

Despite its inability to go into more in-depth analysis as the case with most television presentations, the contribution of the documentary cannot be belittled. At this time when the quality of officials we elect to office leaves much to be desired, the significance of educating the voters cannot be overemphasized. The effort of PCIJ of not just limiting its advocacy to the print medium but utilizing the more popular television is therefore commendable. —**MA. GLENDA LOPEZ WUI**, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, THIRD WORLD STUDIES CENTER, COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND PHILOSOPHY, UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES DILIMAN AND ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, FACULTY OF EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES OPEN UNIVERSITY.

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Shiela S. Coronel, Yvonne T. Chua, Boomba B. Cruz and Luz Rimban. *The rulemakers: How the wealthy and well-born dominate the Congress*. Quezon City: Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, 2004. 270 pp.

Article 11, section 1 of the Philippine Constitution explicitly states that a “public office is a public trust.” This Constitutional provision firmly underscores that public post is not “a property nor a position of power, honor and prestige” but a modest and sacred privilege to serve the country and the people (De Leon 1991, 383). Placing high premium on the principles of accountability, transparency and responsible governance, such provision reminds public officials of the great duty conferred upon them, that is, to promote and prefer the common good over private interests.

Most government representatives however are more oblivious than ignorant of this simple mandate. And because this political mockery contaminates and corrupts even the highest organs of the government, this has spawned public criticisms and diverse initiatives investigating

this Philippine political reality. Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism's (PCIJ) *The rulemakers: How the wealthy and well-born dominate the Congress*, makes a perfect example. *The rulemakers* scrutinizes the composition of the Philippine Senate and House of Representatives in the past century—with emphasis on the profiles, statures and ventures of individuals occupying the legislative in the post-Marcos era. This 270-page book is the most recent attempt to dissect the composition of the legislature as well as meticulously examine who dominates it.

The book's main contention is that the Philippine Congress "is hardly representative of the citizens" (viii), describing that the past and present legislatures exhibit the same feature as being strongholds of the wealthy, the powerful and the famous, and have thus been political areas highly restricted to those comprising the upper ladder of society. The book similarly surveys how much the legislators have been getting from being long-time occupants of their seemingly exclusive senatorial and congressional pews. As it "documents both the changes in and the continuity of the Philippine legislature" (viii), this material presents a comprehensive investigation on the kind of lawmakers the Philippines has and has had as well as on the type of legislative body they have maneuvered and seemingly choose to perpetuate. The full story of the actors behind the Philippine Congress and PCIJ's critical assessment of their legislative endeavors are organized in five chapters.

The first chapter chronicles the rather uninterrupted dominance of the rich and powerful, the educated and experienced, and the famous and influential in both chambers of the Congress. In this section, the authors stress that the legislature has long been the realm of the middle- to upper-class professionals, businessmen and entrepreneurs, landowners or *hacenderos*, old political families and lately, entertainment personalities and *nouveaux riches* (new rich). Hence, the country's elites—by virtue of their educational attainment, economic affluence and political leverage—are said to consistently monopolize the legislative department to the detriment of poor Filipinos excluded in their realm of power. The chapter then highlights the visible disparity between the legislators' status and that of those they are supposed to represent. The first chapter also outlines the history of the Philippine legislature to identify the major changes in its overall structure and organization as it traces the continuity in the composition of the Philippine Congress.

One important change in the composition of the legislature is the emergence of women as legislators, as direct participants in the legislative process. Although still overshadowed by male politicians in quantity, it is said that the appearance of female legislators has significantly increased especially in 2001, “when their number rose nearly sevenfold to 40, the highest ever in the history of Congress” (8). What is lacking in this particular report, however, is at least a brief account on the kind of legislations and projects these women representatives have been pursuing—which are not supposed to be limited to the promotion of women’s rights and advocacies—and what positive assistance they have extended to their respective constituents during their tenure. Given that most women legislators today are either successors to the senatorial or congressional seats once occupied by their husbands, or experienced political officers themselves, it is important to evaluate if their congressional allocations have really been used for the improvement of the sectors or constituencies they represent or have been diverted to the wealth they have accumulated while in office, if not to their husbands’ pockets. A scrutiny of this kind would likewise be helpful in assessing how women, as new legislators, could contribute to or change the persisting milieu in which the Congress has been operating.

The first chapter also notes the recent popularity of Rep. Manuel “*Way Kurat*” (Visayan word meaning “no-nonsense”) Zamora as another major development in the legislature. Even without the support of the ruling elite or of any political magnate, Representative Zamora, a farmer, still managed to get elected to the House of Representatives. This is a major departure from the orthodox way of winning seats in Congress, which is through guns, gold and goons. Also, for a man of humble beginnings, to gain the support of the public and have a say on the legislative hall in itself pose a challenge to elite supremacy. And by describing Representative Zamora as a “congressional abnormality” (28), this section of the book thus extends some degree of affirmation that in a Congress long led by multimillionaires, there is now a space for those who choose to be different in order to remain faithful to their mandate.

It is upsetting, however, that Article 2, Section 26 of the Constitution that prohibits political dynasties to guarantee equal access to political opportunities in public service continues to be a mere stipulation, a defiled one at that. As reported in the book’s second chapter, political dynasties thrive with the posts of old ruling

families preserved, thus making it very difficult for equally deserving Filipinos but with no guaranteed political clout to enter the realm of governance in general, and assume legislative positions, in particular. “The dominance and reign of the same people in the past have enabled powerful and affluent politicians to corner and secure appointive positions for their relatives and followers at present and perhaps, even for the future” (De Leon 1991, 74). Criticizing the unrepresentativeness of the Philippine legislature, the authors again describe the continuance of inheritance, family alliances and marriages between and among traditional rulers as the leading parameters for securing legislative seats and preserving legislative power. It is therefore not surprising to hear the same surnames and see familiar faces in the halls of Congress as ascertained in the book. By mapping both the political and economic domains of each ruling clan, this chapter is most useful in assessing how long these political families have stayed in their inherited positions. However, in discussing the issue of dynasty-building (86), the authors have forgotten to include the “masses,” who have, in fact, been the most crucial resource of old ruling clans in preserving their power. Politicians take advantage of the economic position and vulnerability of the masses and subject them to political manipulation and coercion, leading these people to perpetuate political dynasties through their ballots. Hence, the authors should have remembered that the machinery of traditional politicians consists not of material assets alone but includes human resources as well just to guarantee their continued existence in public office.

The data in the fourth and fifth chapters reveal that the changes in the Philippine Congress are unfortunately, mainly in terms of the amount of money the legislators have amassed while in power. While the legislators busy themselves indulging in their perks in Congress, PCIJ reports that most of the public funds are expended on petty projects implemented based on the discretion of each legislator. The legislators enrich themselves at the cost of public welfare development. Only a few get prosecuted for their illegal activities since their parliamentary immunities buffer legislators from heavy sanctions, and even if they land in jail, they still get to keep their post (169). It is even reported that a number of criminal cases involving congressmen have been dismissed in seeming deference to their influence. Central to the discussion of these chapters is the observation that while there are so many changes in “what” and “how much” the legislators get in “law-

making,” the public continues to spend billions of pesos to sustain their objectionable lifestyles.

The last chapter of the book provides a glimpse of the dynamics between the old-timers and newcomers in Congress. PCIJ narrates how ex-revolutionaries, like Satur Ocampo, who previously despised and fought the government, are now interacting with their former targets and objects of criticism—a rather new scene in Congress. Also, the extension of legislative posts to the marginalized groups and other sectors of society through the party-list system is reported as a positive development in the legislature. However, the book recounts that the representatives of these sectors continue to be overshadowed by the long-time practitioners in Congress, hence the continuance of elite dominance and the furtherance of their interests.

This book has been greatly helpful in evaluating the extent to which the legislators understand and abide by the provisions of the Constitution concerning public office. Though extremely alarming, the revelations in the book trigger an honest reflection on the Constitution as well as validate the common observation that the country’s elected officials contribute largely to the society’s misery.

In general, however, the book does not say anything new in so far as the ills of the Philippine political system are concerned and how government officials, particularly the legislators, create and aggravate the country’s political maladies. This investigative report has only quantified and substantiated what ordinary citizens already know about their leaders, though to an extent, it provides the background against which one can understand the current state the country is in.

Moreover, while there is no doubt about the extensive research done in completing this material, it lacks an account on PCIJ’s stance on the very issues it investigated on and more importantly, a recommendation. It would be better to get, for instance, its clear position on what can be done about the continuity of elite dominance in the Congress. Similarly, a plain presentation of facts garnished with photos and tables, and a mere criticism of what one has found without any recommendation, renders futile any investigation, regardless of how in-depth it may be. However, with the candor and hard work of the investigators, this work exemplifies a valuable effort to stimulate the citizens to be more vigilant and watchful of their “honorable” senators and congressmen. The authors’ main contribution lies in their attempt to expose what the politicians do and to motivate people to

closely and continuously monitor the actors in the legislature instead of just being satisfied of their awareness of it. Although the findings can further escalate the pessimism that citizens already have against the government, it definitely provides empirical, substantial and verifiable proof to justify whatever action the people may take against the legislators as a response to their anomalous congressional enterprises. —

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Glenda M. Gloria, Ana Maria L. Tabunda, and Carmela S. Fonbuena. *Spin & sell: How political ads shaped the 2004 elections*. Makati City: Foundation for Communication Initiatives and Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 2004. 124 pp.

Historical and peculiar are words that may come to mind if one were to describe the 2004 national and local elections.

For the first time in the country's history, a woman (i.e., Gloria Macapagal Arroyo) has been elected president (Corazon Cojuangco Aquino became president through a supposed revolution). There are also interesting—and, depending on one's political convictions, disconcerting—peculiarities under the Macapagal Arroyo regime. After all, she is the second woman after Corazon Cojuangco-Aquino to assume the presidency through another people's uprising in 2001 popularly known as EDSA Dos. Assuming she finishes her six-year term in 2010, she will also be the only president under the 1987 Constitution to serve for nine years.

Incidentally, the May 10, 2004 elections also mark the first time “after the Marcos era” (9) for presidential and vice-presidential candidates to run with the ban on political advertisement lifted. It is interesting to know how they, along with senatorial candidates, maximized this opportunity to get their messages across. *Spin & sell: How political ads shaped the 2004 elections* by Glenda M. Gloria, Ana Maria L. Tabunda, and Carmela S. Fonbuena explains how political advertisements