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Courageous women in media: Marcos and censorship in the Philippines

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Abstract

When Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos declared Martial Law in 1972, press freedom became the first casualty in the country that once boasted of being the 'freest in Asia'. Printing presses, newspaper offices, television and radio stations were raided and padlocked. Marcos was especially fearful of the press and ordered the arrest of journalists whom he charged with conspiring with the 'Left'. Pressured into lifting martial law after nearly 10 years, Marcos continued to censor the media, often demanding publishers to sack journalists whose writing he disapproved of. Ironically, he used the same 'subversive writings' as proof to Western observers that freedom of the press was alive and well under his dictatorship. This article looks at the writings of three female journalists from the *Bulletin Today*. The author examines the work of Arlene Babst, Ninez Cacho-Olivares, and Melinda de Jesus and how they traversed the dictator's fickle, sometimes volatile, reception of their writing. Interviewed is Ninez Cacho-Olivares, who used humour and fairy tales in her popular column to criticise Marcos, his wife, Imelda, and even the military that would occasionally 'invite' her for questioning. She explains an unwritten code of conduct between Marcos and female journalists that served to shield them from total political repression.

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