

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Media and Governance

In a functioning democracy, the role of the media is expectedly adversarial and confrontational—that is, the media are expected to fiscalize the government, to keep it on its feet, and to constantly remind government that it is there not to dominate the people but to carry out the state’s affairs on behalf of the people in whom sovereignty resides in the first place.

This being so, it is almost natural, like a reflex even, for the government to detest the media and to consider it a natural enemy. The media are erroneously seen as threats to the establishment and the people behind the media as harbingers of social destruction, internecine dissent, and calculated unrest. Media are inevitably branded as peddlers of pessimism no different from troublemakers out for nothing but the downfall of the political order. Some government officials have been quoted as saying that the people in Philippine media comprise a small percentage of the unelected elite who have the audacity to criticize them who enjoy the people’s mandate. It should not come as a surprise therefore that the state has resorted to various weapons from its political and legal arsenal to muzzle the media in the guise of protecting national security.

Fortunately, law and jurisprudence are on the side of media freedom. The distinction between the exercise of media freedom – guaranteed by no less than the fundamental law of the land itself – and unbridled liberty bordering on sedition or even outright rebellion is clear. Unfortunately, there are sinister forces who wish to read into the unequivocal text of the constitution, the statutes and settled case law imaginative interpretations (which under ordinary circumstances will never pass the test of judicial scrutiny),

the satisfaction of their personal agenda and nothing else being their ulterior motive.

That is precisely where the problem lies. The challenge is for the media themselves to constantly rectify the falsehoods which the enemies of media freedom never tire of propagating in the name of national security needs and concerns. Such a task, however, is certainly no bed of roses but it becomes imperative in view of the constant and never-ending threats to media freedom courtesy of the government.

The importance of understanding the concept of media freedom cannot be gainsaid. Too much restriction will inevitably give rise to a concentration camp society. On the other hand, unbridled liberty will indubitably lead to chaos. Media that are unaware of the limitations to their freedom can only be either reckless, as in its members end up devoid of any regard for professional responsibility, or so intimidated by the possibility that they may be transgressing legal limitations and therefore courting the prospects of a vexatious litigation that they end up in the abominable situation of fettering themselves unwittingly.

A rational mind will readily see that the foregoing extremes are unacceptable and so the need for a middle ground is underscored. Finding that middle ground therefore is the crux of the matter. One way of doing so is through media education, particularly in the realm of media freedom and its limitations.

It has been said that freedom should be defended by truth when it is attacked by lies, and this truism has become a cardinal postulate on the part of freedom-loving individuals the world over. Be that as it may, it will not hurt if the defense of freedom is accompanied by a shield of knowledge of what the media may legally do and what it may not.

The “unelected” media are never in a position to be candidates in an electoral contest but they are not bereft of popular

mandate. Media must constantly be exponents of the truth and they cannot afford to falter in this regard. The moment media fail, public confidence in the media diminishes and this, in turn, spells the beginning of their end. Thus, while it is true that politicians seek their mandate from the electorate at intervals of three to six years, the media seek theirs from the people on a daily basis. That mandate reverts to the people by way of the enlightenment they get from media that know the extent of their freedom. This is the moral ground upon which media freedom must be defended against government aggression.

We have chosen the theme Media and Governance for this issue of *Plaridel* and a host of materials specifically selected for this issue embody the theme. We invite attention to “Seducing the Voters: The Powerful and Limited Effects of TV Electioneering” by Lourdes Portus, an article that exposes the baneful effects of illegal political campaigning on television and how it tarnishes the sacrosanct nature of an electoral exercise; “Where’s the P in PG?” by Menard Edu Molina, an in-depth analysis of the importance of close parental supervision of juvenile televising of semi-restricted programs; “Covering the Left” by Ma. Irish Dela Cruz, a critical commentary on the frontier between legitimate news coverage and sedition on the part of the news media; and “Di BOBOto!” by Cherine Capadocia et al., a study of the perceptions of first-time voters on elections. Patrick Campos has a review of Boy Villasanta’s book on entertainment journalism while Sarah Jane Raymundo interviews Rowena Paraan of the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines as regards media killings.

An analysis of the latest jurisprudence on media freedom complements the main publication. The lecture of U.P. Gawad Plaridel 2008 recipient Pachico Seares and the U.P. Film Institute’s 2006 filmography of Filipino films are also included in this issue.

It is in the light of all the foregoing that this issue of *Plaridel* sees print. With it is my sincere hope that the materials featured in this issue will help people in the media come to terms with the reality that there is, indeed, truth in the saying that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Victor C. AVECILLA', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

VICTOR C. AVECILLA