, but the salesman who turned out to be a dyed-in-the-wool Bolshevik, began to harangue me: "Yes, madame, in your country, the Moros are fighting the Army. In this world one has to fight. When I was a small boy, my classmates used to beat me up, and when I got home, I would tell my father about it, but this was all the answer I would get: "Go back and fight. Fight for your rights, fight to obtain what you want, that's how you become a real man."

If the world adopted the Bolshevik's motto, the rights of the weak and the freedom of the small nations would be at the mercy of *the mighty with their big guns*.

I was reminded of the lesson which I learned from a movie of Douglas Fairbanks, *Don G*: "Fight when you are right, and apologize when you are wrong." In our struggle for independence, we have to admit that we are the weaker party, and that we must fight with dignity, and without losing sight of our ideal.

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Translated by Cristina P. Hidalgo