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A Question of Relativity: The Role of the News Media in Shaping the View of Women in Asian Political Dynasties

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Abstract

It is one of Asia's ironies that it has consistently produced more women heads of government than any other region in the world, yet there is little evidence that this power has helped to enable the ordinary Asian woman in any significant way.

This study attempts to find some explanations for this paradox. It examines the forces that have helped to propel a number of women onto center-stage in the Asian political theater and, in particular, the role of the news media in this process. It explores the link between media portrayal of the dramatic rise to political power of some Asian women, the values inherent in journalistic commentary on their political governance, and its potential impact on the way women and leadership are perceived in much of Asia.

Looking broadly at Asian women political leaders, but in particular at newspaper coverage of former President Aquino of the Philippines and President Kumaratunga of Sri Lanka, this study explores three main themes:

- The 'mediation process' in the media portrayal of widows and daughters of assassinated Asian leaders and the way in which public opinion may have been 'guided' towards perceiving them as the rightful heirs to political power;
- How journalists have presented widowhood and bereavement as potent political assets;
- The gender stereotyping of these women in newspapers which has promoted and perpetuated prejudice and perhaps shaped public expectation of them as politicians.

The study ends by pointing to several important questions that arise from the research that may have far-reaching significance on the prospects for women in politics in Asia.

Introduction

Of the women elected as heads of state or heads of government worldwide, many have risen to power in South and East Asia. Many of them have emerged in countries where women are still a long way away from achieving any real measure of equality of opportunity, and where there are no legal protection of their rights.

Less than 1 percent of the world's Presidents or Prime Ministers are women although women have been appointed or elected in several European Union and Latin American countries as well as Bermuda, Canada, Central African Republic, Dominica, Haiti, Israel, Latvia, Liberia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands Antilles, New Zealand, Poland, Rwanda, Turkey and Yugoslavia.

Interestingly though, the dominance of women at the top politically is more evident in the countries of South and East Asia than anywhere else in the world. The world's first woman to rise to her country's highest political office was Sirimavo Bandaranaike in Sri Lanka, then Ceylon, in 1960. She was followed by Indira Gandhi in neighboring India six years later and Golda Meir in Israel in 1969. Not until 1979, nineteen years after Bandaranaike, did a woman emerge as head of government in a European nation, with the election of Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom. It was not until June 1984 that the US edition of Time Magazine felt it was appropriate to ask the question: 'Why Not a Woman?' as a cover story on the possible nominations of Geraldine Ferraro or Dianne Feinstein as potential running mates to US presidential hopeful Walter Mondale.

Bandaranaike and Gandhi have been followed by Corazon Aquino in the Philippines (1986), Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan (1988 & 1993), Khaleda Zia in Bangladesh (1991), Chandrika Kumaratunga in Sri Lanka (1994) and Sheikh Hasina in Bangladesh (1996). Waiting in the wings are Megawati Sukarnoputri, Deputy President of Indonesia and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, Deputy President of the Philippines.

Across Asia, many other women are heading movements aimed at political change - Aung San Suu Kyi as leader of the Opposition National League for Democracy in Myanmar, Sonia Gandhi of India's Congress(I) Party, Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, leader of Malaysia's National Justice Party and most recently, Begum Kulsoom Nawaz Sharif in Pakistan. These women are also all widows, wives or daughters of political men.

This pattern goes against the assumption that women in the developed world should expect that their chances of attaining high political office are considerably higher than their counterparts in the still developing world.

Equality before the law and equality of opportunity are prized as the two most important prerequisites for the journey towards equal rights for women. Legislation which enshrined such rights was enacted in one form or another by most of the developed countries of Europe and North America in the latter half of the 20th century. Vehicles to take women towards the road of equal opportunity have been mobilized in many parts of the developed western world and while they are slow in pace, the road is long and the terrain remains tough, there is evidence that the journey has begun. If we were to measure the progress of women by the number who achieve the highest political office, it would appear that Asia is leading the way. The reality is different.

The most striking common element of all the women who have so far achieved the highest political office in Asian countries is that (with the exception of Indira Gandhi) they all succeeded immediately after, or within a short period of the violent assassinations or executions, of their husbands or fathers - in some cases both.

While political dynasties or the attempt to create them are not limited to Asian societies - witness the Kennedy, Bush, Gore, Clinton and Dole families in the United States or the Pitts, Churchills and Astors in Britain - succeeding to political office through bereavement (the widow's mandate) is a phenomenon which is most evident in Asia. There are few precedents or parallels in Europe or North America - and only two instances in Latin America.¹

Asia as a region is a disparate mass of cultures, languages, religions and historical experiences. Yet, the elevation of women to political leadership after bereavement transcends these differences. The phenomenon has occurred in a widely Christian country like the Philippines, in Islamic nations like Indonesia, Bangladesh and Pakistan, in a predominantly Hindu country like India and in largely Buddhist Sri Lanka.

The trend also defies widely different political systems, from multi-party democratic India to more 'predictable' two-party states like Bangladesh, from Pakistan's Westminster-model elections where votes are cast for a party and the leader of the winning party assumes the office of chief executive, to the Philippines' American-style presidential vote which elects a specific person for the top job.

In seeking to explain this phenomenon, one factor may be the role of the news media. One of the major forces of socialization is the way in which the media shapes our perceptions, our expectations and our aspirations. Journalists, as powerful intermediaries in politics, furnish us with one of the lenses through which we view the world, a 'reality' with which we attempt to understand what surrounds us.

These lenses are inevitably focused in a particular way and they prime us to evaluate public figures in certain ways and not in others, with the end result that some views remain out of our collective vision. The shaping, packaging and presentation of women in politics by the mass media is one area in which it is vital to consider not just the messages that are received, but the longer term impact of these messages.

This paper aims to look at both the values that are inherent in the reporting of Asian women leaders, and the public expectations which may result from these reports. It concludes that, while there are analogous patterns in the coverage of women leaders in the East and West, particular content categories emerge that are culture-specific to Asia.

Moreover having a woman as supreme political ruler or as part of the political decision-making process does not necessarily reflect the status of women or the empowerment of women in those societies. The countries of South and East Asia, with their remarkable geographical, political, ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity, have provided more examples of this phenomenon than any other region. This paper firstly examines the position of Asian women in elected office then goes on to consider the ways in which women leaders have been framed by the news media and the role of gender stereotypes.

Theoretical Framework

There is already a body of academic work which suggests that women politicians across the world are stereotypically seen as mothers, housewives or sex objects and that none of these roles is viewed as compatible with political leadership (Sapiro 1993)².

Judy Motion has also advanced the theory, using New Zealand women politicians as an example, that when women do attain political power they often use a 'strategy of historicism' to account for their positions within a framework of archetypal and character ideals which fulfil the notion of destiny, duty or devotion (Motion 1999)³. But few studies have so far looked from a feminist perspective at the character ideals that inform the media portrayal of women leaders in Asia.

A comparative study of the French and British media between 1981 and 1994 (Freedman, 1997) has found that female politicians in both countries are still portrayed in terms of classic stereotypes of femininity, which is perceived as incompatible with the exercise of political power. The research shows that the presentation of female politicians is intimately linked to an inter-related set of political, social and media representations which casually categorized women politicians in relation to traditional myths of masculinity and femininity. Not surprisingly, the same pattern, though somewhat less subtle, emerges in a study of the Asian media.

Scope

For this study, I have examined in-depth, local press coverage of the election campaigns, the immediate post-election period and ongoing reports covering the time in office of former President Aquino of the Philippines and of President Kumaratunga of Sri Lanka. I have taken into account of political orientation by looking at newspapers which supported them as presidential candidates, those which opposed them and some which appeared to be neutral.

In the Philippines, I examined issues of Bulletin Today, Manila Bulletin, Veritas, Manila Times, The Globe, The Independent, Newsday, The Star, The Chronicle, The Inquirer and Mr. & Ms. from August 1985 to March 2000.

For coverage of Kumaratunga, I examined the Sri Lankan papers, The Island and The Sunday Island as well as the Indian papers The Hindu and The Times of India, both of which are widely available in Sri Lanka. I looked at reports from Kumaratunga's pre-election campaign in 1993, to those covering her first term of office from 1994, through to contemporary reports of her re-election in December 1999.

These two sets of publications constituted a randomly selected group of popular tabloid and more serious broadsheets as well as political weeklies. In addition, I looked more broadly at some of the coverage of Aquino and Kumaratunga in the international press during the same period.

There is clearly much scope for extending the research to look more closely at process for variables that might present in a quantitative examination of the gender of the major decision makers and agenda setters in the newspapers and periodicals concerned and of the writers of the articles. This paper, however, uses a more qualitative approach and is concerned rather with issues of gender image, representation and portrayal of these political leaders.

It examines the types of messages that are transmitted by the writers of the articles and asserts that gender-based stereotypes continue to be reinforced in the media, even when reporting on women who occupy the highest possible political office. In so doing, it suggests, there is scope for further research into the possibility that journalists have diminished the chances of success of other women aspiring for political office in Asia.

To a large extent, many Asian women have achieved high political office because of the strong feudal, tribal and hierarchical traditions and the hereditary social structures which exist in their countries. These range from India's caste system and Pakistan's feudal landlords to Sri Lanka's strong Buddhist dependent-arising culture and the Marian culture of the predominantly Roman Catholic Philippines.

But at the same time, it appears that these established structures have been reinforced by a compliant media which has presented these women as extensions, possessions and mirrors of the men who fathered or were married to them. By focusing on biology and family relationships, the media appears to view the nation as the home writ large and the ruler's job an extension of the caring role of mother, wife and daughter. It is worth exploring whether in so doing, it has negatively shaped the perceptions of women in politics and the public's expectation of them.

The evidence in the media both in Asia and further afield, is that the expectations of these women as leaders are linked to their gender stereotypes. This has placed them in an unfair position in relation to their male counterparts. The result is, on the one hand, the emergence of strong, authoritative women in seemingly unconventional political roles and on the other, the reassertion by the media of motherhood and other traditional familial relationships.⁴

Key findings

There is a notable polarity in the language used to describe these political women with that of their male opponents. Several themes emerge in the way the women are portrayed:

- a predominance of adjectives which focus on their feminine, caring side;
- a preoccupation with bereavement, grief and their plight as widows or bereaved daughters;
- an attribution to them of maternity, purity and saintliness and an association with these of weakness;
- a focus on their physical appearances, their clothes and hairstyles;
- the importance attached to their parental and marital status;
- the down-playing, deliberate or otherwise, of their political accomplishments and attributes, in stark contrast to the language used to describe male politicians, where personal status and accomplishments are highlighted as reasons for election.

Michael Fathers, in a Time essay entitled "Widows and Daughters" demonstrates eloquently the fact that the performance of women in leadership is judged by harsher evaluative criteria than men in the same position. He bemoans the fact that Asia's female political leaders have not all been a success at the job. That can be said of a whole pantheon of political leaders, men and women, but it seems that Fathers expect women to perform differently to men, imposing on them tougher standards of delivery.

"Mothers, goddesses, virgins – the symbols have always been there. Yet in 20th century Asia, women have also gained positions of political leadership, usually after some catastrophe befell a politician husband or father. And though the rise of a long downtrodden sex is to be applauded, Asia's women have not all been good rulers. Nor has the persistence of family dynasties been good for democracy."⁵

The facts suggest otherwise.

Begum Khaleda Zia restored democracy to Bangladesh in 1991 after a decade of military rule under General Ershad. She became the country's fourth Prime Minister and the first in its history to complete her term in office. Two of the three Prime Ministers who served before her had been assassinated while

in office. Khaleda Zia brought martial law to an end and restored democracy to Bangladesh. Her successor, Sheikh Hasina, was elected by popular vote in 1996.

Benazir Bhutto was voted into office in democratic elections in 1988, ending eleven years of military rule in Pakistan. She won a simple majority on pledges to improve relations with India, re-enter the Commonwealth as a democratic nation and, without losing the support of the army, reduce her country's involvement in Afghanistan. She was dismissed in 1990 and democratically re-elected in 1993.

Since Chandrika Kumaratunga took office in Sri Lanka in 1994 she has made more effort than any previous leader to try to effect a political resolution to the long-standing conflict between the country's two main ethnic groups. She has proposed a devolution plan which would decentralize power and give greater autonomy to the country's provincial governments, which in turn, would go some way to resolving Tamil grievances.

Cory Aquino's election in the Philippines in 1986 brought to an end an entrenched plutocracy presided over by Ferdinand Marcos for 21 years, more than half of that under martial law. Aquino's election reintroduced and has left a legacy of democracy in the Philippines. Since she stepped down in 1992, there have been two other Presidents, both elected democratically.

Yet, Richard Halloran, writing in the *Houston Chronicle* says of the women who lead or have led Asian countries:

"They lead nations that, 50 years after independence from British colonialism, are struggling to find way to govern themselves and to develop their economies. The women can be rank opportunists, no more or less democratic than their male competitors and have occasionally resorted to strong-arm tactics. They should not be seen as leaders of movements for women's rights, because they have come to power through expedience, not principle."⁶

In London, John Elliot, in the *New Statesman*, is not as blunt in his dismissal. What is interesting, however, is the importance (or lack of) that he attributes to the restoration of democracy by many of these leaders.

"The (Asian) dynasties provided transitional leadership as their countries developed political systems – more often than not to replace colonial rule. Yet while they have helped to build or restore democracy at some stage of their country's history, they have subsequently failed to do much more."⁷

He goes on:

"All these individuals gain early experience living among politicians and watching their late fathers or husbands at work, but few are effective for long and even fewer develop any serious interest or ability in formulating and implementing policy."

This, in my view, is an example of the harsher evaluative criteria that are used to assess the performances of women leaders. It begs the question: Would the restoration of democracy have been dealt with in such a dismissive way had it been achieved by a male leader?

Aquino & Kumaratunga

In order to examine the ways in which the media perceived and presented former President Aquino of the Philippines and President Kumaratunga of Sri Lanka, it is helpful to look at the circumstances in which they achieved power in their respective countries.

Cory Aquino was thrust onto the political stage of the Philippines in August 1983, just days after her husband, aspiring politician Benigno 'Ninoy' Aquino was gunned down soon after his plane touched down at Manila Airport. Of patrician stock, (she hails from one of the country's powerful land-owning families and both her grandfathers and her father had been politically active) she had been educated in the United States and had just returned home in 1954 for graduate studies when she married Ninoy Aquino. He was a campaigning journalist who would later vehemently oppose the rule of Ferdinand Marcos.

Ninoy Aquino was imprisoned by Marcos in 1972 but after seven years was allowed to leave the Philippines for medical treatment in the United States. The family settled in Massachusetts, where Ninoy Aquino took up research fellowships at Harvard and at M.I.T., the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He decided to return to Manila when Marcos announced that he would allow free elections in 1984.

The shocking, almost surgical, assassination of Ninoy Aquino in front of the world's media in 1983 unleashed an extraordinary wave of popular energy. It compounded and coalesced widespread dissatisfaction with Marcos and mobilized Filipinos, in an unprecedented way, to demand political change.

Many anti-Marcos political activists looked to Cory Aquino as a symbol of strength, as someone who had paid the ultimate price for daring to defy the dictator. They saw in her someone who could mobilize the electorate and they focused their energies on promoting her as 'the survivor', charged with a mandate to assume the mantle and continue her dead husband's efforts to restore democracy to the Philippines.

In Sri Lanka, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga was voted in for a second term as President in December 1999, the third person in her family to rise to the highest political office in the land. Both her parents had served as Prime Ministers, her father Solomon Bandaranaike from 1956 to 1959 and her mother Sirimavo Bandaranaike from 1960 to 1965 and then again from 1970 to 1977. Sirimavo Bandaranaike took charge of the country following the assassination of her husband Solomon, a victim of Sri Lanka's ongoing ethnic strife between its Tamil and Sinhala communities.

Solomon Bandaranaike had paid the ultimate price of boldly asserting during his election campaign that the future of Sri Lanka, then Ceylon, was not as a pluralistic nation, but instead, one in which the Sinhala-Buddhist majority would dominate on the premises of language and religion.

Sixty thousand people, including a Prime Minister, a leader of the Opposition and several other senior politicians have died as a result of the 17-year-long conflict. President Kumaratunga herself narrowly escaped an assassination attempt during the election in December 1999. A bomb blast in Colombo at her final campaign rally has left her virtually blind in one eye. The issues of ethnic strife, terrorism and the negative effects of decades of chauvinism remain at the forefront of Kumaratunga's challenges as President.

Kumaratunga's accession to the Presidency is not an unusual event in itself. She grew up in a highly politicized household, studied political science and like her parents before her, joined the ruling Sri Lankan Freedom Party. She is a former director of the country's Land Reform Commission and chief minister of the Western Provincial Council. She married a fellow politician. Like in South Asia's other well-known political dynasty, where Indira Gandhi is said to have learn about matters of state at the feet of her father, India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga gained political knowledge at the hustings at a very early age.⁸

She became President in 1994, with what was then the largest landslide victory in any democracy in history. Her main rival for the Presidency was Gamini Dissanayake, until he was assassinated three weeks before the election. His supporters immediately drafted in Srimathi Dissanayake, his widow, to take his place. In a bold assertion of what was deemed important, the poll prompted one journalist to pen the headline:

"Sri Lanka Election: A Battle of Widows – and Dynasties."⁹

There was no reference to the policies or manifestoes of either party.

Feminine Stereotypes

Dominant gender stereotypes tend to depict men/masculinity as “strong, independent, worldly, aggressive, ambitious, logical, and rough” and women/femininity as the opposite: “weak, dependent, passive, naïve, illogical, gentle and unambitious.”¹⁰

Models of gender tend to be binary in nature, depicting male/female at opposite ends of a spectrum, as being mutually exclusive or oppositional. Through this either/or lens, women are not simply different from men: “woman” is defined by what is “not man” and characteristics of femininity are those that are inappropriate to, or contradict masculinity.¹¹

This is especially so in the long-regarded 'male' world of politics. For many women who achieve positions of power, expectations of what are considered appropriately 'feminine' behavior are often in conflict with qualities regarded as necessary for successful leadership. In short, as Peterson and Runyan argue, gender stereotypes suggest that appropriately feminine women (passive, dependent, domestic; engaged in meeting private, familial needs) are by definition inappropriate political agents (active, autonomous, public oriented; engaged in meeting collective, rather than personal needs).¹²

These expectations are clear from the media coverage of both Aquino and Kumaratunga. The language of gender stereotyping is evident in the media reports of both women as they took firm positions on particular issues, behaving in ways traditionally viewed as 'masculine.' For both of them, it seems the universal underlying theme on which they were judged was their womanhood – its perceived weakness and shortcomings.

This preoccupation with gender and the expectations therefrom are expressed eloquently in an article in the Filipino oppositionist 'Newsday' on Aquino's address to the nation on the occasion of her fourth anniversary in office.

“...Where the nation expected to hear from the embattled leader an elevating message to nurture and nourish back its faith in her graft-ridden and unstable government, she obliged with an unusually pugnacious speech that would have shamed anyone ***born and reared above the gutter...***”(my italics).¹³

It is interesting to note that in the speech Aquino did not use coarse language or any other form of speech or behavior which might objectively be described as coming from 'the gutter'. What she did was bluntly outline some of the main problems facing the nation with firm reassurances that she would be tough and decisive in dealing with them.

This is a demonstration of what Kathleen Hall Jamieson identifies as one of the classic double-binds affecting women in leadership, in this case the dilemma of 'gender appropriate language' and management effectiveness.¹⁴

In similar vein, Sri Lanka's 'Sunday Island,' reporting on Kumaratunga's January 2000 Address to the Nation, described the President as having 'held the floor for over three hours in an aggressive mood.'¹⁵ Likewise, another paper demonstrated the paper's surprise at the President's ability to effectively counter the criticisms of her government:

“Kumaratunga has become a skilled practitioner in the art of throwing a verbal punch...”¹⁶

During Aquino's election campaign, when she began to display signs of her own political skills and competence, journalists - and not only Filipino journalists - expressed their surprise. One report, from the international news agency, Reuters, opined:

“If Cory has come out of a chrysalis in this election, it isn't as a butterfly in a yellow dress but as someone with a great deal more guts and nerve than you might have expected.”¹⁷

Aquino was clearly a victim of another double bind, that of femininity/competence (Jamieson¹⁸) in which the media finds females astonishing if they are seen, at the same time, to be feminine and decisive, or tough and caring. Her election prompted the Filipino media to revise the relationship between the private and political, between women and power.

There appears to be an element of surprise in the media that as female politicians, Kumaratunga and Aquino departed from the expected and 'appropriate' behavior of women, wandering instead into the realm of being adversarial, behavior normally associated with and expected of men and male politicians.

In other words, women talking tough – 'menspeak' - was clearly confusing as it challenged the traditional notion of femininity as soft and acquiescing and that of masculinity as powerful and controlling. This notion has been explored widely by many social scientists who suggest that when women step outside their accustomed roles, news coverage often illustrates a reluctance to accept this displacement of expected patterns and attempts to focus on the traditionally 'feminine.'

Inherent in this is a presumption that the performance of women politicians should be assessed within terms dictated by their gender. These generally require that they should be caring, nurturing and nourishing. Feminine identity is inextricably linked to cultural expectations that motherhood is the primary role of women and that traits associated with political efficacy, such as aggression, authority and toughness are unfeminine. Journalistic expectations are such that when the women deviated from these perceptibly 'appropriate' responses, it was significant enough to be worthy of report.

In an in-depth story in Asiaweek on Kumaratunga published three months after the attack on her life in December 1999, Ron Gluckman, in an article entitled 'Life Under Siege' writes:

"The civil war is but one of the challenges this *fairy-tale* (my italics) president has had to face since she swept into the office she seemed destined to rule from birth. Indeed, few political leaders in the world can match her political lineage. Or her personal sacrifice."¹⁹

Gluckman's article romanticizes further and in so doing reinforces the theory (Gidengil and Everitt 2000)²⁰ that the speech used to describe female politicians is generally more highly charged and emotionally-laden than that used to describe their male counterparts. Looking into Kumaratunga's personal life and her choice of partner, he writes:

"She found a partner in dashing matinee idol Vijaya Kumaratunga; they wed in 1978. The handsome movie star quickly became a popular politician..."²¹

Her willfulness is deemed worthy of mention by another journalist:

"A strong-willed personality, Kumaratunga was a seasoned campaigner, drawing mammoth attendances at every election rally, where party activists proclaimed that the hand which rocks the cradle will once again rule the country."²²

In the same way, Manila's Bulletin Today, proudly presented Aquino's candidacy for the Presidency alongside what it deemed the failure of American women to achieve comparable positions.

"Cory's rise into public life even surpassed any that had ever happened in America. The United States has been a republic since 1776...yet it has never nominated a woman candidate for president."²³

After an involved and detailed list of the women who had aspired to or achieved public positions in the US, starting with the first woman mayor in Kansas in 1887 and ending with Geraldine Ferraro's vice-presidential candidacy in 1984, the article triumphantly concluded:

"Americans felt then, as now, that they cannot yet feel at ease on a woman's ability to steer their country both in times of stability and turbulence."

Yet, it goes on to ask at the end of the piece:

"Can the Filipinos repose trust and confidence in a woman president?"²⁴

The (male) authors of the article present their case by closely examining on behalf of their readers the personalities of the two protagonists, (referring to them as 'Marcos' and 'Cory') then they list the most crucial electoral issues, concluding:

'...The problems require both decisiveness, an ability to make a firm and stable solution to a problem and experience. If Cory is elected, can she address herself to the immediate solution of these problems with competence and firmness?'

If there was any doubt as to what lay at the root of their concerns, these are soon dissipated. In bold masculinist terms, the two writers of the article get to the heart of the matter in the final paragraph, telling their readers:

"Voting for (Aquino) is risky not only because she is a woman, and a woman is known for her fickleness, changing her position capriciously and sometimes irrationally, but also because Cory has actually shown a flip-flopping tendency, changing her position on several key issues of the campaign too often."

Aquino was clearly judged by some journalists on the basis of her gender long before she became President of the Philippines.

The higher competence threshold and harsher evaluative criteria used by the media to judge the performance of female leaders is further displayed in this description of Aquino after the election. Even as she liberalized the political atmosphere in the Philippines after over a decade of martial law, attracted former dissidents to her administration, restored the writ of habeas corpus, set political detainees free and opened talks with Muslim rebels and Communist leaders, the Philippine Panorama told its readers:

"Internally, she has not changed, those who know her say of our *little* (my italics) president."²⁵

The term 'little' was not about physical stature, but a pejorative which suggests that even when women achieve senior political office, the media will often portray them in a way that belittles them. Of her plans for economic reform, the article explains to its readers that 'the Cory government' shows an indication of 'a woman's hand in the economy...a woman's innate right to order our lives.'²⁶

According to Peterson and Runyan, traditional religious belief systems and institutions play an important role in perpetuating images of women that deny them leadership positions.²⁷ Women, they say, are either portrayed as the source of evil or the model of saintliness.

A.O. Flores, in the Bulletin Today, is blunt in his warning to his readers of the danger of having a female President of the Philippines. In an article entitled, "Woman Power", he acknowledges the fact that women have had power historically, but warns his readers that it has always been used negatively, in this case as a temptress:

"Woman power can either be for good or for evil. Woman power has always been with us since Eve. In the guise of woman power, feminine guile prevailed upon Adam to bite of the forbidden fruit."²⁸

Images of motherhood, the widely-perceived 'natural' and primary role of women, are often used to describe women who achieve political power. In Aquino's case, the vulnerability associated with her womanhood and widowhood was seen by one journalist as a way of explaining her perceived impregnability:

"Perhaps her mother-image saved her. To hit Cory is to assault motherhood, widowhood, womanhood: who dares to be the first to throw stones at her sincerity, her goodness, her fragility? Yes, fragility..."²⁹

Some elements of the media were blunt in their dismissal of Aquino's ability to provide real leadership. An article in the Manila Times seven months after her election was perhaps the most scathing of all, the criticisms based largely on her gender. Under the caption, "A Woman in a Man's Job", the writer predicated that her administration was 'bound to fail' as she was unprepared for the job.³⁰

Teddy Beningo, one-time press secretary to Aquino, writing as a columnist in The Star, after leaving the President's office, offered his readers valuable insight into how his former boss was viewed by those who continued in her service.

"Her closest advisers and collaborators now know her character well and pace themselves like members of a family drilled to accept that Mother knows best."³¹

While Benigno saw her as 'Mother', Larry Sipin, columnist in the Manila Times thought of her as another matriarchal figure. In July 1991, as Aquino was nearing the end of her term of office, he wrote emotionally of her valedictory State of the Nation address, referring to her as 'Tita', (Tagalog for 'auntie'), while the President, interestingly, uses the generic 'man' in reference to herself:

'...Tita concluded her speech thus – “As God is my witness, I honestly did the best I could...no more can be asked of any man.’³²

Aquino, consciously or unconsciously, was conforming to the long-standing historical tendency and the half a century old feminist view (de Beauvoir 1952)³³ that many women see themselves as defined and differentiated with reference to men. In spite of achieving the highest political office, Aquino appeared to feel it necessary to play down her female persona, in order to be more authoritative and 'statesmanlike'.

Housewives in the House

Women politicians often face the challenge that their domestic roles are seen as antithetical to public-sphere activities and their performances are judged firstly as (weak) women and then as politicians. Being a housewife is accorded low status by society, for long seen as soft and unskilled work compared to the work usually done (by men) outside the home. Even when women achieve positions of political power, they appear unable to liberate themselves from this widely-held masculinist view of the role of a housewife.

An article in the anti-Marcos (and therefore pro-Aquino) *Mr & Ms*, commenting on her performance on a popular television show, expressed it thus:

“She was poised without being snobby; proper without being coy; spontaneous without being impulsive; natural without being anxious – ***one’s everyday Filipino housewife*** (my italics) without being dreary.”³⁴

The (derogatory) housewife imagery was also used to describe Aquino’s decision-making abilities and to explain, some would say apologize for, her choice of those she selected for key positions.

“In her choice of advisers and associates, she has been constrained by her own background ***as a housewife*** (my italics) to depend on a relatively closed, narrow circle of people she has known just before, during and since the uprising.”³⁵

Alex Dacanay, writing in the *Philippine Panorama*, (‘A day in the life of President Cory Aquino’) confessed to his readers:

“It is hard to accept that the kind, even-tempered Cory could ever be more than the ordinary housewife she has professed to be for the past 28 years before Ninoy was killed.”³⁶

The housewife theme transcended geography. Ten thousand miles away, the *U S News & World Report* decried Aquino’s performance in similar vein.

“At high levels in the Bush administration, Saint Cory, the housewife Joan of Arc, has been decanonized.”³⁷

Similarly, when, in the eyes of some in the Filipino media, the Aquino administration failed to deliver the goods, the President was exempt from blame, because, as *Mr & Ms* put it:

“The people knew that the simple housewife would govern not through her own expertise and know-how, but through the direction, advice and management of close advisers.”³⁸

The cult of appearance

The cult of appearance haunts women politicians in Asia, as elsewhere. Even as Aquino was sworn-in as President, inheriting a bankrupt treasury and Central Bank, an economy in tatters, high inflation, \$25 billion in foreign debt and festering ethnic strife, journalist Vicente Foz felt it was important to tell his readers:

“Mrs Aquino wore a partly-embroidered orange dress. She read her speech without eyeglasses. She put them on later ... she betrayed traces of shyness and awkwardness acknowledging the cheers and chants of the crowd at the Club Pilipino.”³⁹

Three weeks later, the Manila Bulletin talked about "the smiles of the lipstickless Cory..."⁴⁰ ... and a full month after she had been sworn-in, in a blaze of local and international publicity, the paper still felt it was necessary to refer to her as "the lady President".⁴¹

I submit that this is more than a simply descriptive statement but a value-laden characterization, suggestive of particular qualities associated with women in political leadership.

The preoccupation with appearance is often at the expense of substance. Research in the United Kingdom (Peake, 1997)⁴² suggests that while media coverage of male politicians tends to be centered on their political record and experience, with women the focus is more often on their family situation and appearance, which unambiguously draws attention to the fact that they are 'women' politicians.

Ron Gluckman in Asiaweek, writes of the President of Sri Lanka:

"No matter how many saris Kumaratunga wraps around *her stocky frame* (my italics) and despite her public expression of the Buddhist faith, few see her as anything but a western outsider next to Mrs B. as her mother is known."⁴³

Pure and saintly...but weak

The Philippine Islands were colonized by Spain for nearly four hundred years and is today predominantly Marian (venerating the Virgin Mary) Roman Catholic. Some scholars (Elmendorf 1977, Stevens 1994)⁴⁴ have argued that in Latino societies there is a foundational cult of marianismo, the other face of machismo, which promotes a female spiritual superiority and which teaches that women are semi-divine, morally superior to and spiritually stronger than men. They suggest that marianismo is a pattern of attitudes and behavior which has a counterpart in machismo, the cult of virility.

In Buddhism, there is a theory that all phenomena are relational and contingent. Tessa Bartholomeusz argues that in Sri Lanka, moral conflict is contextualized in a pattern of relationships which views behavior and its effects as being continuous, dependent and without autonomy. This theory of dependent-arising is concerned with relationships and centers moral development around the understanding of responsibility, cooperation and compassion, all of which are considered motherly virtues.

She suggests that inasmuch as a central metaphor for dependent-arising is the mother, and inasmuch as this metaphor was invoked extensively in the election campaign, Kumaratunga, has become a living symbol of dependent-arising.⁴⁵

Both these theories provide cultural frameworks to help explain attempts by in the media to bestow both Aquino and Kumaratunga, with 'other-worldly', almost super-human characteristics which set them apart from other (male) politicians. Evelyn Stevens, in particular, has suggested that every society has a pattern of expectations based on real or imagined attributes of the individuals or groups who perform certain tasks.⁴⁶ With time, she argues, these attributes attain a validity which makes it possible to use them as criteria for value judgements quite unrelated to functional necessity.

When Kumaratunga gained her first victory in 1994, The Times of India described her as 'the daughter of the nation'⁴⁷ and as a 'messiah of peace'.⁴⁸

After she suffered the near loss of an eye after a terrorist attack during the 1999 election, Christopher Kremmer of Australia's Sydney Morning Herald wrote:

"Having become the only politician ever to survive a Black Tiger attack, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga has acquired an aura reserved for those politicians blessed by fate."⁴⁹

In the Philippines, just a week before the presidential election between Marcos and Aquino, one of the country's main dailies, the Bulletin Today engaged its readers in a lengthy, two-part discussion headed: "Is the Philippines ready for a woman president?"

Referring to Aquino as 'the 53-year old widow of slain Benigno Aquino' the article went on:

"The mystics among the Filipinos even considered Cory as the Messiah who came from heaven to deliver the country from Marcosian stranglehold. But to many of them, Cory simply represented the reincarnation of the man whom they believed could have successfully ended 20 years of

Marcos rule...It was not by design that Cory was anointed the bearer of the cross to dismantle the 20-year-old leadership of the country."⁵⁰

Under the headline, 'Lady of Legend', A. O. Flores, in the Bulletin Today, wrote of Aquino:

"...the lady whom the political gods have left with the task of carrying on her late husband's mission of peace and reconciliation....In Cory C. Aquino, the phoenix that fell is risen."⁵¹

Those that attributed credit to Aquino independent of her dead husband felt that they could only do so if she possessed something extra, suggesting that as a woman she had to have a superhuman saintliness as part of her armor. In paying tribute to Aquino's popularity, Teodoro Benigno in the Manila Bulletin wrote:

"Mrs Aquino, previously housewife and mother, united the opposition and overnight metamorphosed into a political phenomenon in her own right, a Joan of Arc in yellow battle tunic rousing the nation."⁵²

Women aspiring to public office and those that achieve leadership are often given less respect than men in the same position. Aquino's decision to take on Marcos captured the imagination of Filipino newspapers which dedicated many acres of newsprint to covering the campaigns of the two candidates. While the incumbent was almost always referred to as "President Marcos", "Ferdinand Marcos" or simply "Marcos", Aquino was more often than not referred to as "Cory". Some may suggest that it was an attempt to make a distinction between her and her husband Ninoy Aquino, but this practice carried on not just for the duration of the election campaign, but throughout her term as President.⁵³

Not in their own right – only as extensions of their husbands

It is clear that many Asian women rise to the challenge of political leadership after the death of a husband or father. But while this may be the trigger, for many of them, their performance after attaining power appears to remain linked to their widowhood and bereavement. There is evidence that the media is reluctant to give recognition to their ability to become effective leaders in their own right, independent of their familial connections.

Both Aquino and Kumaratunga were victims of this syndrome. As Aquino began her campaign for the presidency, a pattern emerged in the Filipino media of presenting her not as an individual in her own right, but more importantly as the widow of Ninoy Aquino and as someone who drew whatever strength she possessed from her dead husband's reputation and his 'schooling' of her while in exile.

One well-known Filipino commentator, Isabelo Crisostomo wrote:

"To the people she was Ninoy's replacement or substitute – some say his karma or resurrection...though death had eliminated her husband bodily from the climax of his epic struggle with Marcos, she had stepped into his shoes, as it were – she had taken his place bearing the magic of his name, the mystique and charisma of his persona."⁵⁴

In the same way, Lilia Ramos de Leon in the Manila Times observed that Aquino's popularity was primarily attributable to her "sincerity and purity" and to her status as the martyr's widow, but also because she is "the beloved Ninoy's widow"⁵⁵.

Newspapers have found much fascination with Kumaratunga's personal life, especially her situation as a woman twice bereaved through politics. Much of the Asian coverage of her has been dominated by references to her being the daughter of an assassinated Prime Minister and the widow of a murdered politician.

After seven people had died in a terrorist attack during the election campaign in Sri Lanka in 1994, one international news agency by-passed analysis of the ongoing sectarian conflict and instead chose to reduce the election to something far simpler, not even a contest between the leaders of the two main political parties, but simply between two women, presented as leftovers of their dead husbands:

"Tiger attack mars Sri Lanka's battle of widows" and goes on to refer to the leader of the United National Party as "widow Dissanayake" without once naming her party or mentioning her personal credentials as an active politician and successful lawyer.⁵⁶

Some studies have shown that there is some evidence that women in political leadership are often seen as symbols of unity, compromise, peace and reconciliation⁵⁷, yet vengeance, as a consequence of Kumaratunga's widowhood is posited by one newspaper as a reason for her strategy of entering into negotiations with the Tamils.

"A promising young Sinhalese politician who led the Mahajana Party and supported the accord was among the victims, murdered by his fanatical compatriots. Vijaya Kumaratunga's widow is determined to avenge his sacrifice with a more comprehensive peace offensive than Sri Lanka has ever known before."⁵⁸

Similarly, nearly three years after the death of Ninoy Aquino and of Cory Aquino being constantly in the national spotlight, Vicente Foz in the Bulletin Today felt it necessary to remind readers that the opposition presidential candidate was 'the widow of assassinated opposition leader, Benigno S. Aquino.'⁵⁹

This preoccupation with the cult of widowhood and the need to endow women with special goddess-like characteristics prompted Zaneeta Careem, in The Island newspaper, to write of President Kumaratunga:

"Later her husband Vijaya was killed by a terrorist. This paved the way for her to take to active politics to eradicate political violence and terrorism...Now she seemed to be the new messiah who would usher in an era of peace."⁶⁰

She goes on:

"Definitely destiny had beckoned to her. She is firm. Combined with a winsome smile which makes Mrs Kumaratunga such a draw wherever she is and wherever she speaks. She does not wear her sorrows on her sleeve but they do show on her face which is sometimes creased, but when she smiles she wins hearts with her openness."

In the eyes of the Filipino media, even Ferdinand Marcos, the man whose 20-year long iron-grip on the Philippines Aquino was challenging, saw the most formidable element of her candidature as the martyr's widow.

"He (Marcos) knew his opponent was not Cory alone but Cory and Ninoy and that concealed within that extremely feminine body of Cory was the distillation of the people's long pent-up passions, dreams, frustrations, suspended ambitions – and the surging tidal waves of sympathy and outrage generated by Ninoy's brutal assassination at the airport."⁶¹

On the day that she was voted in as President of the Philippines in February 1986, a front page article in Bulletin Today noted that "Mrs Aquino acted with poise amid a jostling crowd...who had come to see her cast her ballot."⁶²

Research by Robinson and Saint-Jean⁶³ suggest that stereotypes such as women of easy virtue spinster, and club women tend to obliterate the qualifications of female politicians by focusing on sexual characteristics instead of political capacities. They say that the 'woman of easy virtue' label is attached to and stigmatizes women politicians who do not play by the traditional male-oriented social rules.

In Asiaweek, Ron Gluckman refers to 'the current rumor sweeping Colombo, in fact, is that Kumaratunga is a wild swinger who parties late and who has secretly married.'

He goes on:

"She is currently suing one newspaper because it reported, as he recounts, that the President is 'sexually very immoral, she sleeps around with lots of men. She spends her time getting drunk, that's why she's late and she hardly works...she has a whale of a time.'⁶⁴

Kumaratunga says another paper reported suggested that she 'crept into some bachelor's birthday party at 12.30 midnight (sic), through the back gate...and I stayed there until 2.30 in the morning!"⁶⁵

Whether or not these allegations are true is less important than the fact that women like Kumaratunga are expected to adhere to a moral code of sexual abstinence not normally imposed on their male counterparts.

This difference in the evaluative criteria for women leaders can be seen in the way some Filipino journalists, even while expressing unabashed and unqualified admiration for Aquino, found it difficult to view her achievements as separate from her standing as the bereaved wife of Ninoy Aquino.

“Hard to believe, that she, by choice only used to bring the coffee to Ninoy and his stream of visitors. Today, Ninoy might well be known as Cory Aquino’s husband.”⁶⁶

Many journalists in the Philippines have described the Aquino Presidency as having been a failure. Some have tried to explain this by suggesting that the levels of corruption in Philippine society were such that any administration would have needed a much longer period in order to effect the organic changes that were necessary to make a difference.

While decrying Aquino for her inability to make the Philippines into another East Asian tiger, to lead the country into the heady realms of double-digit economic growth that its neighbors were enjoying, many have failed to acknowledge her achievement in toppling the Marcos dictatorship and restoring the country’s democratic institutions. Enormous advances, among them an independent judiciary, academic freedom and a liberated media, have laid the groundwork for Aquino’s successors, Presidents Ramos and Estrada to build on and have ultimately been responsible for making the Philippines a more attractive destination for foreign investment.

Human rights have also been a focus for the Kumaratunga Presidency in Sri Lanka.

In February 1996, two years after being voted in, Kumaratunga’s government formally presented to a parliamentary committee the draft of constitutional changes that would, if adopted, fundamentally transform the structure of the Sri Lankan state.

The devolution package proposed to change Sri Lanka from a unitary state in which central government exercises a preponderance of power to an indissoluble “union of regions” in which substantial responsibility will devolve to local authorities. The new federal structure is designed to satisfy the political aspirations of the Tamil community. It is without doubt the most conciliatory approach the country has ever seen in relation to its ongoing civil war.

Retired U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Howard Schaffer has paid tribute to Kumaratunga’s efforts in this regard. Writing in the University of California’s ‘Asian Survey’ he says:

“She has, as Prime Minister taken major steps to break the long stalemate on the ethnic issues...These initiatives had strengthened her claim in the presidential election to be the candidate of peace and ethnic harmony and helped her win strong support from war-weary Sinhalese as well as from Sri Lankan Tamil voters.”⁶⁷

He goes on:

“More than any of her predecessors she has recognized that the ethnic problem cannot be resolved absent a substantial accommodation of Tamil interests. She has invested tremendous political capital in trying to convince a skeptical electorate of this. She has also brought about laudable improvements in Sri Lanka’s human rights record.”

In spite of this, Kumaratunga is presented by the Sydney Morning Herald’s Christopher Kremmer as blood-thirsty and war-mongering. In an article entitled, “Goddess of War”, he writes:

“President Kumaratunga was elected to end a civil war, but is now bent on destroying the Tamil Tigers.”

He mentions her efforts towards peace in the penultimate paragraph of the article with a brief reference to the constitutional changes she has been pursuing relentlessly.

“Meanwhile, Kumaratunga’s ‘crash or crash through’ approach demands more military victories in 1998, plus a referendum aimed at pushing through constitutional changes.”⁶⁸

CONCLUSIONS

It is clear from this research that the news media constructs Asian women leaders in gender-specific and culture-specific ways. This study suggests that in South and East Asia, the media has presented women politicians as fulfilling expectations based on duty, destiny and devotion, fuelled by bereavement and widowhood, in the case of daughters or wives of assassinated political men. I would argue further that this phenomenon is reinforced by a strong tendency in Asian media towards promoting a gender-typed, dependent-arising 'Mother Goddess' image, which propels these women forward by valorizing their feminine traits, to the exclusion of their political experience or suitability for the job.

As a result, women of Asia may not have been helped, and may actually have been set back, by having women leaders, because of this presentation of them within the narrow confines of gender stereotypes. Nurturing, sacrificing, mothering, partnering, for many in the media, their 'natural' roles, have been presented as being at odds with the (tough) demands of leadership.

Narrative styles which, for example, refer to former President Aquino of the Philippines as "Joan of Arc" and talk of her "sincerity and purity" rather than her achievements in the areas of human rights, conciliation politics and democracy, or her growing up in a family where her father and both grandfathers were congressmen or senators, are good examples of this phenomenon.

So too are the many references to President Kumaratunga as 'a widowed mother of two' compared with the few that mention her other superlative credentials, her early socialization in a politicized household and her own experience as a practicing politician, her degrees in law and political science from London University and the Sorbonne and her ability to speak a variety of languages, both Indic and European. As a consequence, the evaluative criteria used to assess these women's abilities as leaders is not just informed by, but led by the narrative values used in the media.

While this study has explored this phenomenon in an Asian context, there are many parallels in some of the 'advanced' western liberal democracies. It is clearly a universal problem, to varying degrees. Across the world, it seems, women who vie for or achieve political power have to first overcome prejudice in the media against them as women before they can be taken seriously.

Power and leadership have for long been presented as the domain of men, supported by androcentric notions of strength, masculinity, competition and aggression. This has been the inevitable consequence of a self-perpetuating 'norm' in which for centuries men occupied positions of power to the exclusion of women, therefore only men were seen as able to do so effectively.

One consequence of this may have been the marginalization of women in political leadership. In 1997, only 13 percent of parliamentary seats and 7 percent of national cabinet seats worldwide, were held by women.⁶⁹ Internationally, men constitute over 90 percent of the senior positions in the United Nations, the foreign service, government bureaucracies, the judiciary, the military and business. As a result, women remain almost 'invisible' in the sphere of important decision-making.

That, in turn, raised several important questions that have arisen from the study and which deserve further examination:

Has the news media, as an active agent of social change, played a role in helping to catapult some Asian women into high political office in the latter half of the 20th century?

Are there ways in which this has helped to promote family politics and the creation of female political dynasties in Asia? What is the broader and further-reaching significance in the pattern of how the media has reported on Asian women leaders?

Have the chances of Asian women to achieve political power outside of political dynasties, been set back by narrow, prejudiced and patriarchal value-laden reporting of the women who have served and are serving as Prime Ministers and Presidents in Asia?

Endnotes

¹ Mireya Moscoso, whose husband served three terms as President of Panama and Isabel Martinez de Peron, who took over in Argentina after the death of Juan Peron.

² Sapiro, V., "The Uses of Symbolic Women: An Essay in honor of Murray Edelman" in *Political Communication*, Volume 10, 1993

³ Motion, Judy, "Politics as Destiny, Duty and Devotion" in *Political Communication, Volume 16, 1999*

⁴ In 1992, Hillary Clinton, an experienced corporate lawyer with an impressive record of public service work in education and a long-time advocate of children's rights, who, although then not seeking public office, was nevertheless pilloried in the press for her statement at one of her husband's presidential campaign meetings: "I suppose I could have stayed home and baked cookies and had teas." The statement was viewed by many in the media as a betrayal of women's traditional values.

In the same way, the former Canadian Health Minister, Judy LaMarsh in her memoirs, 'A Bird in a Gilded Cage' bemoaned the fact that in spite of her senior position in the Cabinet, she was perceived as a gender token, with reporters appearing to be more interested in her abilities as a cook, rather than with matter matters of state or as a politician. It was, in her view, a stark statement of the preoccupation with gender over competence as far as female politicians and the media are concerned.

More recently, Clinton, as a Senate candidate for New York State, has faced what Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Dean of the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, calls one of the classic 'double binds' peculiar to women in politics. This, she says, is a no-win situation which criticizes the woman who is too traditionally feminine as incompetent and the woman who is too competent as unfeminine. Political women, Jamieson says, must succeed at both.

⁵ *Time*, 23 August, 1999

⁶ *The Houston Chronicle*, 5 May 1996

⁷ *The New Statesman*, Nov 8, 1999

⁸ What is interesting in the Sri Lankan context is that Chandrika Kumaratunga came up from behind in 1992 and eclipsed the rising star of her politically-ambitious brother, Anura Bandaranaike, who had entered the political firmament over a decade before her and who had been viewed by many as his mother's normative heir-apparent. With his sister firmly in command of the party, Anura Bandaranaike, defected to the opposition, joining the United National Party in 1993.

It was clear that Sirimavo Bandaranaike had placed greater reliance on her kinsfolk after the assassination of her husband. In a critical commentary on the burgeoning family compact in Sri Lanka, *Time* magazine, in an article entitled "All in the Family", identified eleven members of the Prime Minister's extended family who had been appointed to political or military positions of power. Like India's Indira Gandhi, Bandaranaike was keen to bolster her position by closing ranks within the clan, though there is evidence that Bandaranaike exploited sibling rivalries among her children to ensure her own survival as head of the Party.

⁹ *The Seattle Times*, 26 October 1994

¹⁰ Lips, Hilary in *Women, Men and Power*, Mountain View, California, Mayfield Publishing, 1991, pg 19

¹¹ Peterson, V. Spike and Runyan, Anne Sisson in *Global Gender Issues*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1999

¹² *Ibid.*

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- ¹³ *Newsday*, 26 February, 1990 "A Voice from the Gutter", Juan Ponce Enrile
- ¹⁴ Jamieson, Kathleen Hall, *Beyond the Double Bind, Women and Leadership*, Oxford University Press, 1995
- ¹⁵ *Sunday Island*, 9 January, 2000
- ¹⁶ *The Island*, 2 January, 2000
- ¹⁷ Quoted from Lewis E. Gleeck, Jr., *President Aquino: Sainthood Postponed*, Loyal Printing Inc. Manila, Philippines, 1995
- ¹⁸ Jamieson, Kathleen Hall, *Beyond the Double Bind, Women and Leadership*, Oxford University Press, 1995
- ¹⁹ *Asiaweek*, 16 March, 2000
- ²⁰ Gidengil & Everitt, *Quoting the Leaders: Gender and Reported Speech in the 1993 Canadian Election Campaign*, Shorenstein Center on Press, Politics and Public Policy, May 2000
- ²¹ *Asiaweek*, 16 March, 2000
- ²² *Agence France Presse*, 18 August 1994
- ²³ *Bulletin Today*, January 31, 1986
- ²⁴ *Bulletin Today*, January 31, 1986
- ²⁵ *Philippine Panorama*, 30 January, 1986
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷ Peterson, V. Spike and Runyan, Anne Sisson in *Global Gender Issues*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1999
- ²⁸ *Bulletin Today*, 12 March 1986
- ²⁹ *The Independent*, 28 August, 1987 "Malacanang Blinked", by Julie Daza
- ³⁰ *Manila Times Sunday Magazine*, Alfonso Felix, September 7, 1986
- ³¹ *The Star*, September 12, 1990
- ³² *Manila Times*, September 24, 1991
- ³³ de Beauvoir, Simone, *The Second Sex*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1952
- ³⁴ *Mr & Ms.*, 23 August 1985
- ³⁵ *The Globe* 14 Dec 1989
- ³⁶ *Philippine Panorama*, 30 March 1986
- ³⁷ *U S News & World Report*, 30 July, 1990
- ³⁸ *Mr & Ms.*, as quoted in Lewis E. Gleeck, Jr., *President Aquino: Sainthood Postponed*, pg 224
- ³⁹ *Bulletin Today*, 26 February, 1986
- ⁴⁰ *Manila Bulletin*, 16 March, 1986
- ⁴¹ *Manila Bulletin*, 23 March, 1986
- ⁴² Peake, Lucy *Press Coverage of Women Candidates for the UK Parliament*, Workshop on Gender and Political Communication, European Consortium for Political Research, Bern, February 1997
- ⁴³ This can be seen in the coverage of aspiring women leaders in Asia as well. A profile of Wan Azizah wan Ismail, leader of Malaysia's Freedom Party in London's *Financial Times* on May 29, 1999 describes her thus:

"Wan Azizah wears no make-up except for eyeliner and puffy eyes are the only trace on her delicate face of the now tiring life that kept her out late at a political rally the night before and got her out of bed early in the morning to comfort her sick, six-year-old child before driving the older ones to school."

⁴⁴ Elmendorf, Mary, *Mexico: The Many Worlds of Women* in *Women, Roles and Status in Eight Countries*, John Wiley & Sons, 1977

Stevens, Evelyn P., *Marianismo: The Other Face of Machismo*, in *Confronting Change, Challenging Tradition, Women in Latin American History*, Wilmington, DE. Scholarly Resources Inc. 1994

⁴⁵ Bartholomeusz, Tessa, *Mothers of Buddhas, Mothers of Nations: Kumaratunga and her meteoric rise to power in Sri Lanka*, Feminist Studies; College Park, Spring 1999

⁴⁶ Stevens, Evelyn P., *Marianismo: The Other Face of Machismo*, in *Confronting Change, Challenging Tradition, Women in Latin American History*, Wilmington, DE. Scholarly Resources Inc. 1994

⁴⁷ *The Times of India*, 20 Dec 1999

⁴⁸ *The Times of India*, 23 Dec 1999

⁴⁹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 Dec 1999

⁵⁰ *Bulletin Today*, January 30, 1986

⁵¹ *Bulletin Today*, February 3rd, 1986

⁵² *Manila Bulletin*, February 28, 1986

It is clear that newspapers are a major source of providing society with words and concepts for constructing political reality. Today, the perception of Cory Aquino the Saint, someone who took power in the Philippines almost through divine intervention continues to be a theme, even eight years after Aquino stepped down as President.

A letter from a reader, selected for inclusion at the end of Deedee Siytangco's column in the internet version of the *Manila Bulletin* ends thus:

"Lord, thank you for creating Cory Aquino,
thank you for redeeming her,
thank you for giving her faith,
thank you for giving yourself to her
thank you for giving us a special person like her...for you are love and
Cory Aquino is your messenger of your love".

⁵³ A close examination of the *Bulletin Today* in January 1986 as campaigning for the presidential elections in February drew to a close, provides a useful demonstration of this sort of gender-driven phenomenon.

The front page of the *Bulletin Today*, January 1st, 1986, covers the presidential campaign with two front-page articles headlined:

HIDDEN WEALTH RECALL URGED and MARCOS WARNS NATION.

In the first article, which deals with a call from Aquino that all overseas wealth by Filipinos be repatriated, there are a total of 6 references to Marcos, all calling him either 'Marcos', 'Mr Marcos' or 'The President'.

There are also 8 references to Aquino, 5 of them as 'Mrs Aquino' and 3 as 'Cory.'

In the second article in which Marcos warns that voting for the opposition would lead the country into darkness, there are 22 allusions to 'The President' or 'Mr Marcos' and one to the opposition leader, simply 'Cory'.

On January 4th 1986, the two main articles, side by side, are headlined:

CORY SAYS ALL SUPPORT WELCOME and MARCOS WARNS ON RED DANGER, again choosing to use the familiar form for Aquino.

Marcos is never referred to by his first name, 'Ferdinand', in any instance.

There is a difference here with the situation of Hillary and Bill Clinton, where one person with the same surname is campaigning for political office while the other remains an incumbent, so it is sometimes necessary to use first names to avoid confusion. In Aquino's case, she started her political campaign more than two years after her husband had been murdered.

The use of the more familiar, less formal use of Aquino's given name is not simply a convenient shorthand but part of a process of gender evaluation, differentiation and representation employed by these newspapers.

⁵⁴ Isabelo T. Crisostomo, *Cory: Profile of a President*, J. Kriz Pub. Enterprises, Quezon City, Philippines, 1986 p 140

⁵⁵ "To Know Ninoy is to Understand Cory" Manila Times 8 November 1986

"Political Wife with a Style of Her Own" says the triumphant banner headline in the much-respected and widely-read UK *Financial Times*, May 29, 1999. In an interview with Malaysian opposition leader Wan Azizah wan Ismail, Sheila McNulty writes:

"We are talking about how the political neutering of her husband has transformed her from a contented housewife one step away from becoming first lady of Malaysia to the head of the country's most influential opposition party..."

Wan Azizah is presented firstly to readers as a 'wife' and a 'contented housewife' before mention is made of her persona as a politician.

The article goes on:

...Her mobile telephone rings and she speaks for a few minutes in Malay. Hanging up, she says, 'That's my vice-president, taking instructions,' seemingly relishing this once undreamt of opportunity to give them."

Dr Wan Azizah wan Ismail may have been 'a contented housewife' who realized an 'undreamt of opportunity' (though it is difficult to imagine how the writer could know this) but she is also a Dublin-trained ophthalmologist who has been in full-time professional practice in Kuala Lumpur for over twenty years.

⁵⁶ *Agence France Presse*, 8 November 1994

Similarly, John Stackhouse, writing in the *Chicago Sun-Times* referring to the Bangladeshi election in 1996, does not even take the trouble to name the outgoing Prime Minister, Begum Khaleda Zia, who had ruled the country for the previous five years, referring to her as 'the widow of a popular military president.'

⁵⁷ Peterson, V. Spike and Runyan, Anne Sisson in *Global Gender Issues*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1999

⁵⁸ *The Hindu*, 11 June 1997

⁵⁹ *Bulletin Today*, Vicente B.Foz, 24 January, 1986

⁶⁰ *The Island*, 2 Jan 2000

⁶¹ Isabelo T. Crisostomo, *Cory: Profile of a President*, J. Kriz Pub. Enterprises, Quezon City, Philippines, 1986 p 141

⁶² *Bulletin Today*, 8 February, 1986

⁶³ Robinson, Gertrude and Saint-Jean, Armande, "The Portrayal of Women Politicians in the Media" in *Gender and Politics in Contemporary Canada*, Francois-Pierre Gingras, Toronto, OUP, 1995.

⁶⁴ *Asiaweek*, 16 March, 1999

⁶⁵ *Asiaweek*, 16 March, 1999

⁶⁶ *Mr & Ms.*, 23 August 1985

⁶⁷ Schaffer, Howard *Sri Lanka in 1995*, Asian Survey, Vol 37 Feb 1996

⁶⁸ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 Jan 1998

⁶⁹ United Nations Human Development Report, 1997 OUP 1997