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Engendering Change - Women in Media NGOs in the Philippines

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Abstract: This paper investigates non-governmental media organizations (media NGOs) in the Philippines and the women who work in them. The method used was interview research. Three media NGOs; *Isis-International Manila*, the *Communication Foundation for Asia (CFA)* and the *Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ)* were chosen as case studies and three women from each organization were interviewed. This paper focuses on the perspectives of these women concerning gender issues in the Philippine media, identifying the challenges they face and their motivations for working in the NGO sector.

Keywords: media, feminism, gender, NGOs, activism, women's movement in the Philippines.

1. Introduction

This paper presents a case study of three non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the Philippines; *Isis-International Manila (Isis)*, the *Communication Foundation for Asia (CFA)* and the *Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ)*, which are concerned with issues related to women and media. These NGOs were selected because they are very well known and have existed for a long time. They have also proven their reputation as media NGOs working for the betterment of the society and women in particular. Their history, function and achievements will be outlined in this paper.

Through the interviews, the relationship between women and media NGOs will be focused on in order to understand the nature of these NGOs and to elucidate the motivations of the women who work in them, as well as to clarify the reasons for the recent growth in the number of NGOs which deal with these issues. The way in which these women see the problems of Philippine media and their views about gender issues will also be discussed.

Why focus on media NGOs and women? Most studies of Philippine society focus on social movements such as the trade union, peasant and women's movements, as well as business- and church-led movements. The literature is vast, yet gives little attention to media and communications. Currently, however, the media play a significant role in Philippine

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society and intersect with many social and political movements. Advances in information technology have created abundant ways for people to access information. While this has many positive aspects it also brings with it a number of problems. One is that the images of women being portrayed in the media are inadequate, incorrect and do not give justice to the real situation of women in society. They generate a continued projection of negative and degrading images of women.

A closer look at the role of media NGOs and the women working in them is therefore urgently required. It can help us gain a better understanding of what is currently happening and assess the future development of the relationship between women and media.

1.1. NGOs and Women in the Philippines

It is widely acknowledged that NGOs have played a major role in promoting social development both at the local and international levels. NGO-led campaigns have been key drivers of inter-governmental negotiations, ranging from the improvement of human rights to a global ban on the elimination of slavery. NGOs across the globe comprise a wide range of groups which differ greatly in size, function and goals.

Silliman and Noble (1998), in their analysis of Philippine NGOs distinguish between three kinds of NGOs at the macro level: *international NGOs*, *national NGOs* and *local NGOs*. *International NGOs* have members from more than one nation and are active in trans-national issues. *National NGOs* are groups that either draw their membership from a single nation or operate within the boundaries of a single nation-state. Finally, *local NGOs* are grassroots organizations which work to improve their communities or the condition of their members through the skills and resources of their memberships.

With such diversity it has been difficult for academics to find a generally accepted definition of NGO. Allegre, in his 1996 study for the Ateneo Center for Social Policy and Public Affairs, defines an NGO as a private, non-profit, voluntary organization that was established primarily to work for socioeconomic, socio-political, or socio-cultural development. It is formed by citizens on a voluntary basis for representing their voices or issues, which they feel are inadequately addressed or not addressed at all by the society at large or by their governments in the national or international arena. This is also the definition this paper will employ.

In the Philippines, NGOs have historically played a significant role in giving voice to the powerless. Women's NGOs have been especially important in voicing the concerns of Filipino women of all ages. Feminism and the women's movement in the Philippines gained in prominence in the late 1970s. It was until recently considered a relatively young movement, with its roots going back no further than the women's suffragist movement during the years leading up to 1965. However, the feminist movement in the Philippines can actually look back on at least a hundred years of history. On the 30th of June 1905, Concepcion Felix and others organized the first official meeting of the *Asociacion Feminista Filipina* (Allegre, 1996). To commemorate this, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo signed Proclamation no. 622, which declares 2005 "the Centennial Year of the Feminist Movement in the Philippines"

(Malacanang 2004).

The hard work of many women organized as NGOs culminated in the Philippines around the time of the assassination of opposition leader Benigno Aquino in 1983. The assassination led to widespread street protests and triggered the organization of various major groups among the ranks of the peasant, fisher-folk and indigenous peoples. In addition, this period saw the establishment of a number of programs that focused on livelihood, ecology, alternative legal assistance, support for migrant workers, and gender equality (Community Organizers' Multidiversity 2004).

Since then, women's NGOs and peoples' organizations have been facilitating consultations among different groups with diverse interests. Advocacy and lobbying by women's NGOs contributed to the formulation of the "Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development," in 2002, a successor document to the "Philippine Development Plan for Women, 1989-1992" (1989). It calls for a development model that is equitable, sustainable, free from violence, respectful of human rights and dignities, supportive of self-determination of human potentials, participatory and empowering women.

Up to the present, women and NGOs have remained active in implementing policies and voicing opinions on what they think is best for them. One good example is in the field of education where women have attained equal rights in terms of access to learning. According to the National Statistics Office and Department of Education *Report on the Literacy of the Population 10 years Old and Over* in 2000, there were more literate women than men; 92.5: 93.1 respectively. This is also corroborated in *Her Stories: Investigative Reports on Filipino Women in the 1990s* published by the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (Cielo 1999). The investigation found that there are more educated women than men in the Philippines at present. However, it also found that jobs offered to women are not the same (in terms of status and salary) as those offered to men.

It is quite clear from these examples that there is a beneficial relationship between NGOs and women in the Philippines, which is invaluable for the betterment of society. They work together with the aim of achieving a more gender-sensitive society. Most women's NGOs are committed to pursuing a society where everybody, regardless of gender, ethnicity and religion is regarded as equal.

The study of NGOs and women working within them is an important yet understudied field of research. In this paper the work of three media NGOs and the real reasons behind the commitment and activeness of Filipino women who are working in them will be discussed. What gives them the motivation and drive to work towards the betterment of women in society? What are their views towards women in the media? What issues are they facing? In trying to address these questions, a clearer picture of the situation of women in contemporary Philippine society and a deeper understanding of the value of these women's work will be gained.

1.2. Interview Research

Nine women who work in media NGOs were interviewed to gain their perspectives on

media and gender related issues. Informants were selected on the basis on their experience and knowledge about the Philippine media, women, and the organization to which they belong. Of the three renowned NGOs dealing with issues of women and the media, I interviewed three women each. The interviews were conducted at each organization's headquarters.

The interviewees were:

- From *Isis International-Manila (Isis)* — Maria Victoria Cabrera-Balleza, Indira Endaya, and Ma. Olivia Cantor.
- From the *Communication Foundation for Asia (CFA)* — Teresita Hermano, Lolita Serrano and Immaculada Belza.
- From the *Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ)* — Vinia Datinguino, Luz Rimban and Avigail Olarte.

For each interviewee, I used two types of interview: First, a structural interview with a carefully worded, prewritten questionnaire and second, an in-depth interview which did not follow a rigid form, allowing the interviewees to speak their minds freely and allowing the interviewer to ask additional follow up questions for clarification.

The questionnaire consisted of a total of 15 questions. They were divided into two categories. The first five questions were general questions regarding the informant's perspectives on the Philippine media, the situation of Filipino women in society and in the media, and regarding what their respective organization does to offer solutions to the given issues. The second half of the questionnaire, consisted of 10 questions designed to draw out the informant's personal evaluation of the organization and her own work. (See appendix for the questionnaire.)

The length of the interviews varied between 20 minutes and 50 minutes. The interviewees were encouraged to give free and open responses. This was done in order to capture the informant's perception in their own words. Interviewees were encouraged to express themselves in Filipino and/or English.

While in-depth interviews are considered a good data collection technique, it is also important to keep potential pitfalls in mind. There may be a large gap between the informant's knowledge and that of the interviewer, which may lead to filtering out or a misunderstanding of the information by the researcher. To cope with this problem and make it possible for other researchers to verify my findings, I also recorded the interviews on tape (with the permission of the interviewees), in addition to carefully recording their responses and comments by taking notes.

2. Case Studies of Three Media NGOs

2.1. Isis International – Manila: Profile and History

Feminists Jane Cottingham and Marilee Karl founded Isis International in 1974 in Rome, Italy. They believed that information should be organised and distributed in a way that women would have easy access to it and founded an organization to address this need. They

named the organization after the Egyptian goddess, Isis, whose attributes are wisdom, creativity and knowledge (Isis 2004).

Isis currently has three international offices. All are committed to assisting Southern women in enhancing their ability to create links and to communicate. Its first offices were located in Rome, Italy and Geneva, Switzerland. To coordinate its Caribbean and Latin American programmes, Isis International set up an office in Santiago, Chile in 1984. In 1991, the office in Rome was transferred to Manila to be closer to the African, Asian and Pacific regions. The Geneva office later moved to Kampala, Uganda in 1994.

Isis is a feminist NGO with a mission to creating space for women through information and communication. *Isis* collects, documents and disseminates information about women's visions and ideas, particularly those from Asia and the Pacific region.

Isis also participates in networking and continues to build links locally and globally. It has connections to organizations in over 150 countries around the world to keep up with the changing trends and analyses concerning women worldwide.

Isis believes that the transformation of society for the better will be achieved if women are provided access and given the right to take part in generating and spreading their own knowledge and experiences through different mediums of communication. Communication is regarded as important and *Isis* strongly believe that it is an essential element to any development process.

However, *Isis* holds that merely obtaining access to information and communication is insufficient. Therefore, *Isis* also challenges women to examine the true nature and interest of the information and communication systems that they receive. *Isis* encourages awareness and knowledge about how the information is constructed, distributed and who produces it.

Similarly, *Isis* is also engaged in attaining a more just, sustainable and humane world by challenging stereotypes and inequalities in the society encouraged by the global mainstream media.

2.2. Isis' Work on Women and Media

Isis monitors, analyses and advocates for issues related to women and media, information and communication technologies. *Isis* staff work on these areas locally and globally by including critical feminist perspectives in their campaigns. They have a history of strongly supporting alternative women's communication systems, as well as providing assistance in improving gender sensitive media codes of conduct to mainstream media.

When asked about what *Isis* does in order to offer solutions to existing problems that



Fig. 1: Isis International-Manila

Filipino women have regarding media, Maria Victoria Cabrera-Balleza, Head of the Media Information and Communication Services Program, replied:

Ever since *Isis* was established in 1974, there was already the problem of women not being represented properly by the media. Since *Isis* was established during the second wave of the feminist movement, even feminists were pictured negatively then — as home wreckers, lesbians and liberated women who do not value the family. In response to those wrong images, *Isis* engaged in the production of alternative media (Cabrera-Balleza 2004).

Cabrera-Balleza added that *Isis* also engaged in producing documentary films and radio programs from the 1990s. She added that *Isis* crossed over very easily from the more established media — print and broadcast to new media — internet and email.

Indira Endaya, Media and Information Communications Services Officer, reinforced Cabrera-Balleza's statement when she said that *Isis* helps to counter women's negative portrayal in the media through what they offer in their alternative media. She said their radio program deals with issues that are rarely discussed by the mainstream media. For example, reproductive health, the women's movement and the Vatican. Endaya also said, "the Philippines is a Catholic country but we discussed the issues with very progressive women. We presented a point of view that was contrary to what has always been said (Endaya 2004)."

Lobbying at all levels — national, regional and international, is a major activity that keeps the *Isis* staff busy. They maintain strategic alliances with a range of international organisations such as the United Nations. Another example given by Cabrera-Balleza about what *Isis* does towards the betterment of women is *Section J* (the woman and media section) of the *Beijing Platform for Action*. According to her, most of the provisions there came from a conference that *Isis* co-organised in 1994 in Bangkok entitled "Women Empowering Communications Conference."

Locally, *Isis* engages in dialogue with the mainstream media. For example, *Isis* staff recently organized a series of conferences attended by mainstream media practitioners. The project was called "The Code of Conduct Campaign." The aim was to influence media practitioners to put forward provisions for gender sensitive reportage in their code of conduct. The conference was deemed successful: a number of organizations which attended added provisions to their codes of conduct. The next problem, according to Cabrera-Balleza, is the reinforcement of these provisions.

When *Isis* started their new strategic planning cycle for 2004-2006, Cabrera-Balleza succeeded in convincing the organization to including media literacy into the aforementioned strategic plan. At present, Cabrera-Balleza and her staff are busy planning and consulting other groups, including the Forum for Citizens' Television and Media in Japan about this matter.

Olivia Cantor, in charge of the media literacy plan, said that *Isis* has just become aware (through Cabrera-Balleza's internal advocacy) that in focussing on media producers, they have neglected one key actor in the media, the audience. To address this problem, they are

now producing media literacy modules and programs. They are also collaborating with other women's NGOs and high schools (Cantor 2004).

Cabrera-Balleza clarified the plan: As a pilot project, *Isis* will collaborate with schools and convince them to integrate the module into their curriculum. *Isis* will be working with teachers and provide them with training. *Isis* also intends to work with the Department of Education because the curriculum of every school has to be approved by them. Cabrera-Balleza refers to the plan as a tripartite collaboration between the government, schools and *Isis* (Cabrera-Balleza 2004).

More than three decades has passed since *Isis* was established. It may have changed its form and structure over the years, but from the interviews it appears that the women of *Isis* remain resilient, inspired and active in working towards the very same objective and vision that their founders dreamt of.



Fig. 2: Communication Foundation for Asia

2.3. Communication Foundation for Asia, Manila: Profile and History

The Communication Foundation for Asia (CFA) is an organization dedicated to “serve God and people in need through all forms of social communication.” Its vision is “the development of people in need through an innovative learning process using media technology and other forms of communication.” Its mission is “to harness the power of communication in the Philippines and Asia so that people in need may be motivated and empowered to change the world they live in and are responsible for” (CFA 2005).

In conducting training and production CFA uses a multi-media approach. CFA's guiding principle in serving God and the people in need through media, is “Education is the key, Communication is the tool.” The five I's of communication continue to be CFA's guide in serving the people in need; *Information*, the first function of communication, *Instruction*, to understand the information given, *Inspiration*, the heart of all communication, *Insistence*, to sustain the inspiration and information, and *Involvement*, the ultimate goal of communication (CFA Primer. Undated).

CFA was founded by the Dutch priest Father Cornelio Lagerwey, a member of the congregation of the *Missionaries of the Sacred Heart* (MSC), in 1960. Its original name was *Social Communications Center*. In 1973, it was renamed *Communication Foundation for Asia*.

Since CFA's establishment up to the present day, it has been engaged in the production of variety of media, such as films, documentaries, magazines, comics and radio dramas. Films produced by the CFA include *Batingaw* (1974) with the theme of responsible parenthood and *Sugat sa Ugat*, first shown in 1984, which deals with agrarian reform. Documentaries include *11 Days in August* (1983), a documentary about the assassination of former opposition leader Ninoy Aquino, and *People Power: The Philippine Experience* (1986), which documents the unfolding of events from the snap election to the EDSA revolution and the inauguration of

Corazon Aquino as president of the Philippines. CFA also produced a radio soap opera entitled *Panginorin* (1976) which was its first daily development radio drama series. It was aired daily on DZRH (the oldest radio station in the Philippines) and received high audience ratings.

Among the magazines produced by CFA are *Pambata* ("For Children"), a monthly children's magazine, and *Gospel Komiks* ("Gospel Comics") a religious comic also for children. In 1979, the same year they started to produce magazines for children, CFA also started the "Flying Team Project." It included the training of eight development workers in various communication skills so that they could go to the different parts of the Philippines to train community leaders belonging to the same field. Following this project were CFA's Media Education workshops.

In 1990, CFA organized the first *National Congress on Development Communication* which was attended by 70 development communication practitioners and academics. During the same year, the first *National Catechetical Congress* was also organized by CFA. The formation of the *National Media Center* for Catechesis followed a year after that. CFA continued its development work and remained active in the field until 1995 when its founder, Father Lagerwey, died.

From 1995 to 2002, the leadership changed frequently and it was only in the early part of 2002 that Father Fil Pelington was elected president of CFA. Under his new management and guidance, CFA started to be active again, reopening its Electronic Media and "Devcom" (development communication) Training Centers.

At present, CFA operates four centers: the Publications Center, the Electronic Media Center, the Catechetical Center, and the Devcom Training Center.

2.4. CFA's Work on Women and Media

Clearly, CFA is an NGO dedicated to helping people in need regardless of gender. It is a pioneer in the field of development communication. They regard communication as an important tool in empowering people and consider it part of "total human development."

Teresita Hermano (Executive Consultant and Vice-president of Program Development), in response to the question on how CFA offers solutions to the problems of women in the media, said,

Aside from being a producer of alternative media, CFA also did a lot of conferences, trainings and workshops on how to produce your own media. They conducted these activities for public school teachers, for priests, for nuns, for NGOs and for community organizers hoping that they learn how to produce media that will serve their own needs (Hermano 2004).

CFA's mission statement indicates that this organization focuses on developing people in need through an innovative learning process using media technology and other forms of communication. While its activities may not necessarily focus on the development of women,

it concerns itself with the development of everybody who is in need, explicitly including women. The head of the Human Resources and Development Department, Lolita Serrano says, “it is inherent in our vision that we develop and help people in need and that women belong to that because they are marginalized in a sense (Serrano 2004).”

Conducting activities that specifically address women and their issues may not have been on the list of the previous CFA activities. However, from the interviews conducted, it was clear that the women working at CFA are considering initiating or participating in activities more explicitly addressing women’s issues. For example, the head of the Training Department, Immaculada Belza, said that since CFA did a video about fathers (which supports family life), she is considering doing a project about mothers as well. Serrano also stated that although her main responsibility is to act as the liaison between the management and the employees, the idea of CFA engaging in projects that will directly benefit women is something she is ready to be part of (Belza 2004).



Fig. 3: Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism

2.5. Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, Manila: Profile and History

In 1989, nine Filipino journalists who were critical of the lack of professionalism and the proliferation of irresponsible, sloppily produced news, started an organization dedicated to go beyond mainstream reportage. They called it the *Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism* (PCIJ).

The founding members were Sheila Coronel, Petronilo Daroy, Lorna Kalaw-Tirol, Malou Mangahas, Horacio Severino, Rosario Tanedo, Rigoberto Tiglao, Marites Vitug and Virgilio Vitug. As a non-stock, independent and non-profit media organization, PCIJ started with only three full-time staff members. Lorna Kalaw-Tirol was the chairperson, the executive director was Sheila Coronel and Pureza Puray, the secretary and researcher. At present, PCIJ has more than 14 full-time workers on their staff.

According to PCIJ’s official website, its three primary objectives are: 1) to promote and encourage the development of investigative journalism by providing funding to journalists, and conducting training toward a better understanding of the importance of in-depth and analytical reporting; 2) to strengthen democratic institutions by acting as the catalyst for social debate; and 3) to provide citizens with crucial and significant information enabling them to participate in public discussions and make informed decisions (PCIJ, 2004).

Like any other new organisation, PCIJ encountered several problems along the way. Cana and Garrido’s research, *In Pursuit of Truth, The PCIJ: A Case Study* (1998) identified four main problems which PCIJ faced: lack of funding, acceptance, lack of exceptional and dedicated journalists and the challenge of getting people used to their way of reporting.

Only 14 years since its establishment and PCIJ has already proven its worth as an

organization that crosses the border of mainstream media and gives a broader meaning to news production. Although it has no intention of replacing other media producers such as mainstream newspapers, radio and television stations, PCIJ has been successful in promoting and encouraging investigative reporting on current and important issues in Philippine society.

As a result of their continuing effort to produce and promote well-researched and documented reports, they have received numerous awards including nine *National Book Awards*, a *Catholic Mass Media Award*, and more than two dozen awards and citations from the *Jaime V. Ongpin Award for Investigative Journalism*.

2.6. PCIJ's Work on Women and Media

PCIJ discusses and investigates issues on matters of larger public interest: the environment, politics, business and human rights. They have also focused on women's issues, not just in the media, but in the whole of Philippine society.

Luz Rimban, the Broadcast Director of PCIJ, noted one of their programs which ran from 1995 to 1999 and looked at the perspective of women in various issues such as agriculture, labour and education. The project culminated in the book entitled *Her Stories; Investigative Reports on Filipino Women in the 1990s* (1999).

Vinia Datinguinoo (journalist and Head of Research) and Avigail Olarte (researcher and writer) also said that PCIJ tries to promote women issues in the media by focusing on the journalists themselves. Olarte says:

PCIJ has really spoken for women and I think our editorial desk now is focused on women and children's issues which is really lacking (elsewhere). During our trainings with PCIJ, we discussed women's issues and how we can better portray women in the media. But still, that training was for journalists to be more gender sensitive in their reports. So, PCIJ makes it a point that the people who work in this organization become aware of these things so that when we write our reports, it will be fair for all concerned (Olarte 2004).

Datinguinoo collaborates this saying that CFA works to improve the skills and raise the standards of journalists. She added "journalism in the Philippines is a self-regulating industry so there are a lot of freedoms as well as abuses (Datinguinoo 2004)". To her, issues related to the representation of women are part of a bigger picture of media practitioners' widespread lack of professionalism, skills and ethical standards. As a trainer, Datinguinoo stresses that when she conducts training seminars, she emphasises fair and humane reporting. She does not simply discuss how to do research and interviews but also tackles issues related to ethics. This usually entails discussions about the representation of women in the media.

3. Women in Media NGOs and their Perspectives

Many women who work in women's NGOs are viewed as feminists. A feminist can be simply defined as any person who supports feminism or relating to, or advocating equal

rights for women (Wordnet 2004) and feminism as a social theory and political movement primarily informed and motivated by the experience of women (Wikipedia 2004). While generally providing a critique of social relations, many proponents of feminism also focus on analyzing gender inequality and the promotion of women's rights, interests, and issues.

Despite the proliferation of feminist movements, there is still very little understanding about feminism in the general population. In the Philippines, still too few people appreciate that many fundamental rights such as universal suffrage and education for women, could only be secured thanks to the persistent efforts of women's rights activists from at least the 19th century onwards. There is still widespread ignorance about the contribution of the women's movement to the rights and liberties most of us enjoy today. Not only is feminism's contribution to social progress under-appreciated, feminists suffer from being stereotyped as "home-wreckers" (Cabrera-Balleza 2004).

On September 21, 1972, when President Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law, newspapers and most Philippine media, except those which were controlled by the Marcos regime, were closed (Pineda-Ofreno 1986). After more than a decade of repression, the so-called "people power revolution" of 1986 paved the way for a new media system, making it "one of the freest if not the freest media in Asia" (Cabrera-Balleza 2004). Compared with other Southeast Asian countries, like Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, the Philippines has developed a free press and a dual media system where state-owned and private media organizations co-exist.

However, the attainment of a free press has also brought with it challenges and problems, not the least of which is the continued repression of women in the media through the production of inconsiderate and unrealistic images. As Datinguinoo notes "because journalism in the Philippines is a self-regulating body, there are a lot of freedoms as well as abuses in it (Datinguinoo 2004)." There have been some efforts to address this situation. The nine interviewees and the organizations they work for, are concrete examples of some of the consistent work done to tackle the issues of gender and media. This work is done by sensitizing and educating media practitioners and audiences about gender and representation.

In the following, I will give space to what these women think about the problems confronting Philippine media today and their perspectives on women in the context of the Philippine media.

3.1. General Issues in the Philippine Media from the Interviews

The informants spoke about a variety of problems that the Philippine media are facing today. Those can be divided into three main categories.

3.1.1. Ownership

The first major problem noted by the informants was ownership. Cabrera-Balleza noted that there are two types of media ownership that the current media policies allow. One type is governmental media which concentrates on government programs and plans. Examples of this type are the National Broadcasting Network (NBN), the Philippine Broadcasting Service

(PBS), and the Philippine Information Agency (PIA). Governmental media are supposed to be public service or public trust media, similar to the concept of NHK in Japan. However, this status is being questioned because they also accept advertising (Cabrera-Balleza 2004).

The second type is private-commercial media which is motivated by the profit agenda. This type of media can be considered a business which exists to make money, like any other corporation. What is more, this type of media dominates the industry. An example is the ABS-CBN Network which is owned by the Lopez family. They are now called “tri-media” because their holdings include television, radio and print. In addition, ABS-CBN’s owners also run utility companies such as Meralco (an electric company), Maynilad (a water company) and Bayantel (a telecommunications company) to name only a few (Endaya 2004).

The problem of such an ownership structure is very clear. When people in power commit scandalous or illegal acts, the possibility that the media which they own will cover the issue is very low. Cabrera-Balleza gave an actual example of an event that proves this statement.

Sometime last year (in 2003), there was a case against Meralco for over charging their subscribers by so many billions of pesos and the Supreme Court ruled that they should pay back the consumers. The issue was covered everywhere, in all the media except the ones that ABS-CBN control. They only touched the issue when the decision came down for them to return the money to consumers and to make an announcement that Meralco is paying people back (Cabrera-Belleza 2004).

This example illustrates how the responsibility of the media, which is to inform, is neglected in order to protect the interests of organizations with power.

3.1.2. Commercialism

A second major issue mentioned by more than half of the informants, was the highly commercialized nature of broadcasting in the Philippines. This phenomenon is the direct result of the ownership problem. Since most of the leading television networks are privately owned, the owners of these networks are concerned about commercial profit and not about the public interest. “Philippine media is basically a big business” said Serrano (2004).

Connected to being highly commercialized is the media’s sensationalist approach in their reporting. Hermano talked about these problems at length. As examples of sensationalism, she noted the practice of showing unnecessary pictures and images of rape victims, of scantily-clad women cowering inside night clubs during police raids, or of molestations. These images presumably serve to titillate the viewers and to catch their attention (Hermano 2004).

Another connected issue noted by the interviewees was the insertion of entertainment-focused segments even in regular newscasts (Hermano 2004). Serious news programs which are supposed to inform the public about important things in society have recently incorporated a gossip section about actors and actresses, informing the viewers of who is dating who and who is pregnant, for example.

3.1.3. Lack of Professionalism

Lack of professionalism is the third major issue that the informants noted, especially from PCIJ. Rimban stated that because the Philippines has a free press, all the issues are being reported. The problem is they are not always tackled the way they are supposed to be because of the lack of professional journalists that could also do investigative reporting (Rimban 2004).

In addition, Olarte and Dantinguino both noted that media practitioners lack skills and ethics. Many journalists are careless on their reporting to the point that they say anything on air (Olarte 2004). They also noted cases of journalists who accept “dirty money” (bribes) without feeling guilty about it (Olarte 2004).

3.2. Women’s Issues in the Philippine Media

In the context of the wider issues of the Philippine media, interviewees observed a number of gender issues. They noted that the Philippine media have shown no reluctance to report about victims of sex crimes and violence, for example. Most editors and reporters would claim that in publishing or airing these stories, they are strongly on the side of the victims (Hermano 2004).

Some interviewees argued, however, that this maybe true but in the process, the media often end up victimizing the victims in their coverage. They felt that journalists and reporters use the stories and images merely to sell more copies or gain higher viewer ratings. Speaking from the point of view of a journalist, Dantinguino noted that gender related issues are the most violated area, for television and print media. The daily pressure of deadlines makes it difficult for journalists to work in an ethical way (Dantinguino 2004).

3.2.1. Sexualized Images

All interviewees felt that women being treated as sex objects remains the most obvious problem in Philippine media. As examples, they noted the common practice of showing women in skimpy bikinis while singing and dancing, even on daytime shows. Dantinguino told of an especially blatant example of sensational reporting. ABS-CBN covered a story of a teen-age girl who killed herself by jumping off a building. The reporter insinuated that the reason behind the teenager’s suicidal act was that she was pregnant. This insinuation was combined with a camera shot of the girl’s belly (Dantinguino 2004). Cabrera-Balleza especially noted that the problem is that news reporting gives extreme importance to girls’ and women’s age and appearance. She pointed out that the Philippines now follows Western standards of feminine beauty, such as a fair complexion (Cabrera-Balleza 2004).

3.2.2. Limited Roles and Character Traits

All of the informants took issue with the way women’s characters and social roles are represented. According to them, women are most frequently represented as weak, less educated, and domestic, usually in the roles of wife, daughter, helper and friend. Cantor said that the media remains condescending in its representations of women, focusing on their

weaknesses, and treating them as the “second sex.” She continued by saying that the problem of media is that they are hesitant to show strong-willed women who go against the norm (Cantor 2004).

3.2.3. Lack of Women in Top Positions in the Industry

The third common observation of the interviewees was the lack of women holding top positions in the media, especially in decision-making posts. While there are some exceptions, the Philippine media is still being controlled by men overall.

To summarize, the major gender-related issues in the media that the interviewees’ noted are as follows:

- The lack of gender sensitivity among media practitioners.
- The rate and profit agenda of not just the media networks but also of journalists and reporters.
- The absence of women in decision making posts.

4. Interviewees’ Motivations and Reasons for Working in NGOs

In the Philippines, the prevailing perception of work in a non-profit organisation is that it is less demanding than work in a typical company. There is also an assumption that people working in NGOs receive relatively higher salaries compared to workers at for-profit companies.

Before conducting the interviews, I shared this negative image of women working in NGOs. I did not believe that they were active and eager in their work because they really believe in their respective organization’s mission, or that they sincerely care about those who are in need or marginalised. I suspected that their main reason for choosing to work in the non-profit sector was that they found it difficult to enter the regular working environment. In the case of those who previously worked in the mainstream, I suspected that they merely got tired of their regular jobs and wanted to have a change of working environment. The results of my interviews however, showed me that these assumptions were wrong.

While most of the nine interviewees stated that they did not find it difficult to get their current positions in their respective NGO, it is clear that their responsibilities, work-load and obligations are enormous. The process of helping people in need does not stop with just thinking of new ways to provide assistance. It does not end with creating programs and/or organising conferences and forums. It requires constantly educating oneself. This is one of the reasons most of the interviewees are taking up or have taken graduate degrees. As Cabrera-Balleza said, “I took the M.A. to sharpen my analytical skills. I wanted to be backed up by theories because I saw that lacking in this organisation (Cabrera-Belleza 2004).”

The perception that women working in media NGOs are motivated primarily by high salaries is also inaccurate, at least in the case of the three that are the subject of this research. A low salary does not necessarily discourage women who work for NGOs. For example, Olarte (PCIJ), Serrano and Belza (both CFA) work for salaries below 20,000 pesos

(40,000 yen) a month. What motivates these women are the non-material benefits that they get from doing their work. Olarte cited three reasons why she is satisfied with her job. Firstly, she believes that her work is good and ideal for her, secondly, that it is practical and necessary and last, it is pleasurable (Olarte 2004). Belza and Serrano distinctly stated that they felt their work brings them closer to God. In addition, they said they gained fulfilment from the thought of having been able to help those who are in need (2004).

Some of the interviewees did receive high salaries, ranging from 50,000 to 65,000 pesos a month (100,000-130,000 yen). However, it appeared in their cases as well, the salary was not the prime factor in motivating them to continue working with media NGOs.

For Cabrera-Balleza, it was her interest and early involvement in communications and women's movements which made *Isis* the workplace of choice for her. She also said that working at *Isis* helped her to develop as an individual. She felt that her analytical and critical thinking has been sharpened because of her work in the organization. Also, her knowledge about women and other social movements has grown significantly. She added that she has acquired a "database in her mind" in which she stores the names of key players, key issues and the concerns of women in the region as well as in other parts of the world.

Hermano, also in the high salary category, came back to CFA to offer her assistance after working in London for 18 years. She decided to return to CFA because she believes that she can make the organization active again. Another motivation for her was also the challenging situation of the broadcast and communication policies in the Philippines. When asked about the benefits she gets from doing her job, she responded without hesitation that "the benefits are really seeing what the results of your work are...to see that you have helped others (Hermano 2004)."

Endaya, Cantor, Rimban and Datinguinoo all receive a medium-high salary. They also cited non-monetary benefits. Apart from Rimban, all mentioned travelling as a benefit. They said travelling was important to them because it enables them to meet new people with the same interests in advocacy. They also felt that it empowered them because it involves large responsibilities (Endaya 2004), and that they learned a lot from each travel experience. They also noted as a motivating factor the fulfilment that they get whenever they see that they have made an impact in their work. Rimban and Datinguinoo called it the "psychological reward."

It can be seen that there are numerous reasons behind the enthusiasm and activeness of these women. There are personal motivations such as the enhancement of knowledge or the improvement of the analytical mind. There are also cases of these NGO workers sacrificing better opportunities abroad to provide help in their home country. Another factor was the satisfaction of having been able to help others — "the psychological reward." Spiritual development was also mentioned. The size of the salary alone was not a motivating or a deterring factor for the nine interviewees.

5. Conclusion

The relationship between the nine women and the three media NGOs that have been discussed in this research shows the level of their analysis of the issues and also the level of their commitment.

The long struggles of women such as those interviewed and the media NGOs' involvement in the social transformation movement, has contributed in bringing the issues and predicaments of Filipino women to national and international attention. In the last 100 years of the women's movement, women like them have been fighting, advocating for and expressing women's right to advance the cause of women. They have, to some measure, succeeded.

While they receive salaries for their work, the women who I interviewed also receive intangible benefits. For example, the result of organizing conferences and forums to empower women: seeing what was learned from it, the production of news that is well-researched, timely, and has an impact. These nine women showed a holistic approach to the issues they are facing. They see that genuine advocacy for women's issues cannot be separated from the issues of the whole nation. As they speak of women issues, they are able to relate it to the basic sectors of the population that are saddled with political and economic problems.

This research found a high level of competence, awareness of the issues and leadership skills in these women. They themselves profess a high level of satisfaction from their work. But is the level and intensity of their commitment really matched accordingly by outcomes? What is lacking that could bring them closer to the goals? While the interviewees gave a detailed critique of mainstream media, and some of them have incorporated media literacy projects in their future plans, their approach to addressing these issues seems to give too little attention to media literacy.

Media literacy as a basic condition for addressing gender issues in media has long been advocated and researched widely in other societies with highly commercialised media. Suzuki defines Media Literacy as:

the term used to denote people's ability to critically analyze and evaluate media in a socio-cultural context, to access the media, and to create communications in a wide variety of forms. It also denotes various kinds of educational activities aimed at developing media literacy as defined here (Suzuki 2003).

The media literacy approach means being aware of the three key components of media: text, audiences and production, in order to understand it fully. It is not simply developing the critical awareness of people. It is a lifelong process that involves the development of an individual from learning how to read the content of the media. This includes understanding how media re-present reality, and the power relations behind the production of it, and applying her/his own judgement or critical thinking to new situations and discussing it with others while carefully absorbing their insights. It also involves activities that would change

the media system, particularly in terms of stereotypes and representation, but also ownership structures. It seems that media NGOs researched for this paper have focused too much on the production and text side, and neglected audiences. A concerted effort to learn from the experiences and advances made in this area in other countries would be beneficial.

One of the elements addressed by media literacy is the need to change the educational system. It needs to incorporate systematic and critical media studies in order to cope with the changing reality. All the interviewees value education and have indeed exerted much needed effort to educate themselves. They could extend their efforts to include demands for media education for all.

Further, while a holistic view of the issues of gender and media is necessary, it appears to need more focus. Given the seriousness of the issue, the scarcity of campaigns directly addressing Filipino women's plight in the media is surprising. *Isis*, CFA and PCIJ have quite ambitious missions as organizations. PCIJ works on practically all large problems that the Philippines is confronting. CFA is engaged in harnessing the power of communication in the Philippines and Asia to empower people in need, while *Isis* has its hands full in creating space for women (both local and global) through information and communication.

Yet, women in the Philippines are still facing innumerable issues that have been existing for decades and only slow progress has been made. There have been changes and developments but the fact remains that these problems are still being carried over, one generation after the other. One of the reasons is that women organizations, active as they may be, are spreading themselves too thinly by trying to solve larger problems of Philippine society and even other countries. Focusing more on the plight of Filipino women before engaging in other issues outside the Philippines, may be necessary to produce more tangible outcomes.

From conducting this research, I gained awareness about the nature of media NGOs and the women working with them, what they are and what they do. I have also come to understand the hardships and struggles these women confront in their fight for social change, and was inspired to hear about their motivations. This research made me realize that there is more which needs to be done. Additional research is necessary to understand and elucidate the situation of women in the Philippine media society. This paper only dealt with the basic and general relationship of women and the media. More detailed and specific research on the outcomes of advocacy work, integration of media literacy in educational programs and other activities are needed. I hope that such research will make a contribution to the knowledge and understanding of the situation of women in the Philippine media society.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

General Questions about the Philippine Media:

- 1 What do you think about the Philippine Media?
- 2 What do you think about the situation of women in the society? In the media?
- 3 What are the issues and problems towards women that you see in the media?
- 4 What can this organization or you do to give solutions to these problems?
- 5 Do you believe that there is still hope?

Personal Queries

- 1 How long have you been working here?
- 2 Are you enjoying your work?

- 3 Did you apply here directly after graduating? (Please tell me about your job hunting days)
- 4 Was it hard or easy for you to get this job? Why?
- 5 What made you decide to work here?
- 6 Until when do you see yourself working with this organization? Do you have any plans for the future? (for yourself and the NGO)
- 7 Did you ever have a dream occupation? What was it?
- 8 If you are not working here now, what kind of job do you think you would most likely be doing?
- 9 What are the benefits (not necessarily material) that you get from this kind of job? How much is your salary?
- 10 What if somebody offers you a better paying job, will you accept it?