# Charity Appeals as "Poverty Porn"? Production Ethics in Representing Suffering Children and Typhoon Haiyan Beneficiaries in the Philippines

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## Abstract

This paper explores the production process behind charity appeals in the context of developing Philippines. INGO appeals have traditionally been studied through textual analyses that expose their use of shock effect techniques and neo-colonial narratives that fail to bridge the "moral distance" between Western donors and "distant sufferers" (Chouliaraki, 2013; Vestergaard, 2009). Here, I develop an ethnographic approach to investigate the interactions between producers and the poor people who are subjects of appeals. I pay attention to producers' articulations of "good work" and strategies of compliance and resistance as regards local media conventions of representing suffering within a culture of disaster and everyday suffering.

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Production studies has much to contribute to current literature in media ethics, particularly to debates about documentary and news media's representation of suffering. Within the recent moral turn in media studies, there is a significant reconstructing of "first principles" and "virtues" in the normative critique of media practice–from hospitality,[i] to justice,[ii] to accuracy, sincerity, and care.[iii] These principles are typically applied to the ethical critique of the mediation of "peak moments" of tragedy and natural disaster, and the ways in which specific narratives within the genres of news and charity advertising make different moral claims on Western publics. Whether "distant sufferers" appear as passive, needy victims in stereotypical "poverty porn" imagery or as active agents given both voice and historical context is a production choice assumed to have far-reaching moral consequences. Media narratives are generally assumed to create either positions of maximal distance that cause only "compassion fatigue"[iv] or a productive "proper distance" that cultivates relationships premised on mutual understanding and empathy.[v]

But the dominance of these philosophical and text-centered approaches to studying audiences and producers lack almost any ethnographic method of empirical study. In relation to audiences, we know very little about the correspondence between theorists' elaborate moral positions about the most "proper" representational practices and ordinary people's diverse and unpredictable patterns of engagement and meaning-making in relation to them,[vi] though re-

cent contributions suggest a determined effort to address this blind spot.[vii] With a few honorable exceptions,[viii] what is even more lacking are production studies approaches that illustrate ethics not just as principles but *as process*.

Production studies contributes a more expansive consideration of ethics in the mediation of suffering in their attentiveness to everyday practices and dilemmas of creative professionals and the particular local and institutional vocabularies of good and bad work used in media production.[ix] This approach is particularly important as the current literature on mediated suffering has a tendency to analyze disparate moment of "peak tragedies" or the distinct "textual games" of each fundraising charity advert,[x] with less to say about the development of creative practices in relation to national cultures or organizational norms. The concern of production studies to explain media production as "creativity within constraints" in nuanced relation with producers' identities offers up an analysis of mediated suffering in the context of the "messy stuff" of institutional ecologies and regulatory conditions under which generic narratives are produced.[xi]

I locate producers' ethics in the recruitment and treatment of vulnerable groups in relation to their everyday interactions, decision-making, and application of institutional codes. Within this optic, the ethics of representing sufferers with agency, voice, and "proper distance" becomes subsumed by what Georgina Born calls an *ethics of translation*.[xii] Born's call for an anthropological ethics of media, analysis must attend to the connections and disconnections of broad ethical principles, institutional norms, and media producers' own personal intentions across three different scales of media ethics. This is what she calls,

the normative, institutional ethics, and the practical ethics–where it is the last, practical ethics, that ultimately bears responsibility for the alchemical translation of the media-normative into the only form in which it can be publicly metabolized (by audiences and users): in the guise of specific genres of mediatized cultural experience, replete as they are with ethical and aesthetic potentials–potentials that are of course variably and imperfectly realized.[xiii]

In this chapter, I consider the producers of television network charity appeals as *agents of ethical translation.* This work is based on interviews and observations with fifteen television producers of charity appeals from 2009 to 2014 in Manila, Philippines. In studying these producers, I locate the aspect of their work as ethical translators, who make everyday articulations of "right" and "wrong" in media practice, within the messy "practical ethics" of balancing between their project deadlines and duties of care toward subjects, managing their emotions in the wake of tragedy, and justifying their work outputs in the face of public criticism. I begin by reviewing the current media ethics literature and its critique of humanitarian and charity appeals and then provide an account of local debates in the Philippine context. I also give a background to the peculiar role of Filipino television as a charitable social institution in the most "disaster-prone country in the world"–a remit that animates the production and reception of the local genre of the charity appeal.[xiv]

Inspired by production studies work on the interaction between producers and working-class "ordinary people" participants,[xv] this chapter offers *translation models* that exemplify producers' strategies of compliance and resistance as regards to local media conventions of representing suffering. These translation models aim to account for producers' vitality and ambi-

tion for good work amidst social and institutional pressures that, when in conflict, produce moral dilemmas in production.

### *Charity Appeals as "Poverty Porn"?*

In the media ethics literature, the genre of the humanitarian appeal has been approached as a diverse and contested communicative space. Some media scholars regard charity appeals as enactments of ethical discourse that may activate emotional regimes of pity or indignation among audiences and publics.[xvi] For instance, Lilie Chouliaraki's pathbreaking work maps out a useful typology of different techniques in Western humanitarian advertising from 1) "shock effect" campaigning to 2) positive imagery to 3) "posthumanitarian" irony. Chouliaraki analyzes different campaigns' aesthetics, suggesting an evolution of styles, and laying open each campaigns' ethical claims. She criticizes "shock effect" campaigns for their dehumanization of non-Western others: "captured on camera, these body parts, passively sitting in a row as they are, become fetishized: they do not reflect real human bodies but curiosities of the flesh that mobilize a pornographic spectatorial imagination between disgust and desire".[xvii] In contrast, positive imagery campaigns involve narrative techniques of personalizing sufferers and singularizing donors, where the presence of the benefactor becomes "instrumental in summoning up the emotional regime of empathy".[xviii] Nevertheless she admits that such campaigns may have the inadvertent effect of glossing over asymmetries of power and increase social denial to act on suffering "on the grounds that it may be unnecessary" due to the televised presence of benefactors.[xix] The last and most contemporary technique of charity appeals eschews the factual and photorealistic representation of suffering altogether and instead relies on cartoon animation, computer-generated imagery, the hiring of paid actors, and the foregrounding of the corporate brand while erasing sufferers from the picture altogether. While each is rife with drawbacks, Chouliaraki is most anxious about this present-day

"posthumanitarian" technique for its self-centered and consumerist sensibilities, ultimately failing to push audiences beyond their comfort zone.

It must be noted that the literature is not wholly negative about "shock effect" campaigning. Karen Wells, for one, argues that melodramatic styles in children-centered charity adverts effectively activate compassion and identification for suffering children who "unambiguously signify virtue" to potential donors.[xx] With its exaggerated and high-emotion narrative, melo-dramatic campaigning can offer, in her view, "a critique of the worst excesses of economic inequality".[xxi] Stan Cohen supports this as well, arguing that representing suffering "at its worst" can motivate political action and challenge social denial.[xxii]

In the Philippines, charity appeals are popularly identified as productions of both the charity subsidiaries and the corporate communication arms of privately owned top-rated television networks. Appeals produced by the charity subsidiaries lean toward the "shock effect" style of campaigning, and employ a documentary mode of filmmaking. These appeals, which air at the end of primetime newscasts and during commercial breaks throughout the day, usually relate to charitable projects of the TV network charity foundations, which include feeding programs for the poor and fundraising for victims of natural disaster. The most common of these appeals are individual case studies of children suffering from a physical deformity—with the most "iconic" image of these appeals being a child with hydrocephalus, which causes an abnormal body enlargement. The mise-en-scene of such an appeal is the everyday, the home and domestic spaces that children and their families inhabit. Following Choukiaraki's de-scription of Western styles of "shock effect" campaigns, there is also a "curiosity of the flesh", with lingering close-up shots of poor children to authenticate their helplessness and

deservedness of television viewers' attention and donation. [xxiii] The appeal also includes testimonials from mothers who are individualized and personalized. Typically, mothers display an excess of emotion in the camera, which is assumed to evoke pity from viewers who can identify with being mothers or children themselves. The appeal closes with a number flashed on the screen, and an invitation for audiences to donate to the network, which would mediates, in both symbolic and material terms, the collection of money and awarding this televisually to the suffering subject.

The charity appeal is just one of the services which exemplify the peculiarity of Philippine media as a space for gestural forms of economic redistribution and socially-mediated recognition. [xxiv] Though privately owned, Philippine television network stations are venues that people visit not only for live entertainment but also to access various public services such as legal advice, medical assistance, moneylending, and referrals to NGOs and government offices. One particular sub-genre of charity appeals involve televising disaster relief efforts which seek donations from viewers at home, at the same time flagging the corporate brand in the effort to cultivate viewer loyalty and trust within a highly competitive media environment. During events of natural calamity, representatives from media charities travel alongside their journalist colleagues to the site of disaster. After the journalist delivers a news report, representatives and journalists stand side-by side in handing out relief goods to victims.

A justification of such practices, certainly one preferred by the television networks, is that media fill the gap left by corrupt and bureaucratic public institutions–not to mention the absence of welfare state provisions. In such context of intervention, the cultural critic Conrado

De Quiros has described Filipino media as "acting as the government". When a major typhoon hit the capital of Metro Manila in September 2009, De Quiros observed:

> In fact the monumental thing that happened last Saturday was the complete absence of government. The only government there was were the media, notably [privately-owned television networks] ABS-CBN and GMA-7. You can forgive both for advertising their wares, or relief efforts, under the extenuating circumstances. They were the government. They were the central authority apprising the public of the situation. They were the central authority coming to the aid of victims. They were running the country.[xxv]

As both GMA network news anchor and head of their media charity arm Kapuso Foundation, Mel Tiangco explains, their role is not just as the first reporters on a scene but also often as first responders:

> The reason why Kapuso Foundation is tied to the news is because, from our news desk, we learn days beforehand of the possibility of, say, a typhoon, and therefore we are able to prepare and help the victims. Why, who arrives on the site first anyway? It's always us. And it's just irresponsible if we arrive and do nothing but just cover, when people are actually dying, or buried in [rubble]... But when Red Cross and the government and the other charities arrive, then we [Kapuso Foundation] would pull out. But Kapuso Foundation is always there as the first to respond.[xxvi]

This representation of news networks as benevolent charities does not tell the whole story. Television networks' "spirit of service" to the poor and disaster victims in particular are subject to criticisms of exploitation and the perpetuation of "bad values".[xxvii] Elite cultural critics and academics identify that media's charitable practices extend from the political economy of local television, which functions according to a "sachet economics" business model where the spending (and voting) power of *the masa* (the masses) are what generate profit and win elections. As well, the targeting of *the masa* in television content and services is criticized as purely instrumental for television owners given the proportion of the lower-class (two-thirds of the population) in comparison to the middle- and upper-classes. Overrepresentation and "redistributing" to the poor are pessimistically viewed by these critics as sinister strategies merely used to survive in the heated television "ratings wars".[xxix]

In addition, local commentators regard media practices of overrepresenting the poor in charity appeals and cash-distributing game shows as perpetuating a "culture of mendicancy" or a "mendicant society".[xxx] For example, the enormously popular but now defunct game show *Wowowee* supposedly conditions Filipinos to depend on "easy money,"[xxxi] instead of "providing them the tools to navigate in a harsh and complex world".[xxxii]

These multiple and contradictory discourses about the role of private media in a context of widespread poverty and frequent disaster inform the production of charity appeals. The media have historically positioned themselves as responsible agents who fill the gap of weak government, yet are surveilled by cultural elites for their conflation of public service with business strategy. The media acts as truth-tellers to local realities of suffering in news reports and documentary-style shock appeals, yet they actively employ branding and loyalty strategies into the production of television content and dispensing of services.

***Understanding Producers: Strategies of Compliance versus Risk and Resistance***

The following section maps out strategies of translation work in the production of charity appeals. Following Georgina Born's call to trace the practical ethics in media work,[xxxiii] I relate how producers translate television networks' diffuse ethical commitments of public service into particular cultural forms. I present translation models that reflect the producers' strategies of either 1) *compliance*, where the producer follows institutional interests and established procedural codes, or 2) translation with greater *risk* and *resistance*. This second mode situates a producer with a stronger imperative to transmute personal (though socially-shaped) moralities of care that directly challenge norms of production.

The following analysis is based on participant observations and in-depth interviews of 15 producers of charity appeals created for privately owned television networks. These producers are generally in charge of the network's public service arm; some are actively involved in engaging with beneficiaries while some are tasked in the actual production of fundraising videos. To give focus to the discussion, I relate two portraits of individuals supervising production of two different types of charity appeals.[xxxiv] While these producers share similar socio-economic backgrounds and occupy similar middle-range positions within the institutional hierarchy, these two individuals exemplify different agentic practices of ethical translation: the first is an example of translation with a tendency towards compliance with institutional interests and established procedural codes, and the second is an example of translation with greater risk and resistance and a stronger imperative to transmute personal moralities of care (themselves socially shaped) that challenge norms of media production.

What emerges is that producers of child-centered appeals (usually of sick, disfigured children) generally comply with established procedures of recruitment and filming. In comparison, producers of disaster appeals are more ambivalent about the fusion of charitable aims with corporate interests—most especially in the context of Typhoon Haiyan's exceptional devastation. Here I argue that the divergent outcomes of producers' ethical translation work are a function of the different contexts of suffering that they encounter (children's suffering versus exceptional disaster) and the different styles of charity appeals they create (shock effect versus positive imagery/corporate branding).

*Complicity in the case of child subjects*

In the case of producing child-centered charity appeals, producers often follow established codes and are very rarely experimental. What was evident from my interviews and observation is that producers are highly reflexive and cautious in relation to ethical criticism of and legal complaints about media's typical practices of "acting as the government", specifically as it relates to helping yet "exploiting" poor and sick children. Producers then respond by articulating moral justifications of established codes and production techniques, but are also constrained by strict demands of production.

34 year-old "Bea" is a producer of charity appeals in one of the TV networks. She came from a lower-middle-class background and has been employed in this institution ever since graduating from a polytechnic university in Manila. Bea leads a crew of two other people—a researcher and cameraman—and are tasked to produce (plan, write, shoot, edit) fifteen 30- to 60-second appeals per week. These appeals air within various commercial gaps throughout the day and as well as sometimes within the primetime news. They are also broadcasted in their network's satellite channel aimed at overseas Filipino audiences in the US, Europe and

the Middle East (whom I learned from two directors of media charities, are significant sources of donations). Networks strategically use these produced charity appeals as gap-fillers within the flow of television,[xxxv] such as during unexpected program interruptions or as a way of breaking the monotony of episodic promos and adverts.

The most common sub-genre of appeals that Bea shoots is what the team calls the *pana-wagan* plug (literally, "calling out" or "speaking into the air"), which, as discussed above, hearkens to shock effect campaigning ,with the tearful testimonial of mother and lingering close-ups of a child's bodily deformities. Bea and her crew shared with me that they had just shot a *panawagan* plug about Angel, a 9 year-old child whose successful medical operation had corrected a physical abnormality. Angel was born without a hole in her anus and had part of her intestines sticking out from the side of her body, which facilitated bowel movement in the place of the malfunctioning anus. They had filmed Angel in her return to elementary school, where she used to be bullied by her classmates for always soiling her white school uniform.

For Bea, stories of charity recipients' "personal transformation" crafted as "thank you plugs," are the most personally gratifying stories to shoot. These are occasions when they meet again clients whom they had first met in pitiful contexts in happier conditions. For instance, Bea recalled 9 year-old Angel's intense embarrassment on camera when they had to shoot her mother changing her into new clothes in their home, never once smiling to her and her crew, but in their most recent shoot, this time a thank you plug, Angel finally broke into a shy smile.

The predominance of the *panawagan* sub-genre of charity appeal over the "thank you plug" and or general project appeal is a function of both material and time constraints. Because media charities open their doors several times a week for the "screening" of sick and disfigured children, Bea and her team find subjects right outside their own offices. Children with cleft palates, enlarged heads from hydrocephalus, and blackened lumps on the body from meningitis queue with their mothers for a screening with Bea's colleagues at the network. Their social worker colleague is tasked to authenticate the child's documents (including a medical certificate from a doctor, a certificate of indigence from the town hall, and a breakdown of the cost of operation detailed by the public hospital). They then interview the families for possible recommendation to Bea for a *panawagan* charity appeal shoot.

My interview with Bea revealed that while she finds shooting thank you plugs personally gratifying, she considers the production of these *panawagans* as her most important and sensitive task. The *panawagan*, as the most common form of appeal on television, is what fuels the everyday stream of fundraising income. Consistent with Orgad's findings in the UK context, where NGOs find shock effect campaigns as generating higher donations than positive imagery, Filipino media charities observe the same trend. [xxxvi]

Bea was defensive when I had asked her about *panawagans* and whether she thinks this particular style is effective. I later learned through interviews with the corporate communication and advertising and promotions departments of the TV network that employees in the company are not unified in their support for shock effect campaigning. Bea is aware that her colleagues in these departments (from more elite backgrounds) have been commissioned to produce special videos directed toward high-profile investors, donors, and wealthy overseas Filipino organizations and employed more positive imagery in these videos that are more con-

sistent with upper- to middle-class moralities of empowerment and dignity, not to mention Western discourses of development. It is not difficult to see that she takes this as a critique of her crew's work, as they are responsible for everyday fundraising and also the direct interactions with beneficiaries from whom her colleagues are, in her mind, comfortably detached. Nevertheless she justifies her good work by marshaling a discourse of authenticity:

> "What is really important for us is the truth. We don't really direct them, 'this is what we want you to say'. Though we brief them what we're supposed to do, of course, we are asking for help from the public. And then we tell the parent, 'Ma'am, whatever it is you're feeling, what your child's situation really is, we need that... whatever you're going through, you should tell the public'... And then we will do our best in our script to show what other people really need to see. For me, in what I write, I put myself as part of the audience. If I were the one watching, how could I be moved and be touched to offer help to a stranger? That's all."

Unlike their colleagues in other departments from private school backgrounds (or educated overseas), many of whom subscribe to broader public and academic criticism of shock-provoking poverty porn imagery, Bea and her crew stand by the *panawagan* as a more authentic discourse of suffering designed to touch audiences through high-emotion narrative. Unlike the positive imagery and posthumanitarian campaigning aimed at affluent or even foreign audiences produced by other departments of the network, Bea as a lower middle-class person herself asserts proximity with the low-income *masa* from whom her she believes her elite colleagues are distanced from: she recognizes that the *masa* themselves are the main audiences of these *panawagans* she creates and thus uses high-emotion narrative techniques to

relate to their personal conditions. The use of melodramatic and photorealistic imagery in local charity appeals is then rescued from the critique of pornographic spectatorship, but as an accountability mechanism for media's exercise of good faith and good judgment in a competitive "selection of unfortunates".[xxxvii]

Selecting disfigured children and their pitiful mothers authenticates the subjects' suffering and justifies their media-facilitated recognition and gestural redistribution over an imagined community of low-income people who may also see themselves as potential beneficiaries. At the same time, Bea relates during the interview that while their organization comes under critique for its shock effect imagery, she observes that critics neglect that it also produces "thank you plugs" that show beneficiaries in happier times. Indeed, charity appeals within broadcast media organizations take on a serial or episodic quality in the context of television flow, and afford a melodramatic quality of reception among loyal television viewers who see the story through.

My interview with Bea also revealed that her complicity towards production guidelines laid out by upper management and legal consultants stems from the organization's anxieties and experiences with poor clients who have attempted to scam the organization. Authenticity mechanisms such as the collection and verification of clients' documents and medical certificates, as discussed above, are welcomed by Bea, as they ease the burden of selecting respondents. In other cases, adherence to production guidelines alleviates her fear of legal complaints from appeals' subjects.

In the specific case of charity appeals that focus on child victims of physical and sexual abuse, the recently established requirements of secrecy and anonymity are strictly followed

by production crews in order to avoid litigation from affected parties. Charity appeal guide-lines to solarize the face of rescued children and their abusive perpetrators are followed, in spite of Bea's own impulse to expose abusers' identity out of indignation:

> Bea: You really want to show who the perpetrator is to make it at least known that this person is the one who abused the child.
>
> Ong: It's like you want to show it?
>
> Bea: Yes, you even want to strangle the guy... but you cannot reveal that because the child might be identified [by association]. So the one who'll get in trouble will be the child–especially if it's the father who is the perpetrator! So you really have to follow the guidelines.

Strict adherence to established procedures in the case of child rescues empowers producers to administer their duties in the morally grey context of media's "acting as the government", where government policies and industry self-regulation (historically confined to monitoring media content of sex and violence) are slow to catch up.[xxxviii]

Bea's compliance to traditional practices of representing suffering children is as agentic as it is practiced in the face of legal and moral surveillance from government, cultural critics, and even her own colleagues. While on one hand compliance can be seen as a passive translation of established codes, in Bea's case it is also a rejection of new trends of positive imagery or posthumanitarian campaigning. Bea's own proximity to harsh realities of poverty from her long professional involvement with the media charity and her own personal position of low-er-middle-class precarity orients her to reproduce the discourse of authenticity embedded in supposedly shocking "poverty porn" appeals. As a person who has experienced hardship, Bea

easily sympathizes with potential beneficiaries of media-assisted charity and rejects inauthentic middle-class discourses of development that are reflected in the positive imagery appeals. Therefore, her adherence to procedural codes is a further evidence of how producer Bea sees the value of the *panawagans* as well as the other more suffering-oriented charity appeals.

*Risk and resistance in the context of natural disaster*

In the event of exceptional tragedy, producers embrace as primary their roles as charity employees over that of media producers. Their work becomes an occasion of tactical resistance against established procedural codes and regulatory constraints. The producers whom I interviewed who follow a translation model of risk and resistance, had all filmed charity appeals for the Typhoon Haiyan affected communities.

At the time of my interview with Raul, he had just flown in from Tacloban, a city in central Philippines that recorded over 5,000 casualties from the devastation of Typhoon Haiyan in November 2013. That month, May 2014, Typhoon Haiyan was marking its six-month anniversary and it was crucial that their organization continued with relief distribution to the homeless and jobless people living as refugees in tent cities in Tacloban and its neighboring cities. Raul described his job as disaster response manager as *bugbog sa field*, or "fatigued from the field". In 2013–a year marked by armed conflict, typhoons and a 7.2 magnitude earthquake–Raul and his colleague Erlinda had barely spent any time in their Manila office. Instead, they had flown directly from one disaster zone to another.

> Erlinda: The 2013 experience was really devastating.... It was nonstop. With God's mercy we were guided. Of course you've come from a warzone, then you go to an earthquake, then a fire, then a typhoon.

Ong: There must be some trauma...

Erlinda: You're right, of course. We have no stress debriefing... We miss out on it, but yeah, we carry on.

Raul: Sometimes we arrive in Manila, two days later we fly out again. They need this, they need that.

Erlinda: That's how life is. Sometimes it's fun.


The day after Typhoon Haiyan hit, Raul was in Tacloban along with the Philippine military's first response team. Prior to Haiyan's landfall, Raul had arranged for relief goods to be devolved to Tacloban from an existing stockpile in Cebu, originally intended for earthquake-affected populations. Raul's plan in Tacloban was to meet up with his journalist colleagues from the network (who had lost communication with Manila headquarters), to distribute food to his colleagues, then to facilitate relief distribution with local populations that would be televised for charity appeals. Raul recounted how he and his colleagues subsisted in the first few days by opening up their network's relief packs which contained canned sardines and rice, unfortunately made soggy by the flooding caused by Haiyan's storm surge. He also proudly recalled being the first organization to coordinate relief distribution, even leading government efforts. Locals in Tacloban thanked him, and he remembered that even the national social welfare secretary commended him for the crew's efficient first response, "'Oh, hello Raul, you've made it again before me,' she said to me. I got embarrassed." Raul recognizes that this part of his job, as charity worker and coordinator, extends from his company's long-time ambition to cultivate loyalty from audiences by fostering an image that it is an institution that audiences can turn to in times of need (*may matatakbuhan*). *May matatakbuhan* is arguably substantiated by surveys which indicate that television networks are some of the most trusted institutions in the country.[xxxix]

As discussed earlier, producers' practical translation of Philippine media's "spirit of service" is also shaped by codified regulations and industry agreements.[xl] According to Raul, networks learned from previous disasters that systematic coordination with local government units is important in ensuring accountability. In the context of disaster response, a memorandum of agreement between media charities and the military was made in 2013 that allowed media personnel access to military resources in transporting relief goods and camera equipment. In turn, the military had discretion over their selection of media beneficiaries.

In our interview, Raul related an important moment of moral dilemma in Tacloban when he and his staff were tasked to plan the filming of relief distribution with television network celebrities. While it was standard practice to involve stars of current soap operas in charity appeal productions as part of tactical cross-platform promotions (to increase TV ratings) and corporate image-building among audiences and stakeholders, Raul found this particularly difficult to implement in Tacloban, where there has been aggressive looting presumably from desperate and hungry typhoon-affected communities. Raul and Erlinda challenged their network bosses' mandate of bringing celebrities to Tacloban:

> Raul: As much as we want, we really don't want [a celebrity photo op] televised.
>
> Erlinda: We don't want it. We don't want to be accompanied [by a celebrity] (laughing)
>
> Raul: Of course, that's an added burden for us... Already the Warays [an ethnic group that includes Tacloban locals] are already a misbehaving lot. Of all the people I have helped, these are the ones who don't like to queue, who don't listen to you. Then you add the burden of taking care of a celebrity there. You know, that's a celebrity. That's

a big boss. So really, as much as we want, we don't want that photo op. Because public service is not about showing-off for the celebrity. So at times, for us, it's awkward. But we can't do anything, we're in a television network!

Raul also recounted the time when celebrities ignored their instruction of handing out one relief pack per individual during distribution, as the celebrity was too moved by the destitute appearance of a person on the queue that the celebrity unfairly handed out two sacks of relief. As this has become common during celebrity-led distributions, Raul adamantly shared with us his insistence to intervene and enforce protocol, even if it meant causing offense to a potentially "sensitive" celebrity.

Many times during our interview, Raul expressed disapproval of the televising of relief operations. Although aware that decisions should always come from their boss, Raul was proud in recalling how he consistently tries to fight for what he believes is "the right thing to do" on ground, such as when his team decided not to shoot a charity appeal on the first day of relief distribution after Typhoon Haiyan,

> It's outside of the ratings, it's already outside of everything. It's about public service. Because we also don't want to show people, 'Look how charitable we are'. It's like we glorify ourselves too much that we're the first, then we need to shoot a video and stuff.

While typically compliant with network strategies of using natural disasters as opportunities for corporate branding and loyalty-building through the filming of charitable activities, Raul's first hand encounter with the exceptional tragedy of Haiyan compelled him to set priorities

and make hard decisions. Choosing to conduct only relief distribution rather than filming appeals during the first day of Haiyan suggests a splitting of his duties as a charity worker and a media employee, where his personal moral commitment to care for typhoon-affected communities overpowered his concerns as producer. His "sabotage" of the production of charity appeals indicates his crew's freedom to conducted operations in the disaster zone. Because they enter disasters zone as relief workers-cum-media personnel, they are able to conduct operations far from senior network executives' surveillance and therefore manage their priorities more independently.

The difficult labor conditions these producers endure and justify to themselves structures their experience of their own ethical translation work. Compared to Western contexts, the social distance between the producer and the sufferer in the Filipino case is not vast at all, given that the creative laborers themselves articulate stories of their own economic hardship and limited mobility. Within the course of our interview, Raul and Erlinda confided that their low income (scaled according to a charity scale rather than the corporate scale of their colleagues in broadcast network; with no access to company bonuses enjoyed by other employees) does not compensate for the Christmas that they missed because of Typhoon Haiyan and the trauma that is triggered every time they hear the whirl of helicopters, a sound that takes them back to living in fear within the warzone of Zamboanga. Nevertheless, Raul expressed in our interview personal justifications for his continued work, which he also described as not a job but a "service." He did see some status and symbol of justification by being seen on tv during relief distributions by his admiring and media-obsessed family and friends. Ultimately though, it is the sense of fulfillment of being able to help resolve the suffering of many Filipinos that motivates Raul–and other producers like Erlinda and Bea–to continue their work in producing media charity programs.

Towards Ethical Media Ecologies?

Representing suffering is a moral dilemma that producers reflect on, justify, and occasionally challenge as part of ordinary routine and exceptional tragedy. Compliance with and resistance to established procedural codes vary depending on producers' own social backgrounds and professional positions which orient them toward particular moral justifications or rejections of shock effect "poverty porn" techniques which prevail in a local context of widespread poverty and frequent disaster.

While this chapter seeks to make a contribution to understanding why trite techniques of representing suffering endure in the face of widespread public criticism of "poverty porn", it also imagines ways in which we can combine that criticism of mediated suffering with a sensitive advocacy for more ethical ecologies for the media laborers who are behind these productions. As it applies to the Philippine context, this call to both study and advocate for media workers is not a demonization of media companies. Rather, it unpacks the contradictions in organizations' strategic benevolence to the Filipino underprivileged and their marginalization of their own charity subsidiary employees within the professional hierarchy. If we are to lament media's failure to break new expressive ground about suffering and its resolution through gestural charity, our concern should start not from first principle, but the "messy stuff" of practice and how we can nurture and support its agents toward creative invention and experimentation, and toward the organic extension and mediation of care.

[i] Roger Silverstone, *Media and Morality: On the Rise of the Mediapolis* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007).

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[iii] Nick Couldry, *Media Society World: Social Theory in a Digital Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).

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