

Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy  
Special Issue, December 2018, pp. 181-206

## **The Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) and ABS-CBN through the Prisms of Herman and Chomsky’s “Propaganda Model”: Duterte’s Tirade against the Media and vice versa**

Menelito P. Mansueto  
Colegio de San Juan de Letran  
migs\_mansueto@yahoo.com  
Jeresa May C. Ochave  
Ateneo de Davao University  
jeresa.ochave@gmail.com

### **Abstract**

This paper is an attempt to localize Herman and Chomsky’s analysis of the commercial media and use this concept to fit in the Philippine media climate. Through the propaganda model, they introduced the five interrelated media filters which made possible the “manufacture of consent.” By consent, Herman and Chomsky meant that the mass communication media can be a powerful tool to manufacture ideology and to influence a wider public to believe in a capitalistic propaganda. Thus, they call their theory the “propaganda model” referring to the capitalist media structure and its underlying political function. Herman and Chomsky’s analysis has been centered upon the US media, however, they also believed that the model is also true in other parts of the world as the media conglomeration is also found all around the globe. In the Philippines, media conglomeration is not an alien concept especially in the presence of a giant media outlet, such as, ABS-CBN. In this essay, the authors claim that the propaganda model is also observed even in the less obvious corporate media in the country, disguised as an independent media entity but like a chameleon, it

camouflages into an invisible creature leaving predators without any clue. Hence, the reason to analyze and scrutinize a highly reputable news organization in the country, namely, the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) in relation to their portrayal of the Duterte presidency.

**Keywords:** Filipino Journalism, Five Media Filters, Media Corruption, Press Freedom, Philippine Media Conglomerate

## Introduction

This essay attempts to show how vulnerable a prestigious and reputable news agency is to unperceived media deterioration and corruption. In so doing, the authors apply the propaganda model to analyze what seemed to be a breaking point of one of the leading news organizations in the Philippines. The case in point is the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, also known as PCIJ, which for many years has acquired the respect and reputation among many journalists and news readers. The propaganda model, on the other hand, seeks to inquire upon the media structure and performance, rather than on the effects of the media on the public.<sup>1</sup> The propaganda model was first conceptualized and popularized by Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky in their book *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* published in 1988. It is “an analytical framework that attempts to explain the performance of the U.S. media in terms of the basic institutional structures and relationships within which they operate.”<sup>2</sup> The underlying view is that aside from the other functions of media which is to inform and democratize the public, it also “serve, and propagandize on behalf of, the powerful societal interests that control and finance them.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), xii.

<sup>2</sup> Herman & Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, xi.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

The PCIJ, in contrast to the corporate media, has its own unique structure as it has no recognized owner nor owned by any media conglomerate, though it remained largely a private entity. The authors, nonetheless, insist that PCIJ is not at all different from any corporate agencies since its members, most if not all, are affiliated with other corporate businesses, to which integrity and interests they still are obliged to keep up and have advertisers and clients to protect for having occupied important positions in these companies. For instance, Howie G. Severino is the vice president for professional development of GMA Network, Inc.; Atty. Ma. Pilar Martinez-Caedo is the corporate secretary of Asia United Insurance, Inc. and at the same time a lawyer at Martinez-Caedo Law Office; Dominic Danao is a businessman and entrepreneur; Shiela S. Coronel is a professor and dean at Columbia University in the City of New York; David Celdran is director for current affairs and television production of the ABS-CBN News Channel; Lisa Gokongwei-Cheng is an heiress of one of the wealthiest patriarchs in the Philippines, a publishing mogul who serves as the president of Summit Media (Cosmopolitan, FHM, Candy, TopGear, etc.) and as director of Robinsons Bank Corporation/Robinsons Savings Bank, and also an avid supporter of Vice President Leni Robredo right from the start of the 2016 election campaign; Atty. Jose Manuel Diokno is dean at DLSU College of Law, executive director of Diokno Law Center, and chair of the Free Legal Assistance Group (FLAG), (Diokno is currently in the line-up of senatorial aspirants under the Liberal Party (LP) ticket, the political party that came under fire in the Duterte administration); Malou Mangahas is vice president for research and content development of GMA News and Public Affairs.<sup>4</sup> ABS-CBN and GMA-7 are known for its editorials which are highly critical of President Duterte. Finally, the whole point of this article is to show how Duterte is deliberately being attacked by the aforesaid media as observed in many instances, for example, in the airing of a political campaign advertisement by ABS-CBN<sup>5</sup> (as well as GMA-7) directly portraying a negative moral

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<sup>4</sup> About the PCIJ, see <http://pcij.org/about/>.

<sup>5</sup> Rappler.com. "Celebrities react to use of children in anti-Duterte ad" in *Rappler*, May 6, 2016.

character of Duterte with the use of children.<sup>6</sup> More so, Duterte claimed that he paid ABS-CBN for a political advertisement which the network never aired. ABS-CBN did not return the money.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Propaganda Model of Herman and Chomsky**

Herman and Chomsky<sup>8</sup> identified five general types of filters wherein the news is framed in favor of the corporate interests of the media as private businesses and of the interests of its advertisers and patrons. These five general categories of news filters are, namely: (a) size, financial ownership, and its profit orientation, wherein the wealthy elites control major media conglomeration through business capitals, business interests, business partnerships, allies and associates; (b) funding through advertising, wherein the income of the news agency depends upon the advertisers' biases towards consumer culture and wealth idolization; (c) news sourcing, wherein elite institutions and data experts subsidize the news with "objective" information presumed to be accurate; (d) flak and the enforcers, wherein the wealthy elites produce costly flak to discipline news outlets and "left wing" groups; and (e) ideology, wherein a framework is formed that defines what are acceptable ideas and thereby

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<sup>6</sup> An instance similar of this was when Duterte complained and confronted Pia Rañada of Rappler for publishing fabricated stories with the lack of evidence, referring to the allegation that SAP Bong Go intervened in the Navy Frigate deal of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. See Carmela Fonbuena (2018) "Bong Go intervenes in P15.5-B project to acquire PH warships," *Rappler*, January 16, 2018. Amidst accusation of curtailing press freedom, Duterte vows to protect the freedom of expression, claiming that though he may not agree with what is being said, he will defend the right to say it. What is unusual in Duterte's approach, however, is that he openly addresses his critics in his public speeches by fully displaying a certain distaste and annoyance.

<sup>7</sup> GMA News, "Duterte: Additional P3M in SALN paid for ad not aired by ABS-CBN" *GMA News Online*, May 16, 2017. Florentino-Hofileña observed that there is an impending network bias for political candidates as "networks also had to deal with the biases and preferences of their owners and top news executives" in the airing of political ads and the coverage of political campaigns. See Chay Florentino-Hofileña, *News for Sale: The Corruption & Commercialization of the Philippine Media*, 2004 edition, Quezon City: Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, 2004, pp. 33-35.

<sup>8</sup> Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2002.

creates “unity” through a common enemy. These filters are so linked together in which the news media is viewed primarily as a capitalistic entity.<sup>9</sup> Undeniably, the mass media is mutually interdependent with capitalism as the latter is also able to enhance consumerism through media advertisements. Can there still be a hope for a media that is devoid of capitalistic interest? The kind of media that gains independence from capitalist and political claws to be able to serve better its purpose of press freedom and media responsibility.

In an essay which came out in 2000, Edward S. Herman captured the essence of the propaganda model in a simple but modern description.<sup>10</sup> To describe financial ownership, Herman writes, “They are profit-seeking businesses, owned by very wealthy people (or other companies).”<sup>11</sup> To describe funding through advertisements, “they are funded largely by advertisers who are also profit-seeking entities, and who want their advertisements to appear in a supportive selling environment.”<sup>12</sup> To describe news sourcing, “The media also lean heavily on government and major business firms as information sources and both efficiency and political considerations and, frequently, overlapping interests, cause a certain degree of solidarity to prevail among the government, major media and other corporate businesses.”<sup>13</sup>

To describe flak and the enforcers, “Government and large non-media business firms are also best positioned (and sufficiently wealthy) to be able to pressure the media with threats of withdrawal of advertising or TV licenses, libel suits and other direct and indirect modes of attack.”<sup>14</sup> And finally, he describes the fifth filter which he refers to as ideology, “The media are also constrained by the dominant ideology, which heavily featured anti-communism before and during the Cold War era and was

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<sup>9</sup> Edward S. Herman, “The Propaganda Model: A Retrospective” in *Journalism Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2002, 102.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

often mobilized to induce the media to support (or refrain from criticizing) US attacks on small states that were labeled communist.”<sup>15</sup>

Though Herman and Chomsky’s analysis are focused on the US media, they both asserted the theory’s applicability to the media outside of the US soil as media capitalism is a global phenomenon. It is through this model but in a localized version that PCIJ’s recent image will be analyzed and appropriated vis-à-vis the circumstances related to the media portrayal of Duterte’s public image and presidency.

### **The Given Situation**

The search for a trusted, credible, and reputable media in the country is very much desired, especially in this turbulent time when a greater number of the populace began questioning the reputations of the country’s major media outlets, attuned in the so-called global era of the fake news. A series and number of events had occurred that caused these unrelenting criticisms of the Philippine media and its journalism practices. It began in the campaign period of the 2016 elections. Then presidential candidate Rodrigo Roa Duterte, or infamously known as “Digong,” was perceived as underdog for many reasons. He had claimed the lack of campaign funds due to unprecedented candidacy. He, being the only candidate from down south, had been at an unfair disadvantage for the lack of media mileage, and being only a mayor from the far city of Davao, as compared to opponents from leading political parties, who have acquired a national position in government either as incumbent vice president, as incumbent senator, or as cabinet secretary.<sup>16</sup> Despite the fact that Duterte later gained the sympathy of the crowd, and eventually became a crowd favorite at rallies, his supporters suspected of character sabotage as his campaign rallies are rarely the content of daily news, limited only to what can be conceived as a negative propaganda through media’s close scrutiny of his unusual cursing

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Duterte’s opponents during the 2016 presidential race were former Vice President Jejomar Binay, former Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago, former DILG Secretary Mar Roxas, and Senator Grace Poe.

in public, his threats to kill crime suspects, his unusual jokes upon rape victims, and his annoyance to the Church and its leaders, mostly on live television interviews and live video feeds at rallies.

As it is often said about ‘mischievous destiny,’ fate indeed is a joker as Duterte’s fate brought him to become the 16<sup>th</sup> President of the Philippine Republic after winning a landslide victory against rival Mar Roxas, Liberal Party’s standard-bearer. Soon after Duterte assumed presidency, the tumult between the president-elect and the media practitioners had grown intense as the president himself uttered in a press conference that the journalists who had been killed were either receiving money for news or involved in extortion activities. Outraged of the president-elect’s statement, a group of journalists called for a media boycott for which the president-elect audaciously accepted as a challenge and even dared the protesting journalists to let alone matters about his Presidency and governance, saved only for the government-owned television network.<sup>17</sup>

### **The PCIJ’s Reputation**

Speaking of media’s reputation, the PCIJ has been recognized for years of its unblemished credibility as an internationally awarded news agency. It instigated in 2001 the toppling down of then President Joseph Estrada after its exposé<sup>18</sup> of his “midnight cabinet” and involvement in the *jueteng* operations.<sup>19</sup> The PCIJ prides itself in being an independent and nonprofit media agency that specializes in “investigative reporting.” It was established in 1989 by nine Filipino journalists who were well-experienced in the field and who had realized the need for an independent media bureau that goes beyond “day-to-day reportage” to a detailed, substantive, and meticulous gathering of data, so-called

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<sup>17</sup> Sara Malm, “Philippines’ President Duterte says he will boycott the media for his ENTIRE term because ‘if there are interviews, there will be criticism,’” *MailOnline*, June 8, 2016.

<sup>18</sup> See stories in Sheila S. Coronel, “The Pare Principle,” *i Magazine*, October-December 1998, and Ellen Tordesillas, “The Nocturnal President,” *i Magazine*, October-December 1999. Also, Sheila S. Coronel, “All the President’s Men” in *Betrayals of the Public Trust*, 2000.

<sup>19</sup> Lars Moller and Jack Jackson, *Journalistic Legwork that Tumbled a President: A Case Study and Guide for Investigative Journalists*, World Bank Institute, v.

‘investigative’ reportage, claiming that “deadline pressures, extreme competition, budgetary constraints, and safety issues” had restrained many newsmakers from delving into the deeper roots and the wider contexts of news, events, and issues. As a reputable organization, it aimed to “encourage the development of investigative journalism and to create a culture for it within the Philippine press.”<sup>20</sup>

The PCIJ has a varied source of funds that come from “revenues from the sales of publications and videos as well as contributions from *PCIJ Patrons* (who donated P3,000 to P10,000 each a year and get *PCIJ products* in return)” [emphasis mine]. The PCIJ is also known for conducting and organizing training seminars for “journalists, journalism teachers, and students in the Philippines” and other Southeast Asian countries, “the Pacific Islands, and the South African subcontinent” from the 1990 to 2012. From these, the PCIJ “also makes money by conducting [these] journalism training in the Philippines and other countries.” Another source of funds for the PCIJ is the revenue that “comes from the proceeds of an Endowment Fund whose money was donated by the Ford Foundation (the rest was contributed by PCIJ revenues). That donation came with few conditions, only that the money be properly managed and used to fund PCIJ operations.” Lastly, PCIJ also received “grants for *special projects*” [emphasis mine, whatever that means] that formed part of the funding budget.<sup>21</sup>

It is ultimately out of these funding structures by which the PCIJ had claimed of its being an independent body due to an apparent absence of media owners and advertisers. In their own words, the PCIJ asserted “we are beholden neither to media owners nor to advertisers nor even to grant-giving organizations (the diversity of our funding base allows us to *choose the projects we want to do* with donors and to set our own terms with them). We are, however, *accountable to our board* and ultimately, to our readers” [emphasis mine].<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> About PCIJ <<http://pcij.org/about/>>

<sup>21</sup> PCIJ Patron <<http://pcij.org/patron/>>

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*



The PCIJ has the following people that currently formed part of its board in its organizational structure:

Board of Editors

CHAIRMAN

Howie G. Severino

SECRETARY

Atty. Ma. Pilar Martinez-Caedo

TREASURER

Dominick NA Danao

MEMBERS

Sheila S. Coronel

(FOUNDING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR)

David Celdran

Lisa Gokongwei-Cheng

Atty. Jose Manuel Diokno

Cecile C.A. Balgos

Malou Mangahas

To note, the PCIJ does not have its own television network, but instead sells its documentary films to mainstream media such as GMA-7, under a certain business contract, or agreement.<sup>23</sup> Hence, for obvious reasons, there is no good outlet and medium for the commercial advertisers as they do not have a company-owned media platform, such as, a television network, or a daily broadsheet, but limited only to book and magazine publications, news website, and training seminars. But this does not necessarily mean they cannot obtain sponsors, their news content itself can also be their product aside from their medium, and in fact, is more significant than their medium for having been engaged in what is called “investigative journalism.”

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<sup>23</sup> “Investigative Documentaries: A program with a lot of math” *GMA News Online*, December 3, 2013.

## The Challenging Times of President Duterte

The unorthodox leadership of President Duterte has spawned criticisms from the media that ranges from his personal lifestyle, his family life, his public policies and political decisions, and down to his alleged political cronies or allies. His critics also range from the religious sector, human rights advocates, and the rival political party. The thorniest of all these criticisms is his alleged involvement to vigilante killings, known as EJKs, or extra-judicial killings, to which protests had reached the ICC (International Criminal Court) as well as it also brought him into trouble with the UN, EU, and with the former US President Barrack Obama.

On February 28, 2017, the PCIJ published an article<sup>24</sup> through their online website, a story containing some revelations taken from a 70-pages diary or journal claimed to be owned and written by SPO3 Arturo Lascañas. Lascañas himself handed a few pages to the PCIJ to which they also reproduced a copy for their news website and inviting attention to all journalists to publish as well. As written in his journals, Lascañas claimed that then Mayor of Davao City, now President Rodrigo Duterte, had ordered the killings done by the Davao Death Squad, and Lascañas recognized himself as the major player in that killing squad. Aside from that, the PCIJ also featured a video interview with SPO3 Lascañas that is also published online through PCIJ's own website and the news agency's social media accounts.<sup>25</sup> If indeed all these allegations are true, this could now be a fatal blow to Duterte's presidency which could possibly support subsequent plans for impeachment complaint and a criminal case to be filed at the International Criminal Court (ICC) against the Philippine president which are all aimed at ousting the president out from his position.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> "Lascañas pens tell-all journal: Duterte rule 'a Divine Trap'," *Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism*, 2017.

<sup>25</sup> PcijDotorg, PCIJ | A Hitman's Journal | March 2017. *Youtube*.

<sup>26</sup> Atty. Jude Jose Sabio sent communications to the ICC asking for an investigation on human rights violations in Duterte's drug war accusing the latter for "crimes against humanity". Magdalo partylist representative Gary Alejano and Sen. Trillanes also filed a supplemental complaint to ICC. Alejano later run for senator under LP's line-up. Atty. Jude Jose Sabio, on the other hand, was Edgar Motabato's legal counsel. Motabato was the self-confessed hitman claiming involvement in the Davao Death Squad, presented to Sen. Leila de Lima being the chair for the Senate

However, on March 3, 2017, Rigoberto D. Tiglao, who claimed to be among the pioneers and one of the nine Filipino journalists who founded the PCIJ in 1989, came up with what can be described as a drastic criticism of the PCIJ's move to publicize Lascañas. Tiglao wrote, in an article published in the opinion page of Manila Times, "the PCIJ should now stop degrading the term 'investigative journalism.' It is so scandalous that a once prestigious institution that helped develop journalistic excellence in this country doesn't seem to realize that because of its journalistic sloppiness, it has spread canards against the President of the Republic."<sup>27</sup> Tiglao accuses Senator Antonio Trillanes IV of sabotaging the PCIJ to disseminate such "rubbish black propaganda."<sup>28</sup> According to Tiglao, Sen. Trillanes "managed to put the PCIJ brand on his hoax 'journal' to give it credibility." He adds, "it is neither an investigative piece that is the result of painstaking research, but merely the dissemination of a fake document from a single, biased source. Nor is it even journalism as we know it, as it didn't even subject the "journal" to some textual analysis or even interview Lascañas to test him if he really wrote it, as journalists simply doing their job would."<sup>29</sup>

Part of Tiglao's criticism is that at his very own calculation being a writer as he is, Lascañas could not possibly have written in such a very grandiloquent manner, using words like "Presidential derby," "Divine Trap," "political Waterloo," in which accordingly could only be possible unless Lascañas had "taken a course in European history," or had "read a novel in the English

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committee on justice and human rights. Though in hiding claiming for death threats, Atty. Sabio managed to ask a friend to file a COC on his behalf for his senatorial bid in 2019. Like Lascañas, Motabato has also gone into hiding. See "Alejano, Trillanes file supplemental complaint vs Duterte at ICC" *ABS-CBN News*, June 6, 2017. See also Gil C. Cabacungan, "De Lima's committee to protect Matobato" *INQUIRER.NET*, September 18, 2016. See also Rey E. Requejo, "Sabio's conspirators to be investigated" *manilastandard.net*, May 02, 2017. See also Katrina Domingo, "Lawyer behind Duterte case in ICC runs for senator" *ABS-CBN News*. October 15, 2018.

<sup>27</sup> Rigoberto D. Tiglao, "Trillanes, using PCIJ, taking us for fools with Lascañas' obviously fake journal" in *The Manila Times*, March 3, 2017.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

language.”<sup>30</sup> Tiglao opines that Lascañas, as also known to many, is only a “non-commissioned officer” who spoke “not in English but in Filipino” during the Senate interrogation by which time, Lascañas “backed President Duterte.”<sup>31</sup> Tiglao also pointed out that the PCIJ executive director Malou Mangahas, together with “her colleagues at PCIJ helped detonate in 1993 the bombshell that a Supreme Court (SC) justice wasn’t really the author of his decision defending the Philippine Long Distance Co. (PLDT) that was adopted by the entire SC tribunal, but the company’s lawyer wrote it. (The SC justice resigned in disgrace.)”<sup>32</sup> Tiglao merely skirmishes how could they (the PCIJ) not at least hesitate for once with regards to the authenticity of Lascañas’s “journal,” nor perform some textual analysis on the journal entries.<sup>33</sup> Tiglao accuses Senator Antonio Trillanes IV and Senator Leila de Lima to have masterminded such maneuver.<sup>34</sup> He also drags the name of Atty. Jose Manuel Diokno, one of the PCIJ board members, who happens to be the lawyer of both Senator Leila de Lima and SPO3 Arturo Lascañas. Tiglao suspected that the journal could have been written “by one of the FLAG lawyers, who were all anti-Marcos activists” for the usage of such term as “Marcos regime,” instead of “Marcos government” or “Marcos administration,” as Lascañas would have most likely used.<sup>35</sup> Atty. Jose Manuel Diokno is also currently the chair of Free Legal Assistance Group, or FLAG, an organization which Jose Manuel Diokno’s father had formed. Jose Manuel Diokno, who was at the same time a counsel of De Lima, was also part of the Free Legal Assistance Group (FLAG) panel that presented the Davao policeman SPO3 Arturo Lascañas before the media at the Senate hearing.

The PCIJ, however, wrote a response on Rigoberto Tiglao’s accusations which was also published on March 3, 2017. The PCIJ categorically denies any involvement of Senator Trillanes, Senator

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> See Stella Tirol-Cadiz, “A Fake Ruling,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, January 28, 1993. Also, Sheila S. Coronel, *Betrayal of the Public Trust*, PCIJ, 2000.

<sup>33</sup> See Rigoberto D. Tiglao, “Trillanes, using PCIJ, taking us for fools with Lascañas’ obviously fake journal” in *The Manila Times*, March 3, 2017.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

de Lima, and of anyone among the FLAG lawyers. The PCIJ also stood firm in asserting that “neither Atty. Diokno nor any of the FLAG lawyers had anything to do with the writing of the journal of SPO3 Arturo Lascañas or the publication of the PCIJ story.”<sup>36</sup> The PCIJ, however, neglected to answer why there was no attempt to probe supposedly committed on the part of the PCIJ with regards the authenticity of the Lascañas’s “journal” prior to any public distribution of such material, an aspect which Tiglao highlighted on his argument. The PCIJ simply assumed the genuineness of the journal (contrary to what it has already and usually done in the past, namely, to critically examine and scrutinize so-called evidence), but rather proceeded immediately on verifying the facts that are mentioned in the journal despite of its questionable authorship. The response article of the PCIJ seemingly appeared only to save face what used to be the agency’s unblemished reputation amidst public criticism, as it does not answer in detail piece by piece every question hurled against it.

### **The PCIJ Filters**

It is thru these localized appropriations of Herman and Chomsky’s “propaganda model” that the authors would like to argue on the probability of a network of influences of the ideologies and interests collectively held by the PCIJ colleagues to influence somehow upon each other, in terms of authoritative power by seniority and affinity, thereby together serving as a selective bias to their views being united as a single media institution that is responsible and committed for providing the whole nation of nothing but the whole truth. The presence of business persons and political figures in the PCIJ could highly give a suspicion with regards its own business and political interests, a category that can fall under Herman and Chomsky’s analysis of the financial ownership of the media organization as a primary filter.

The PCIJ, though not primarily an advertising medium and does not show an apparent line-up of advertisers, is not excluded

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<sup>36</sup> “PCIJ comment on Tiglao’s column” in The PCIJ Blog, *Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism*, 2017.

from the second filter which Herman and Chomsky refers to as “funding through advertisement”. In the absence of a company-owned television network, the PCIJ continue to air news documentaries through the mainstream GMA Network, particularly, in the TV show “Investigative Documentaries” hosted by Malou Mangahas herself.<sup>37</sup> This could mean that the PCIJ staff and board need to consider the interests and biases of GMA-7 and its advertisers, particularly that Mangahas also occupies the top post as vice president for content of the said network. Aside from that, the PCIJ readily acknowledges the support and contribution that they have received from their “patrons,” which could be in the likes of Senator Antonio Trillanes and Senator Leila de Lima, as believed by Tiglao,<sup>38</sup> as well as from corporations and institutions who are behind the PCIJ funds, whose business and political interests PCIJ had to reconsider.

The author who is said to be behind the so-called journal or diaries in the person of SPO3 Arturo Lascañas is up until now has gone into hiding and has never ever surfaced since then. His last reported appearance was being under the witness’s protection program of Senator Antonio Trillanes IV who presented the former as his piece of evidence against Duterte’s EJKs. The PCIJ’s persistence with regards the authenticity of Lascañas’s diaries can be categorized under Herman and Chomsky’s analysis of the news sourcing, wherein a false and fabricated data be given legitimacy thru official declaration by agencies and institutions, and by repetitively replicating it so.

With these complicated set-up and financial structure of the PCIJ operation, their writers and researchers are naturally under the clutch and control of its bosses who, based on the Propaganda Model, are the power relationship that worked in framing their subjects. Investigative reporting, in its real essence, is good only when the subject under investigation does not in any sense contradicts or in conflict to the interests of its patrons by which the news agency is bound to protect. It is in this sense that “flak and the enforcers,” which Herman and Chomsky considered to be

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<sup>37</sup> “Investigative Documentaries: A program with a lot of math” *GMA News Online*, December 3, 2013.

<sup>38</sup> Tiglao, *The Manila Times*, March 3, 2017.

the fourth filter, intervenes in the actual writing and in the selection and preferences of news entries, through the editing process and choice of issues to be tackled, with certain pressures from within. Altogether as one media organization, the staff, researchers, and the editorial board are united in one common goal, that is, to produce exposés that can discredit the Duterte administration, as evidenced by their strong confidence of the Lascañas journal despite of which authenticity remains questionable. True to their brand of “investigative reporting,” the PCIJ never spared any mercy to the Duterte administration, the same goes with other media and news entities, especially those which Duterte threatened for closure of its operation, such as the controversial Rappler, ABS-CBN, and Philippine Daily Inquirer (PDI).<sup>39</sup>

On another hand, the persistent demoralizing and negative portrayal of the president’s character through the media contributes to what Herman and Chomsky referred to as “ideology” or anti-communism, the fifth category which they later relate to fear and terrorism, after the World Trade Center attacks. It is no coincidence that Duterte, since the start of the election campaign, was continuously branded as a dictator, a mass executioner, a womanizer, a blasphemer, a corruptor, a drug lord himself, wherein the Church, the rival political party, and media critics found a common agenda whose stereotyping translates to attacks against the President and anybody they perceived as his allies and followers.

Through these five (5) filters of the Propaganda Model which Herman and Chomsky identifies, the suspicious credibility of the PCIJ is now revealed to the attention of its readers as to whom and to what interests this news agency is protecting for – no other than its elite “patrons”. It then becomes clear that the recent image of the PCIJ to readers are not different from the shameful nature of corporate-owned media agencies – serving not the masses but the self-interests of the elites. Contrary to its website’s banner slogan that reads: “We tell it like it is. No matter who. No matter what,” the PCIJ also has its own covert vested interests,

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<sup>39</sup> Salaverria, Leila B. “Duterte, Rappler clash over fake news, press freedom,” *INQUIRER.NET*, January 18, 2018.

just like any other corporate media conglomerates and news organizations.

### **Duterte and ABS-CBN**

Duterte is predisposed to oppose the renewal of business permit of ABS-CBN alleging that it is unable to pay its duly required taxes. The complicated links that connect the eventual feud between ABS-CBN and Duterte began from a distant past in the Philippines's dark history. ABS-CBN Corporation<sup>40</sup> is a giant and powerful media conglomerate, owned by the Lopez family of Iloilo, which was shut down by Marcos during martial law years. ABS-CBN is just one among the many businesses of the Lopez Group (formerly, Benpres Holdings), of which includes the Meralco (Manila Electric Co.) whose Chairman and CEO is Manuel M. Lopez (named after his godfather Manuel Roxas, the fifth President of the Philippines from Iloilo). Manuel Araneta Roxas II, also known as Mar Roxas, the former President's grandson, is Duterte's rival in the 2016 presidential election. Mar Roxas's mother, Judy Araneta Roxas, co-owns with siblings the Araneta Group of businesses that manages the Araneta Coliseum and nearby establishments in Cubao, and a vast sugar refinery in Bago City, Negros Occidental. Mar Roxas's wife, Korina Sanchez, is a popular TV host and news anchor of ABS-CBN. Eugenio "Geny" Lopez, Jr., who manages ABS-CBN during Marcos's time, became a critic of the latter which became the reason for his imprisonment but managed to escape during the Martial Law era. Duterte is perceived as a crony and ally of the late dictator's son, former Senator Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos, Jr.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Domini M. Torrevillas, "The trials & triumphs of the Lopez family" in *Philstar*, June 8, 2003.

<sup>41</sup> In addition to the claim that the media can be bought and paid by politicians, the authors would also like to cite an instance in which a media mogul attempts to bribe a politician. Former congressman of Quezon City Mike T. Defensor claimed to have received an envelope containing "crisps P1000 bills" a few days before Christmas of 1995 amounting to P200,000 from a representative of Benpres Holdings, owner of ABS-CBN. Benpres Holdings showed interest in the construction of NLEX that is "expected to yield revenues of over half-a-trillion pesos in 25 years". In a congressional hearing where he "fudged the details of the payoff," the young congressman explained, "I have just started my political career, I cannot go against ABS-CBN." See story in Sheila S Coronel, "Squeeze Play on the Expressway," *Manila*



## **Duterte, the Aquinos, and the Journalistic Practice in the Philippines**

The former President Benigno Simeon “Noynoy” C. Aquino III of the Liberal Party also comes from a long line of descent from the Philippines’ most elite and wealthiest family hierarchy. Aquino’s mother, also former President, Corazon C. Aquino descended from the Cojuangco clan of Tarlac, who married the late Senator Benigno Simeon “Ninoy” Aquino, Jr. who is also a scion from a rich political clan of Tarlac. Noynoy Aquino’s youngest sibling, Kris Aquino, works as an influential TV host and actress of ABS-CBN. The Cojuangco family owns the controversial sugar plantation known as Hacienda Luisita in Tarlac, where a violent dispersal of protesting farmers resulted to 7 deaths and injured at least 200 others in 2004.<sup>42</sup>

Senatorial aspirant for 2019 midterm election, Atty. Jose Manuel “Chel” Diokno, one of PCIJ’s directorial board, is son of former Senator Jose “Pepe” W. Diokno who founded the FLAG (Free Legal Assistance Group) in 1974 after his released from imprisonment. Pepe Diokno was arrested for his involvement in the protest rallies against President Marcos and was detained along with Ninoy Aquino at the Fort Bonifacio. FLAG provides “free legal assistance” to Martial Law victims who suffered injustices by the dictatorial regime. As a matter of fact, among LP’s 2019 senatorial line-up is Erin Tañada, the grandson of former Senator Lorenzo Tañada who was also imprisoned, released, and founded the FLAG together with the late former Senator Diokno.<sup>43</sup>

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*Standard and Manila Times*, March 4-5, 1996. Also, Sheila S. Coronel, *Betrayal of the Public Trust*, PCIJ, 2000.

<sup>42</sup> See Ronalyn V. Olea and Dabet Castañeda. “The Hacienda Luisita Massacre: How It Happened” in *BULATLAT: Journalism for the People*, November 28, 2004.

<sup>43</sup> Jovic Yee, “A ’70s throwback? Aquino, Diokno, Tañada and Marcos slug it out in 2019” in *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, October 16, 2018.

In his essays, Christopher Ryan Maboloc<sup>44</sup> proposed that the “grammar of dissent”<sup>45</sup> against the failures of the EDSA revolution and the elitist democracy of Aquino paved the way for the Duterte phenomenon. It is in the growing discontent of the people towards the inefficient governance of the country led by the elites who are insensitive to the plight of the poor and the marginalized that have catapulted Duterte to power as he exhibited a perfect braggadocio of political will.<sup>46</sup> Maboloc says that Duterte has become the voice of the powerless, such as the OFWs and the Moro people of Muslim Mindanao. The “grammar of dissent”<sup>47</sup> according to Maboloc is “often identified with anti-imperialist agenda” and that “it advances the attitude against cultural hegemony”.<sup>48</sup> True enough, there is no doubt then that the scions of the Aquinos, the Cojuangcos, the Aranetas, the Lopezes, the Gokongweis, the Dioknos, and the Tañadas remained to be among the business elites and the richest families and political clans in the country and they comprise as members and supporters of the Liberal Party (LP) in the Philippines’ political history up to this very day. Their complicated connection to the media is sealed and inevitable.

Though it remained a reputable job, journalism in the Philippines has never been utterly clean and truly honest ever since. In the Editor’s Note as well as in the opening line of their press release of the book *News for Sale: The Corruption and Commercialization of the Philippine Media* written by Chay Florentino-Hofileña, the PCIJ readily admitted in saying that “No one in journalism will deny that media corruption exists.”<sup>49</sup> The book *News for Sale* reveals the nasty and cunning practices of journalism that thrives on electioneering practices in the Philippines as the book’s title itself conveys. It cannot be

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<sup>44</sup> Christopher Ryan B. Maboloc, “The Radical Politics of Nation-States: The Case of President Rodrigo Duterte” *Journal of ASEAN Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1, 119, 2018.

<sup>45</sup> Christopher Ryan B. Maboloc, “Situating the Mindanao Agenda in the Radical Politics of President Duterte,” *IQRA*, vol. 4, 9, Ateneo de Davao University, 2017.

<sup>46</sup> Maboloc, *ibid.*, 4.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>49</sup> Chay Florentino-Hofileña (2004), *News for Sale: The Corruption and Commercialization of the Philippine Media*, 2004 edition  
<<http://pcij.org/books/news-for-sale/>>

described here in great detail the media corruption that is being hinted above due to a limited space but allow these excerpts from Florentino-Hofileña's book that was published by PCIJ in 2004 to hopefully give a clear picture of what is happening behind the camera, "Our study of media corruption in the 1998 and 2004 elections clearly shows that corruption among journalists in the Philippines is institutionalized. It is endemic in the media environment. It is not simply a case of individual reporters gone wrong but of a media structure that has condoned corruption and allowed it to continue and proliferate in various forms."<sup>50</sup> Florentino-Hofileña continues, "Because political advertising was banned, many candidates diverted funds that would otherwise have gone to advertising to such institutional arrangements and to other forms of corrupting—and buying—journalists."<sup>51</sup> The PCIJ, however, being one of the country's foremost journalism institution, cannot be exempted from the findings just quoted above. It is an enigma why the *News for Sale* project was discontinued after Noynoy won the presidency in 2010. Understandably, they are preoccupied finding fault with Digong in 2016.

### **Weighing the Media Bias**

The PCIJ highlighted in their website certain statistics about the number of deaths suspected to be summary executions or extrajudicial killings. Protesters used these data to show the dictatorial tendency of the current administration under President Duterte. Activists readily and conclusively accuses President Duterte to be the one behind the deaths of innocent Lumad leaders, and their volunteer teachers. What is amazing, however, is that when equally bloody incidents occurred but during the administration of the former President Aquino, in time during the APEC Summit in Cebu in 2015, there was an amazingly dead silence in the media about these concerns, except for

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<sup>50</sup> Chay Florentino-Hofileña, *News for Sale: The Corruption & Commercialization of the Philippine Media*, 2004 edition, Quezon City: Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, 2004, 1.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

dismissing the killings as NPA-related.<sup>52</sup> For instance, on August 31, 2015, a year before the Duterte presidency, the founder and executive director of Alternative Learning Center for Agricultural and Livelihood Development (ALCADEV) with two other fellow tribal leaders were murdered brutally and mercilessly in broad daylight by alleged military-trained paramilitary troops known as “Magahat-Bagani” that also harassed and occupied the indigenous schools and villages of Sitio Han-ayan, Diatagon, Lianga, Surigao del Sur. Likewise, a month later, on September 28, 2015, another Lumad leader is ambushed in the person of Lito Abion, an active member of Tagdumahan, which is a collective resistance of local tribes against the mining operations and land-grabbing in the Manobo and Banwaon ancestral lands in Agusan del Sur. The deaths were so alarming that it resulted to the evacuation and permanent displacement of estimated 3,000 Lumad peoples all over Mindanao. At the height of these tragic events, the media, including the PCIJ, were so oblivious to the bloody fate of these Lumad leaders. The news even reached international audience first before it gained attention nationally and locally, through user-generated social media accounts instead from the country’s own major news media outlets. The Lumad tribes had suffered in frustration for the lack of media mileage with regards the difficulty of their conditions, which is obviously contrary to the media’s overwhelming response of similar events in the Duterte era. Duterte is undeniably being demonized in his efforts for the “war on drugs”. A fair and unbiased account is missing. Even headlines are purposely tweaked to give a diabolic and negative impression, with images that are obviously staged and enhanced, and deliberately selective portraying only the ugly side of president Digong.

## **Conclusion**

With these inherent structure of major media outlets which is conglomeration and profit-oriented, and much more corrupted, they can never be a true voice of democracy as they still serve the interests of the elites and the corporations. On the other hand, the

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<sup>52</sup> Solita Collas-Monsod, “Who is exploiting the ‘lumad’?” in *Inquirer.net*, September 19, 2015. See also Boying Pimentel, “Lumad, the Left and Mareng Winnie’s ‘new people’s army,’” *Inquirer.net*, October 6, 2015.

user-generated content which is a feature of the social media has the potential to create the possible hope for the voiceless as they are provided with a platform that truly voices out the sentiment of the people better than the self-serving corporate media. Social media has a cheaper, wider, and efficient mileage. Duterte, however, was strongly accused by the “liberals” of using “trolls” for his campaign and to advance his agenda. Undeniably, the Duterte campaign took advantage of such medium or platform that effectively won him the presidency.

Furthermore, it can now be presumed from the nature of politics in the Philippines that Rodrigo Duterte, being outside of the once dominant political circle reigning in the country, is thereby considered an adversary to the vested interests that these varied elite groups try to protect through the media they control. The PCIJ played a very important role in leading and shaping the direction of news reportage in the country. Being a powerful elite media authority, it invests with all its might to criticize the Duterte regime as it supplied, produced, and been accused of fabricating the sources that served as basis to discredit the legitimate government and influence the public opinion in the discussions of government and political matters under the Duterte administration.

There is a discrepancy, however, with the original intentions of the framers of the propaganda model as Herman and Chomsky were referring to the possible connivance between the US government and the US media conglomerates, particularly in its concept of “flak and the enforcers” in its role in providing the public of relevant information, with relation to the concern for government transparency. Herman and Chomsky conceptualized the propaganda model theory at a period when the US government and the US media conspired or in a friendly atmosphere towards each other against the interests of the public. They first published their book in 1988. The case of the Duterte leadership is totally a different story, in which Duterte is perceived as a challenge to the traditional elitist politics of the Aquino and the Liberal Party, which has tight connections in the media. In the same manner that Trump is a pain in the neck of CNN and most of the US media, Duterte continues to be the target

of major news companies under the blatant influence of the Filipino elites.

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