

## Truth-Telling in Dangerous Times: The Practice of *Parrhesia* in Philippine Journalism

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**Abstract:** This article asserts that Philippine journalism practices parrhesia by exploring the present situation of the Philippine press vis-à-vis Foucault's concept of Parrhesia (fearless speech). Foucault's concept of Parrhesia is a feasible practice that gives a description as to why the Philippine press experience a curtailment of their rights in their duty to speak truth to power. Foucault claims that the practice of parrhesia is a critique of present circumstances, or what Foucault calls 'history of the present,' where a specific regime of truth is imposed by power via a variety of strategies that run through both institutional and non-institutional practices. In contrast, the Philippine press battles the Duterte administration and its machinery of misinformation in social media amidst the repercussions they might face, all in the name of their duty and obligation to the truth. At present, as the Philippine press continues to do the duty of monitoring Duterte's political power, journalists and press workers continually face dangers and harassments in striving to fulfill their duties as independent monitors of power, and resisting the fascistic tendency of the present government that does everything in its power to control and repress anyone that dares to challenge his power.

**Keywords:** *Philippine journalism, Foucault, parrhesia, truth-telling, critique, governmentality*

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### Introduction

A country might be considered democratic and free when its press and media are able to provide the citizens information that will make them have the capacity to see what is happening in society. And in reporting, the press must be able to provide both sides of a story. This is where an antagonistic relationship between the press and those in politics develops.

In the Philippines, the press has been pivotal to many events in the history of the Filipino people. Intersecting with Philippine politics, it gives rise to antagonism between media and government. This antagonism results from the media's role to ensure that the elected officials keep their electoral promises and uphold the highest standards of their oath of office.

Yet, when one speaks of the Philippine press, it can be certain that it is one of the oldest and freest in Asia, while at the same time a press that is highly partisan.<sup>1</sup> News reports in the television

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<sup>1</sup> Raul Pertierra, *The New Media, Society & Politics in the Philippines* (Germany: Fesmedia Asia, 2012), 13.

focus more on specific personalities with the belief that their interests will only be fulfilled if they have access to the media and the press either by owning a station, or through other under-the-table deals which can either be economic or political in nature.<sup>2</sup>

Now, what does the press have to say about this? Despite being owned or controlled by oligarchic individuals, the Philippine press tries its best to serve not only these owners, but the consumers as well. Members of the press assigned to cover Philippine politics try their best to write objectively that would cater to the release of information that is unbiased for their company or organization at the risk of being removed from the specific news beat.

Worse than losing the news beat, the member of the press might even earn the ire of the people in power that one is writing about, which might lead to intimidation or even death. This is the culture of impunity, whose victims are not those coming from the mainstream or public press but are local or junior members of the profession in local and alternative media.<sup>3</sup>

If such is the case of the plurality of mainstream Filipino press and journalism, what then can be made from the slate of the numerous attacks on press freedom by the current regime? It is apparent that the present administration of the country has begun numerous tirades against the press, especially politicians who have vested self-interests (who rather use their positions as a way to increase their wealth and their standard of living) and are under scrutiny from the press. But such attacks are not directed to all members of the press and have been present even in previous administrations. A study in 2005 revealed that in the history of the Philippine press, beginning in 1986 onwards, two tendencies of the Philippine Press came out: a progressive one which featured “a radical critique of Philippine society and a vision of an alternative economic, political and social system,” and a conservative tendency that relied on “a reformist outlook and a basic faith in the justice and wisdom of the existing system.”<sup>4</sup>

Out of the two, the latter speaks of the timid press (a press who would rather be merely reporting what was said rather than be critical about the information) brought about by “ideological assumptions of the political and economic system of which they are a part,” are shackled by the manipulations and pressures from extralegal forces: the government’s influence over the business of media owners, of their advertiser, and even an unseen ideological shackle each media practitioner possesses which “often shape their responses to public issues, thus hindering the flow of information during a crisis.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Pertierra, *New Media*, 13.

<sup>3</sup> Pertierra, *New Media*, 14.

<sup>4</sup> ARTICLE 19 and CMFR, *Freedom of Expression and the Media in the Philippines*, (2005), <https://www.article19.org/data/files/pdfs/publications/philippines-baseline-study.pdf>, 26.

<sup>5</sup> ARTICLE 19 and CMFR, *Freedom of Expression*, 27.

The critical press looks on the government's accomplishments and even its failures, the shift from propaganda journalism<sup>6</sup> to becoming watchdog journalism<sup>7</sup>. These members of the press are seen as more critical with the way they report as they are bestowed on a certain role of being a watchdog journalist as a guardian, which supplies the citizens information they must have to prevent the abuse of power, to warn citizens about those that are doing them harm, and even to "persuade government agencies, mired in bureaucratic inaction, into doing their jobs."<sup>8</sup>

With the present administration's crackdown and constant attacks on the press, there is a need to reconsider the critical role of the media and the press. While it is a reflection of society, the press must rediscover and review their values in fulfilling their duty to speak the truth and be independent monitors of power. To merely rely on "recording what 'he said-she said does the job with less questioning, less probing scrutiny of the subject,"<sup>9</sup> it merely echoes an authoritarian impulse that "lets the elected powers to do as they please, *without question or criticism*."<sup>10</sup>

A constant power struggle is seen between the Philippine press against Duterte's strongman populism and his blind followers. The Duterte administration attempts to impose their own truth by peddling disinformation to keep the administration in power. The Philippine press, in its capacity, battles this through critique. This critique highlights a power-relation between the ruling alternative truth imposed by a fascistic government peddled by its army of trolls and bots and a resistance to the Philippine press who is providing the objective truth in alternative facts and fake news peddled by the government.

Taking the position of a strong commitment to a practice of fearless speech, we could read the Philippine Press' critical stance of truth-telling through the optics of Michel Foucault's concept of *parrhesia* which he uncovered from its Greek origins. The present-day Philippine press attempts to become truth-tellers against the imposed regime of truth of the current administration by means of critique or, in the Foucauldian sense, resistance to domination. For Foucault, there is a need for critique because it is a "resistance against dominant articulations of time, power and knowledge find inspiration in his definition of critique as the refusal to 'be governed like that' (also, but not only) by and through time."<sup>11</sup> And this resistance is characterized by how the Philippine press has now become critical, rather than timid, to a repressive state: the ruling propaganda journalism is becoming more of a watchdog journalism. The press' partisanship has been focused on serving its consumer rather than

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<sup>6</sup> Propaganda journalism focused on being state propagandists and organizers of socialist construction situated in a Russian perspective. Svetlana Pasti, "Two Generations of Contemporary Russian Journalists," *European Journal of Communication* 20, no.1 (2005): 89-115, doi:10.1177/0267323105049634.

<sup>7</sup> A term that had arisen in the US in the 90s, watchdog journalism is by no means just occasional selective, hard-hitting investigative reporting. It starts with a state of mind, accepting responsibility as a surrogate for the public, asking penetrating questions at every level, from the town council to the state house to the White House, in corporate offices, in union halls and in professional offices and all points in between. Murrey Marder, "This is Watchdog Journalism," *Nieman Reports* 53-54 (2000): 78-79, <https://niemanreports.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/99winter-00spring-opt.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> ARTICLE 19 and CMFR, *Freedom of Expression*, 28.

<sup>9</sup> Melinda De Jesus, "2021 State of Press Freedom in the Philippines," Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, May 5, 2021, <https://pcij.org/article/5208/2021-state-of-press-freedom-in-the-philippines>.

<sup>10</sup> Melinda De Jesus, "2021 State of Press Freedom in the Philippines" [emphasis mine].

<sup>11</sup> Jürgen Portschy, "Time of power, knowledge and critique in the work of Foucault," *Time & Society* 29, no. 2 (2020):392-419, 396, doi:10.1177/0961463X20911786.

the pockets of the press' owners. They become more duty-bound rather than pursuing reports for their reputation, and have even transcended working to tell news even at the cost of their lives. As it shows a congruence with Foucault's description of a *parrhesiastes* (truth-teller), it also expounds how critique is used as a resistance against the current administration's regime of truth.

### The Situation of Philippine Journalism

Following the above-mentioned transformation within the confines of media and its confrontation with the contemporary prismatic reality of truth's sources, its position as a transmitter of information was challenged even more in the advent of social media, whose new form of discourse continues to shape the public. As a matter of fact, the line between private from public greatly diminished. With the rise of social media, the press had to take on this new platform to continue its relevance. But with the rise of social networking sites, also began the flooding of personal opinions in the social media platforms. The once respected press became a target of mockery by everyone from all walks of life in social media, through the prompting of the government itself.

Attacks on the Philippine press began during the electoral campaign in the Philippines, it could not be denied that the media had been a great help for the voters to choose their candidate for the highest position in the state. The media had done this by giving the public an unbiased view of each candidate. Each candidate's background was researched thoroughly, but usually, people would easily be attracted to the controversial issues rather than the good side of a candidate.

Enter former Davao Mayor Rodrigo R. Duterte, with his nationalist and "will-get-the-job-done" attitude, who would oftentimes get much media exposure by his nonconformist attitude as a politician, numerous press and media outlets would cover his stunts. From cursing the Pope,<sup>12</sup> to catcalling women,<sup>13</sup> and to even vilifying the press.<sup>14</sup> From that moment, it seemed that the love-hate relationship between the press and the government ensued.

To put it into context, Filipino journalists adhere to their Journalist's Code of Ethics,<sup>15</sup> a document approved by the Philippine Press Institute, National Union of Journalists in the Philippines, and National Press Club in 1988. The JCE contains rules on verification and fact-checking, the need for a balanced reporting, respecting confidentiality, proper identification, professional integrity, against plagiarism, and many others that involve the close relationship of being a journalist and the truth.<sup>16</sup> With journalists adhering to the truth in public matters, it had clashed with Duterte's machinery during his election, namely: trolls, bots, fake news, and disinformation.

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<sup>12</sup> Pia Ranada, "Duterte Curses Pope Francis over Traffic during His Visit," Rappler, November 30, 2015, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/politics/elections/2016/114481-rodrigo-duterte-curses-pope-francis>.

<sup>13</sup> Paterno Esmaguel II, "Catcalling: Duterte Broke the Law in Own City." Rappler. June 2, 2016. <https://www.rappler.com/nation/135111-duterte-catcalling-mariz-umali-ordinance-davao>.

<sup>14</sup> Yuji Vincent Gonzales, "Threatening Journalists Criminal-NUJP." Inquirer News. October 4, 2016. <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/821510/threatening-journalists-criminal-nujp>.

<sup>15</sup> To be referred to as JCE for the rest of the article.

<sup>16</sup> Philippine Press Institute, "Journalist's Code of Ethics", Philippine Press Institute. June 6, 2017. <https://philpressinstitute.net/journalist-code-of-ethics/>.

Duterte's candidacy is one that has been promoted so much in social media, even to the point of the formation of what could be called as alternative social media news. The formation of these alternative "media outlets" was brought about by how Duterte's supporters are utilizing the leading social networking site, Facebook, and using "trolls or fake accounts and paid for them, along with "influencers" on social media, essentially people or accounts that had a huge following."<sup>17</sup> In turn, these became trolls who

"seed" messages taken from blogs and pages, and which are then amplified by other trolls and spread through members of bigger groups. The messages are beneficial to various political camps and interests, creating a false notion of what is true and what is real.<sup>18</sup>

Most of the time, these messages took the form of faux news where it either presented an over-exaggerated but blatantly obvious lie praising Duterte and his administration or a blown-up issue against the opposition who critiques the government's policies. The Philippine press was stationed at the center of these disinformation wars as they constantly attempted to uphold their duty towards what is true. This was done by providing an objective truth against the presently imposed regime of truth by the administration.<sup>19</sup>

While some media outlets continue to become timid with their news reports, their media personnel would take a critical stance by disassociating themselves from the outlet and resisting the imposed truths. One key issue which highlighted the notion of the journalistic duty versus the interests of the media outlet was when an editor of The Manila Times resigned over an issue on the ouster matrix bared by the outlet's chair emeritus. Felipe Salvosa II, the managing editor of The Manila Times and a journalism professor and coordinator of the Journalism program of the University of Santo Tomas, was quoted saying:

A diagram is by no means an evidence of 'destabilization' or an 'ouster plot.' It is a very huge stretch for anyone to accuse PCIJ, Vera Files and Rappler of actively plotting to unseat the President. I know people there and they are not coup plotters.<sup>20</sup>

But one could stop journalists from being biased on certain issues that they cover, and it could not be denied that journalists indeed showed bias at one point or another. One author wrote that:

Journalists – admittedly – are not perfect. Neither is media as an infallible institution. But what is important is that journalists remain focused in their objectives and confident in their methods [...] journalists are biased, as all human beings are – but their stories should not be. No, bias is not the most

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<sup>17</sup> Chay Hofileña, "Fake Accounts, Manufactured Reality on Social Media," Rappler, October 9, 2016, <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/investigative/fake-accounts-manufactured-reality-social-media>.

<sup>18</sup> Hofileña, "Fake Accounts."

<sup>19</sup> An example of this is the case of Maria Ressa who was recently awarded as a Nobel Peace Prize laureate for her effort in defending freedom of expression in the country. Despite international recognition, the government continuously denies the existence of a curtailment of the freedom of expression in the country. See later discussions for examples of attacks on press freedom in the country and Francis Wakefield, "No press freedom curtailment – Roque." Daily Tribune. May 8, 2020, <https://tribune.net.ph/index.php/2020/05/08/no-press-freedom-curtailment-roque>.

<sup>20</sup> Rappler.com, "Manila Times Editor Resigns over 'Matrix' Story," Rappler, May 5, 2019, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/228942-manila-times-editor-resigns-over-duterte-ouster-plot-matrix-story>.

important characteristic of journalism. Accuracy, fairness, and yes, truth are — and readers must understand this.<sup>21</sup>

The importance of this brought out an impartial yet information-loaded article. These types of articles were mostly found in advocacy journalism, reflected in the way the news was reported by Bulatlat ([www.bulatlat.com](http://www.bulatlat.com)), Manila Today ([www.manilatoday.net](http://www.manilatoday.net)), Kodaio Productions ([www.kodaio.org](http://www.kodaio.org)), and Pinoy Weekly ([www.pinokweekly.org](http://www.pinokweekly.org)). These news outlets focused more on a people-oriented type of reporting. Despite being considered as left-leaning organizations, these gave us a fresher perspective on viewing matters rather than the available sources in the mainstream media. Those in the alternative media who practice critical journalism do their best to be objective and fair in the reports they are tasked to do.

From focusing on giving the people a balanced view on news and opinion, here arose the watchdog type of journalism that the Philippine press employed. Newcomers and fresh college graduates who took up journalism would think twice about exercising this role because of being frightened of the attacks. One author explained this as:

The violence perpetrated against journalists is an important problem, as it can also have a chilling effect among current and future journalists. For example, current journalists might be more wary about exercising their watchdog role, for fear of being attacked. Those considering journalism as a career might also think twice about joining the profession, given the level of impunity with which attacks on media workers are carried out in the country.<sup>22</sup>

The watchdog journalism being employed in the Philippines was attacked by the culture of impunity rampant in the country. The current problem of impunity also added to eight other problems ranging from corruption in their ranks to the violence committed against them, sensationalism, or the erosion of the quality of journalism, the issue on information access, even the earlier said business pressure, the influence of their audience and new technology, and lastly the level of professionalism of journalism in the country.<sup>23</sup>

Adding to such a scale of impoverishment in the journalistic trade, the hatred of the government towards the Philippine press became increasingly rampant since the time of President Marcos even until the current administration. Strangely, one could also notice the seeming congruence with how the Marcos administration treated the press vis-à-vis Duterte's treatment of the press. Marcos' mosquito press could be compared to the present's biased media or *dilawan*.

Attacks on the media had been highlighted with what is happening with online news outlet, Rappler. The media outlet was attacked by the Securities and Exchanges Commission, accusing them

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<sup>21</sup> Ryan Macasero, "Is the Media 'Biased?' Journalism in the Time of Duterte," CDN, January 7, 2017, <https://cebudailynews.inquirer.net/118273/media-biased-journalism-time-duterte>.

<sup>22</sup> Edson Tandoc Jr., "Watching over the watchdogs: The problems that Filipino journalists face." *Journalism Studies* 18, no. 1 (2017): 102–117, 10, doi:10.1080/1461670X.2016.1218298.

<sup>23</sup> Tandoc, "Watching Over the Watchdogs," 6–8.

of violating the Constitution's restriction on foreign ownership of local media, and violating the anti-dummy law, the Corporate Code, and the Securities Regulation Code.<sup>24</sup>

Another attack on the media was the case of the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, Ellen Tordesillas of Rappler, Vera Files, and even the National Union of People's Lawyers, maligning these groups and individuals as plotters for the ouster of the president. The reason that PCIJ was linked is brought by the fact that they had investigated the discrepancies in the SALN of the president.<sup>25</sup>

The seeming culture of impunity is also highlighted in the different types of attacks and threats against the press, which could be seen in a data collated by the Freedom for Media, Freedom for All Network, comprised of the following groups: Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR), National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP), Philippine Press Institute (PPI), MindaNews, and Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ).

In the data they gathered from June 30, 2016 up to April 30, 2019, there had been 12 cases of killings, 18 cases of online harassments, 16 cases of intimidation, 12 cases of threat by SMS, 12 cases of libel, ten cases of website attack, eight cases of being barred from coverage and slay attempt, five cases each of verbal threat/assault, physical assault, arrest and cyber libel, three cases each of physical harassment and corporate-related issues, and two cases each of bomb threat, strafing/shooting, and article takedown.<sup>26</sup>

Currently, the Philippine press is now in its darkest time since the Marcos era marked by the conviction of Maria Ressa, Rappler CEO, and former Rappler writer-researcher, Reynaldo Santos Jr., of cyber libel in publishing an article that implicated a businessperson being involved in illegal drug smuggling and human trafficking, and the continued harassment in the renewal of the franchise of ABS-CBN from congress. The case of Ressa and Santos' conviction is noted as a systematic attack on the opposition, "the verdict is not only a singular event, "[t]his is Duterte consolidating power."<sup>27</sup>

The case of the renewal of the franchise of ABS-CBN has been denied by congress brought by disputes around the terms and conditions of the franchise renewal agreement<sup>28</sup> and the National

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<sup>24</sup> The current administration focused its tirades against Rappler by implying that foreigners who want to destabilize the country owns the institution. Doris Dumlaog-Abadilla, "SEC Orders Closure of Rappler Site," Inquirer.net, January 16, 2018, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/960631/sec-orders-closure-of-rappler-site>

<sup>25</sup> The Philippine Center of Investigative Journalism has been targeted by attacks because of an alleged investigation on the discrepancies in the SALN of the first family, prompting the current government to create the issue that the PCIJ, together with other organizations are plotting to oust Duterte. PCIJ, "PCIJ on 'Oust-Duterte Plot': Wrong Report, on Many Counts," Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, April 22, 2019, <https://pcij.org/article/1572/pcij-on-oust-duterte-plot-br-wrong-report-on-many-counts>

<sup>26</sup> For a more comprehensive discussion on the state of Philippine media under the present administration, see PCIJ. "The State of Philippine Media, under Duterte." Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, May 3, 2019. <https://pcij.org/article/1596/the-state-of-philippine-media-under-duterte>.

<sup>27</sup> Ana Santos, "Philippines: Maria Ressa's cyber libel verdict 'a method of silencing dissent,'" DW, June 15, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/philippines-maria-ressas-cyber-libel-verdict-a-method-of-silencing-dissent/a-53811284>.

<sup>28</sup> Issues revolving the renewal of the franchise of ABS-CBN revolved around violations of labor and securities laws, tax evasion, foreign ownership, despite having been disproved decisively, the congressmen who don't

Telecommunications Commission issuing a cease-and-desist order to immediately cease the network's broadcasting.<sup>29</sup>

It is apparent in the characterization of the state of the Philippine press that they are under threat by the present administration since a critical stance of journalism will, in turn, put them at risk. An institution challenging a prevailing regime of truth imposed by a government that displays a nostalgia for authoritarianism, through the exposure of truth and critique, is a point analyzed by Michel Foucault. To view the power-relation between the Philippine press and the Duterte administration, it is better first to understand Foucault's concept of *parrhesia*.

### Foucault's *Parrhesia*

*Parrhesiastes* comes from the word *parrhesia*, which generally means someone who tells the truth, from the Greek word 'pan' (everything) and 'rhema' (that which is said).<sup>30</sup> Foucault's conception of *parrhesia* and the *parrhesiastes* gives an image of a certain person who speaks without withholding his thoughts and expresses such an account that those who listen to him will understand what he is saying. The idea of *parrhesia* has been partly problematized especially in pre-Christian philosophical musings, heavily founded in ancient Athenian democracy, wherein it has evolved from being utilized in the areas of rhetoric, politics, and even leading to being in the realm of philosophy.<sup>31</sup>

To begin understanding *parrhesia*, to consider a certain person or entity as performing *parrhesia*, it must first have the characteristic of frankness. Foucault notes that a *parrhesiastes* must not speak rhetorically but rather utilize the most simple and direct words to convey the idea to his audience.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, *parrhesia* suggests that the *parrhesiastes* "emphasizes the fact that he is both the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the *enunciandum* — that he himself is the subject of the opinion to which he refers."<sup>33</sup> Frankness is needed in the *parrhesiastes* thoughts and that he must convey his idea and opinion as clearly as possible to his audience. The *parrhesiastes* is someone who owns what he says since he is the subject of his own words. As someone would assert that what he speaks is what is on his mind, does that mean he practices *parrhesia*?

A person may assert that what he is saying is the truth while explaining it in the simplest terms for his audience, but is it enough so that the speaker will be a *parrhesiastes*? To this, Foucault would refer us to the second characteristic of *parrhesia*, that is, truth. Being offered with two definitions of *parrhesia*, Foucault adheres to a positive expression of the concept, which is to "tell the truth". This

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want the franchise renewed have had their last veil of disguise peeled off to reveal Rodrigo Duterte's face contorted in vengeful and narcissistic contempt for ABS-CBN, all for an old slight — it had no airtime to spare for a couple of campaign advertisements for his successful presidential run in 2016. Vergel Santos, "[OPINION] The ABS-CBN hearings: A theater of the absurd", Rappler, July 3, 2020, <https://www.rappler.com/thought-leaders/265591-opinion-abs-cbn-hearings-theater-absurd>.

<sup>29</sup> There have been two issuances of cease-and-desist order for ABS-CBN. The first was on the ABS-CBN not having a valid Congressional Franchise required by law, the second being to stop the direct broadcast of the satellite service (Sky Direct). Ralf Rivas, "NTC shuts down ABS-CBN's Sky Direct, TV Plus channels, Rappler, July 1, 2020, <https://r3.rappler.com/nation/265299-ntc-orders-sky-cable-stop-operating-satellite-tv-service>.

<sup>30</sup> Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, ed. Joseph Pearson (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2001), 11.

<sup>31</sup> Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 20–24.

<sup>32</sup> Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 12.

<sup>33</sup> Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 12–13.

happens because the *parrhesiastes* is sincere in his opinion and the opinion he holds is the truth.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, Foucault asserts that a *parrhesiastes*, in his capacity to get the truth, assumes that the truth-teller possesses “certain moral qualities: when someone has certain moral qualities, then that is the proof that he has access to the truth and vice versa.”<sup>35</sup> In short, the truth has an intrinsic relationship with being moral.

Another criterion for one to be called a *parrhesiastes* is to speak the truth despite the possible risk or danger to the speaker in his act of telling the truth. Simply stating the truth, as in a professor lecturing to his students, does not amount to one becoming a *parrhesiastes*. However, if a speaker expresses his thoughts and/or opinions in the face of strong opposition or against a person in power (e.g., politicians, etc.) he takes a risk, which might get him prosecuted, imprisoned, punished or, worse, killed. This makes a speaker a *parrhesiastes* since the speaker speaks the truth in the face of danger. How Foucault explains danger is through examples of telling a friend he is wrong, the truth-teller’s relationship with his friend might suffer and an orator in a debate might lose popularity because his opinions are against the majority’s truth.<sup>36</sup> In other words, *parrhesia* has a relationship with the truth and the courage to tell the truth in the face of danger. The speaker must have courage to speak the truth for him to be a true *parrhesiastes* even to the point of risking his own life for the truth.

*Parrhesia* also involves an element of criticism. As mentioned above, there is a certain risk for the *parrhesiastes* in committing *parrhesia*, so criticism also involves the same risk. The *parrhesiastes* must speak the truth regarding the interlocutor regardless of causing possible hurt or injury to the interlocutor. This certain element of danger stems from the fact that *parrhesia* offers a truthful and criticizing idea or opinion of the *parrhesiastes* to the interlocutor or himself. The greater the power of the interlocutor over the *parrhesiastes*, the greater the danger. *Parrhesia*, then, is not simply a demonstrative method of truth but is applied to a more practical manner in terms of offering criticisms to the interlocutor or to the speaker himself provided that the *parrhesiastes* is in a lower position (i.e., less powerful position) than that of the interlocutor. “The *parrhesia* comes from ‘below,’ as it were, and is directed towards ‘above.’”<sup>37</sup> This implies that a person of higher authority or power does not commit *parrhesia* if he is simply criticizing those who are “below” him, as in the case of a manager berating an employee.

Lastly, the duty aspect of *parrhesia* is illustrated when the *parrhesiastes* speaks of the truth as he finds that he, free from any duress or coercion, ought to speak it to others. If the speaker is compelled to speak the truth, as in the case of being tortured into testifying against another person, it is not qualified as *parrhesia*. The same is true when one is compelled to admit one’s own fault or crime; one is not committing *parrhesia* despite the risk of harm to oneself in telling the truth. However, if the person admits his crime out of a sense of duty, then he is committing *parrhesia*:

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<sup>34</sup> Foucault had earlier described in his work that the verb form of *parrhesia* is *parrhesiazesthai* (to speak the truth) and this is why he adheres to this conception of *parrhesia* rather than the pejorative one of merely saying anything one has in mind without qualification. Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 14.

<sup>35</sup> Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 15.

<sup>36</sup> Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 16.

<sup>37</sup> Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 18.

A criminal who is forced by his judges to confess his crime does not use *parrhesia*. But if he voluntarily confesses his crime to someone else out of a sense of moral obligation, then he performs a *parrhesiastic* act.<sup>38</sup>

*Parrhesia*, as a sense of duty, involves a certain degree of freedom of the *parrhesiastes* to express the truth, as he believes it to be. The *parrhesiastes* can only be committing *parrhesia* when he tells the truth out of his feeling of moral obligation, free from outside influence, voluntary and willing by himself.

In short, *parrhesia* then puts the *parrhesiastes* into a series of connections through the presented aspects or factors for a discourse or utterance to be considered as *parrhesia*. Foucault offered a vivid illustration as to how the *parrhesiastes* is connected to the truth (a truth that the *parrhesiastes*' moral quality can only bring) in being frank. Frankness embodies the *parrhesiastic* relationship of the speaker to the truth inasmuch as the speaker expresses himself without obstruction, intending to cut his message across his audience clearly. *Parrhesia* also connects the speaker to his life in the dimension of danger. The *parrhesiastes* must be someone who risks his life in speaking the truth. *Parrhesia* also gives the speaker a relationship to others and to himself in its aspect of offering criticism. The *parrhesiastes* offers the truth about others or of himself as he expresses the truth in a *parrhesiastic* utterance. Lastly, *parrhesia* has a connection to one's moral duty, being free to speak the truth out of one's sense of obligation to tell the truth.

### The Practice of *Parrhesia* in Philippine Journalism

There is a strong similarity between the five characteristics of the Philippine press and that of the *parrhesiastes*.

In terms of frankness, with the rise of alternative news outlets and fake news sites, the critical stance of the Philippine press is strongly at play as they constantly attempt to challenge the regime of truth imposed by the government and the mechanisms of disinformation rampant in social media. From the usual attempts of objective news reporting, other media outlets have engaged in fact-checking the information being spread by supporters of the government online. As a *parrhesiast* is frank and honest, one only speaks of what is objectively true, rather than mere subjective rhetoric to win over one's target audience.

Secondly, the Philippine press' duty to author well-researched articles based on true and factual information is rooted in the journalistic obligation to tell the truth. Every article must only contain true information. These kinds of information, which are true and reliable, require long periods of research and verification. At the same time, today, the Philippine press are morally inclined to speak the truth about power brought about by how the prevailing regime of truth is challenging the very values that the Filipinos hold dear. For this aspect, this shows the second characteristic of the *parrhesiastes*, and that is the truth. The *parrhesiastes* focuses only on relaying the truth and this truth is his opinion, since he knows it is the truth. The *parrhesiastes*, then, can communicate information that is true because he knows that it is the truth, in the same way, the Philippine press will draft the article because they have exhaustively researched the information. They know that it is the truth and they have morally acquired the truth.

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<sup>38</sup> Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 19.

The prevalent culture of impunity to the Philippine press<sup>39</sup> shows how many powerful persons are trying to silence them just because the press holds the truth that can lead to the downfall of these powerful groups or individuals.<sup>40</sup> The slate of persecution of the press has been rampant just because the press is a powerful institution that can enact change, and the truth will cost them their very lives. The *parrhesiastes*, on the other hand, is endangered because he holds the truth, and that truth will necessitate risk. The truth that a *parrhesiastes* holds must be equitable to something that will cost him to show courage in the face of danger.

Next comes the watchdog journalism that is employed by the Philippine press which makes them an independent forum for criticism; one of the basic duties that journalists and persons in the media must be able to enact. They must become the voice of the voiceless, and they must show impartially, the inequalities that the status quo is causing. They are similar to how a *parrhesiastes* is a vehicle for criticism, and this critical notion of the *parrhesiastes* is brought by the inequality between the *parrhesiastes* and his interlocutor. The *parrhesiastes* can even be simply shrugged off and be labeled as a dissenting opinion, but still he continues, as he knows it is the truth. This is likewise displayed in the press that despite being labeled as *bayaran* or *dilawan*, they continue the work that is tasked to them. Foucault recognizes the importance of critique as a form of resistance to power where it is a “moral and political attitude,” an “art of not being governed, or the art of not being governed like that and at this price”<sup>41</sup> and to some extent it is a “political *ethos*” against the rationalities of Nazism and Stalinism, both of which Foucault categorizes as fascistic regimes.<sup>42</sup> In the same way, the rationality of fascism which makes one crave power, is seen in how Filipinos continue to support Duterte; thus, they still fall victim to the lies and deceit imposed by the regime of truth. Duterte and his machinery of disinformation and fake news continue to peddle. It is how the Philippine press acts as a critique to such a regime of truth and at the same time resists the domination of the Duterte administration that they become *parrhesiastes*: a power-relation as *parrhesia* thrives when the truth is spoken to someone in power, which in this case, the Philippine press towards Duterte.

Lastly, the Philippine press is guided by the JCE that shows how they must act and do news reporting for the sake of the truth. They are duty-bound to follow these rules which are very much reflective of how important the truth is in the journalistic trade – reports must be done truthfully – and so guidelines were made: the JCE. In the same manner, the *parrhesiastes*, in his quest for truth-

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<sup>39</sup> Current issues of the culture of impunity faced by Filipino journalists includes a divided press (the conservative-libertarian divide), restrictions in the Covid-19 crisis (such as the need for accreditation, quarantine conditions, market collapse for community press, visible militarization, a limited information flow, digital package information instead of briefings, and even low response to FOI request), the draconian Anti-Terror Law (which could be used by police and military to curtail legitimate criticism), a culture of fear (which involves the closure of ABS-CBN, red-tagging of journalists, and police action on media organizations and critical reporting), incidents of threats and attack (killings, intimidations, and libel cases). De Jesus, “2021 State of Press Freedom.”

<sup>40</sup> The long tradition of Philippine journalism as becoming mouthpieces that could trigger the downfall of power began as early the Spanish colonial period, with *La Solidaridad* as an influence for revolutionary sentiments against Spain. The next prominent period where crackdowns occurred against journalists who do their duty was the Martial Law where the rise of the mosquito press against Ferdinand Marcos’ machinery of censorship and crackdown led to the autocrat’s downfall. See A. Lin Neumann, “The Philippines: Amid troubles, a rich press tradition”, *Committee to Protect Journalists*. August 15, 2005, <https://cpj.org/reports/2005/08/neumann-sidebar/>.

<sup>41</sup> Deborah Cook, “Adorno, Foucault and critique.” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 39, no. 10 (2013): 965–981, 975, doi: 10.1177/0191453713507016.

<sup>42</sup> Cook, “Adorno, Foucault and critique,” 977.

telling, is guided by the idea that he needs to tell the truth because it is his duty, and he is morally and even spiritually bound to do it for the betterment of the community and society.

With such actions being done by the Philippine press, they pose a threat to the state as an institution since:

[b]eing a *parrhesiast* is a threat to institutions because he/she challenges the truth which is essential for the existence and survival of the society and of the state. All societies and states and their institutions are tied on certain principles that are tied to the truth. [...] Hence, it is expected that they may react violently to the one who has the courage to tell the truth that challenges their current “regime of truth.”<sup>43</sup>

When the Duterte administration reacts violently to the Philippine press who challenges its regime of truth, it becomes a natural reaction which can be taken from Foucault's conception of governing. Having three types, it is more suitable to have governing as the “science of governing well,” which is seen as an establishment of an economy<sup>44</sup> at the level of the state as a whole.<sup>45</sup> Since Duterte acts as the head of the government, he sees fit to regulate and control the society he rules over by suppressing and repressing anyone who dares challenge the way he rules. The Philippine press, as a *parrhesiast*, provides a critical stance against the regime of truth of Duterte. To put it in the words of Foucault, *parrhesia* is “a technique in counter-balancing” where

[i]t is a counter-balance to the deployment of power in the dynamics of power-relations of institutions because someone has the courage to check the utilization of power over individuals, particularly, if it is excessive, by telling the truth that challenges institutions. [*Parrhesia*] is a counter-balance, or counter-conduct, to the politics of truth. [...] The *parrhesiast* may introduce revolutionary discourses that are tied to the truth by criticizing society and its institutions as well as the prejudices and norms that prevailed in the society and its dominant institutions, [...] or may also put into question the current “regimes of truth” using moral discourses and even challenge the prevailing truth and its influence on social situations and their strategies, techniques, processes and procedures.<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

From the discussion, it has been argued that, indeed, present-day journalism in the Philippines practices *parrhesia*. As an institution, the Philippines upholds the journalistic obligation to objective truth-telling against Duterte and his machinery of disinformation and lies found in the many faux news outlets in social media. Despite numerous attacks and the threat of being endangered, the Philippine press continues to fight for the truth as espoused by their moral obligation to truth-telling. Foucault's *parrhesia* provides the characteristics of a truth-teller while at the same is presenting the need for critique as a form of resistance against the prevalence of fascism embedded in society. A ruling regime of truth must be subjected to critique especially if the institution that controls it becomes oppressive.

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<sup>43</sup> Christian Bryan Bustamante, “Truth-Telling, Caring, and Governing: The Significance of Foucault's Interpretation of Parrhesia to Governance,” *SCIENTIA: The International Journal on the Liberal Arts* 8, no.1 (2019): 1–15, 11, url:<https://scientia-sanbada.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/v8n1.03-Bustamante.pdf>.

<sup>44</sup> This refers to the “regulation and control of the inhabitants, wealth, and conduct of all and each.” Bustamante, “Truth-telling, Caring, and Governing,” 4.

<sup>45</sup> Bustamante, “Truth-telling, Caring, and Governing,” 4.

<sup>46</sup> Bustamante, “Truth-telling, Caring, and Governing,” 11.

While an institution adheres to a specific way of governing, the truth-teller must act to counter-balance discourses imposed by dominant institutions by having a critical perspective of society. Journalism in the Philippines under the Duterte administration attempts to provide a critical take on the rampant disinformation wars in social media by practicing *parrhesia*. Despite the threat of danger in speaking the truth to power, the press continues to do so as it is their moral obligation. In telling the truth, they provide a critique against the ruling regime of the truth of Duterte and, in turn, try to awaken the masses who have been blindly following and enduring an oppressive regime.

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