

unsettling feeling that the media, supposedly a self-declared watchdog in the interest of the public, indeed needs an overseer to ensure that it acts responsibly and conveys information accurately. In this respect, this report would have been useful—in determining the extent to which citizen monitoring of the media can actually influence the behavior and attitudes of media organizations and practitioners. But is the public also prepared to play a more active role in shaping the practice of mass media?

On the whole, the report could have provided a more organized presentation of the material so as not to lose a reader in the midst of all the tabular and graphical presentations, as well as in the analysis dispersed liberally all throughout the report. The annexes, which contained the First to Sixth Reports, was more systematic and thus more useful than the supposedly consolidated reports presented in the first two parts of the book. Nonetheless, the book serves two important purposes. It provides the general framework for future citizens' media monitoring projects and offers extensive numerical data should one be enthused to further analyze media behavior during the 2004 elections.—

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Coronel, Shiela S., Yvonne T. Chua and Isagani S. de Castro. *Cockfight, horserace, boxing match (Why elections are covered as sport): Lessons learned from the 2004 campaign coverage*. Manila: Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, 2004. 62 pp.

The appetite for scandal is, indeed, at its peak during elections. Intrigues are passed off as issues and personal lives as platforms. The book *Cockfight, horserace, boxing match (Why elections are covered as sport): Lessons learned from the 2004 campaign coverage* attempts to dissect the reasons behind media's treatment of an intense political exercise as a spectacle, with the spotlight directed toward personalities. More specifically, the focus is on media's coverage of elections as sports with much animation on "who's leading and who's losing out."

Cockfight is the product of a research conducted by the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) on how media content was produced during the 2004 national elections and who were the

individuals—reporters, newspaper editors, broadcast journalists, media owners and campaign strategists—accountable for such content. The study, however, is limited to Manila-based national media. Data were based on a confidential survey of 59 print and broadcast journalists involved in the coverage of the 2004 campaign; two focus group discussions (FGDs), one each for newspaper editors and television news directors; and, one-on-one interviews with handlers of media bureaus of the five major political parties and presidential candidates.

Coronel's synoptic paper (1-37), with the same title as the book, attempts to systematize and interpret these two separate research reports in order to draw out the answer to the question, "Why are elections covered as sports?" The findings of the study can be best described as a case of finger-pointing: indolent and inexperienced reporters, mostly fresh out of college, who were anxious of making the day's news quota, and thus satisfied with the straightforward who-what-when-where accounts; editors who, either by design or neglect, allowed their reporters to be swayed by campaign strategists and thus lost control of the election coverage; media owners, who were more concerned with competing in the market than delivering news that matter; political strategists, who steered the direction of election coverage; and, candidates, who consciously overlooked issues and platforms in their campaign.

The fact is, although an election is considered a major media event in the Philippines, there is an overwhelming predisposition in the industry to prepare for it logistically rather than substantively. For instance, "only 24 percent of the reporters said that their news organizations conducted special training on election coverage. Most of them got only the routine briefings on assignments. Moreover, only half of the respondents said that they were provided with specific ethical guidelines for election coverage" (8-9). The study presents other disconcerting information, such as the TV networks' indulgence of time and resources on the look of the news set rather than the training of news staff. Preoccupied with the technical details, media took into account form instead of content in its preparation for election coverage, clearly missing the big picture. A quick look at how these so-called information gatekeepers prepared for the coverage reveal how they have trivialized electoral politics.

However, the book circuitously implies that the overarching business of media, which puts a premium on ratings, has by and large shaped the process through which content is generated. Although

there are government-owned TV networks, newspapers and radio, media in the Philippines are largely corporate entities, which adhere to the principles of business practice and commercial interests. For this reason, it is predictable that the media behaved in ways that guarantee audience, ratings, and revenues, which somehow created an inevitable chain:

News executives are on the lookout for news that will rate, so reporters in turn tailored their reporting to what the editors wanted. Media strategists of candidates, seeing this state of affairs, in turn manufactured spins and media events that would cater to the media's taste for the superficial and sensational. (20)

Furthermore, in its discussion of media owners' bias (26-29), the book argues that the media owners' interests and preferences compromised the autonomy and independence of the media. For instance, the government-owned TV networks (PTV4, RPN 9 and IBC 13) and tabloids (*People's Journal* and *People's Tonight*) became mouthpieces of the Arroyo campaign. This was evident not only in airtime and space allotted for the administration candidate, but also in the deployment of resources for coverage. Political leanings were left undisguised in the reportage of ABS-CBN, but the book fails to elaborate on the network's alleged partiality. In fact, the book does not present the structure or profile of the different players in the Philippine media industry, which is relevant in its emphasis on profits and political interests as the impetus for a news angle. Nonetheless, this assertion is hardly original.

Cockfight goes a step further from its exposé stance and puts forward recommendations on how to deal with the problems, purportedly, at the core: a superior incentive package for reporters, which includes among others competitive salaries, professional training, and mentoring; strengthening of self-regulatory mechanism; and public vigilance on media's performance.

While this investigative cum research report provides an accurate sketch of the entrails and workings of Philippine media during coverage of elections, it largely suffers from conceptual, methodological and technical pitfalls. First, it is working under the conjecture that without a doubt, Philippine elections are covered as sports without laying the basis for such blanket assumption. The book's failure to provide at least a background on how elections are covered by Philippine media may invalidate the main assumption of the study altogether. Logic

dictates that any discussion on *reasons* behind media's superficial coverage of Philippine elections requires empirical evidence that the *manner* was indeed such. Without the *how*, then the *why* becomes superfluous. Although this was not the focus of the study, a review of related literature on the analysis of political messages during elections would have certainly helped. How exactly is media's coverage of elections in the Philippines? It is not clear whether the book is pointing out media's stress on positive or negative messages (portraying a candidate in a favorable/unfavorable light), on issue- or character-oriented themes in its coverage, on purely "horserace" style of reporting, or a fusion of the three. The authors tend to refer to one or the other throughout the book and even obfuscate each of these types of coverage by introducing norms and ethics such as balanced reporting. In the end, without observed data, the characterization of election coverage as horserace or cockfight in this study is speculative rather than established. In fact, the analogy is not even idiosyncratic to Philippine elections. The coverage of the Mindanao conflict is typified as sports as well, if the figure of speech is to be loosely used.

Second, the title of the book is misleading. A reader looking for the relationship between media and politics in a research-publication supposedly highlighting the underlying principle behind media's frivolous coverage of elections would be disillusioned. The book merely touches on newsroom-level factors. While it is necessary to probe these elements, it is equally important to situate media coverage into a larger context. Only then can one fully appreciate the relationship between media and elections. Even if media is driven by profit, it does not function in a vacuum. Its behavior during elections can mirror the strengths or weaknesses of the political system where it operates. Anthony Broh, for instance, explains that "the need for candidates to court the media is directly related to a phenomenon most often associated with the ascendancy of television: the weakening of political parties. The media have, in many ways, replaced the parties as sources of political information, providers of political ideology, and winnowers of candidates" (cited in Stuckey 2000). The debility of political parties would naturally lead to candidate-centered campaigns, which would also direct media coverage creating a self-perpetuating cycle. Although there is tendency to exaggerate the power of media during elections, the reality is media does matter but within a specific context. In the case of the Philippines, media has been faulted for the shallowness of political discourse during elections or for making or unmaking political

careers (6). This is giving media too much credit. For if it is absolutely true then media's tangibility and omnipresence make it a convenient scapegoat. A well-founded and contextual analysis of political communication in the Philippines is absent in *Cockfights*. Of course, the research to which the book is based is simply concerned with identifying factors *within* the Philippine media industry that guided the slant of election coverage. But in Coronel's introduction to the research findings, the book appears to make an effort in clarifying the link between media and politics in the context of elections. In the end, though, the book does not offer clear and distinct notes on the matter.

Finally, the book privileges TV and newspapers, even though 25 percent of the surveyed respondents in the PCIJ study came from radio. Does this mean that radio has basically become a relic of the past? The book was unable to justify its preferential treatment of TV and newspaper. As a matter of fact, it gives the impression that radio could be detached or exonerated from the cursory coverage of Philippine elections.

On a more technical side, having no conceptual framework, *Cockfight* suffers from incoherence in its presentation of the research findings. Data are scattered and lengthy excerpts from the FGDs and interviews of anonymous respondents, with almost indistinguishable thoughts, were framed in a he said/she said journalistic reporting. Actually, the book is a collection of quotes separated only by standard introductory and transition paragraphs. This renders the book almost taxing to read. In addition, *Cockfight* lives up to its title since in some instances, the casual arrangement of the excerpts make the respondents look like they are pitted against each other. The book also carelessly drops sweeping statements without supporting facts—"Filipinos, much more now than ever in the past, rely on the mass media in deciding whom to vote and which issues are important" (5) and "The tradition of providing information and enlightenment is more deeply rooted in print than in broadcast" (35)—which could altogether misinform the readers. Moreover, some secondary data have no proper citation.

Despite the letdowns, *Cockfight* presents the reader a preview of the dynamics among various actors in the construction of media content during elections. By shedding light into the drive for profits of media owners, the seemingly lack of appropriate training of correspondents, the indifference and tolerance of editors to mediocrity, and the high level of control and influence of political strategists on election coverage, the book propounds a challenge on journalism as a discipline

and a profession. In this respect, *Cockfight* is a valuable contribution. The problems the book surfaced are actually not peculiar to elections, but obstacles that have long been plaguing Philippine media. But other than the usual tirade on media's irresponsibility and penchant for the paltry during elections, it does little to facilitate one's understanding of the relationship between media and politics. —SHARON M. Q UINSAAT, UNIVERSITY RESEARCHER, THIRD WORLD STUDIES CENTER, COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND PHILOSOPHY, UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES DILIMAN.

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Chay Florentino-Hofileña. 2004. *News for sale: The corruption and commercialization of the Philippine media*. Quezon City : Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism. 120 pp.

The book *News for Sale* written by veteran journalist Chay Florentino Hofileña is one of the latest installments in the various volumes produced by the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) on corruption. However, unlike PCIJ's other publications which mostly have the government as subject of investigation, *News for Sale* focuses on the corruption of the Philippine media during elections. The 2004 edition is the sequel to the 1998 volume written by the author of the same title. Like the 1998 edition, it relied on documentation and interviews with journalists, candidates and media handlers of politicians and political parties for its data.

As expressed by journalists who contributed short pieces in the book, it is not easy to talk about corruption in the media. Malou Mangahas in the book's sidebar wrote that it has become more convenient for journalists to "err on the side of silence" as exposing corruption brings no reward to the whistle blower. If one were a reporter, exposing those on the take would open oneself up to ostracism by peers. The irony is while journalists relentlessly pursue criticisms against others who are not their peers and "ruin reputations built over lifetimes at the snap of a finger," they keep silent about the vile confronting them (95). They also would not take the grandest