

Televised Ecotopianism: An Ecocritical Analysis on Environmental Risk and Risk Reduction Discourses in Philippine Environmental Documentaries

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ABSTRACT

Environmental and risk communication have become trends in many forms of mass media, including television. In the Philippines, local television stations have joined the bandwagon by producing their own versions of environmental programmes, for example, GMA Network's award-winning broadcast documentaries such as *Signos*, *Planet Philippines*, *Wildlife for Sale*, and *Oras Na*. Grounded on the ecocritical theory, this paper discusses the paradigm dominating the discourses on environmental risk and risk reduction in the four documentaries. It has been found that the main framework of presentation and analysis on environmental risks and risk reduction is ecotopianism, which is problematic as it excludes socio-cultural aspects. This paper, therefore, calls for the inclusion of neglected perspectives on the topic such as transgressive ecotopianism, indigenous or traditional knowledge, and eco-Marxism. Presenting such alternative discourses on air encourages a well-informed audience, thus making them empowered to participate in the discussion and formulation of decisions and policies regarding the future of the environment and the planet as a whole.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, environmental documentaries, ecotopianism, risk communication

1. INTRODUCTION

As environmental problems and hazards such as forest cover depletion, pollution, and climate change, among others, become more globally visible today, environmental risk awareness has also become a trend, a necessity, and a responsibility. Environmental communication is defined by Cox (2010: 20) as "the symbolic medium that we use in constructing environmental problems and negotiating society's different responses to them." This specific area of communication aims to expose relevant and timely issues and problems about the environment as well as to present possible preventive measures and solutions as recommended by a select population, usually by scientific experts.

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The campaign for awareness on environmental problems and hazards emerged in the 1960s up to the early 1970s when academic literature such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and Meadows et al.'s *Limits to Growth* presented the depleting and finite nature of the earth's natural resources caused by unregulated and rapid industrial and urban development (Frederick, 1999). Since then, activities, advocacies, and campaigns that aim to communicate the environment – its characteristics, components, parts, aspects, problems, issues, and endangerment – have been organised, perpetuated, and implemented worldwide.

Under this specific type of communication is a subgenre that involves the dissemination of knowledge and awareness on environmental risks and risk reduction techniques, that is, risk communication. It can be defined as “the exchange of information among interested parties about the nature, magnitude, significance, and control of risk” (De la Paz, 1999: 15). This means that risk communication conveys information that aims to educate the receivers of messages about any environmental or natural phenomena, to provide the enumeration and discussion of possible risks that may occur once such phenomena take place, and to present ways or measures of refraining from experiencing and encountering the effects of such environmental risks.

1.1 Eco-documentaries as Tools for Environmental and Risk Communication

Several tools have been used to fulfil the normative duties of environmental and risk communication, among which are various forms of mass media. Advocates, governments, and leaders have long utilised newspapers, radio, film, and television in communicating risks since they are considered as powerful tools in shaping and directing the political debate about the Earth's future (Pope, 1996).

In the global broadcast television and film arena, several documentary films about environmental problems and risks were produced because such types of media product have been found to be influential in inciting debates and discussion regarding the state and future of the Earth and the environment (McKinney and Shariff, 1997). Among the most notable documentaries that have emerged of recent are *The Inconvenient Truth* (2010), *Planet in Peril* (2008), and *The 11th Hour* (2008).

This trend is not isolated in the international media but also in the local broadcast institutions of various countries. In the Philippines, their two most popular local television stations have also joined the bandwagon. ABS-CBN integrated environmental issues in their news and current affairs programmes such as *Matanglawin*, *Failon Ngayon*, and *The Correspondents*, among others. Similarly, GMA Network produced their own environmental documentary programme, *Born to Be Wild*, as well as award-winning documentary specials such as *Signos* (2008), *Planet Philippines* (2009), *Wildlife for Sale* (2010), and *Oras Na* (2011).

1.2 Environmental Risks in Philippine Environmental Documentaries

Patterned on the format and style of well-known and international environmental documentaries, GMA Network produced four noteworthy ones. These are *Signos: Banta ng Nagbabagong Klima (Signs: Threats of a Changing Climate)*, *Planet Philippines*, *Wildlife for Sale*, and *Oras Na* (It is time).

1.2.1 *Signos: Banta ng Nagbabagong Klima*

Produced by GMA Network in 2008 and hosted and narrated by Filipino actor and Greenpeace advocate, Richard Gutierrez, *Signos: Banta ng Nagbabagong Klima* is the first full-length eco-documentary in the Philippines that discussed the risks that are or can be caused by climate change. Due to its comprehensive discussion on the issue and effects of climate change in the Philippines, as well as its visual quality, it bagged the Best Documentary Special Award from the 22nd Star Awards for Television in the Philippines in 2008. Table 1 shows the specific environmental risks discussed and examined in the eco-documentary, along with the causes and proposed solutions for the risks as presented by the media text.

Table 1. Specific environmental risks, causes and proposed solutions as reported in *Signos*

Specific risks	General causes	Proposed solutions
Coral bleaching Excessive rain or super typhoons or the La Niña phenomenon resulting in floods, landslides and storm surge Epidemics or diseases due to climate change (e.g. malaria, snail fever, dengue) Food shortage (especially of rice and fish) Rising sea levels Drought or the El Niño phenomenon	Climate change caused by: Excessive use of fossil fuels; Industrial revolution or industrialisation; urbanisation or urban development	Industrial revolution or industrialisation; urbanisation or urban development Individual efforts such as: Unplugging of electric appliances when not in use; using energy-efficient light bulbs; decreasing garbage per person (less than 6 large garbage bags per year); shifting from using fossil fuel to using alternative renewable energy sources; lessening carbon footprint

1.2.2 *Planet Philippines*

Also hosted by Gutierrez, *Planet Philippines* (2009) featured various animal and plant species that constitute the huge biodiversity found in the different islands and water systems of Philippines. It presented the wildlife found in some of the country's virgin forests, caves, and marine territories. It also brought to light some environmental issues such as the endangerment of a number of the country's endemic flora and fauna.

The eco-documentary has been critically acclaimed due to its advocacy as well as its aesthetic value. In fact, it received a number of awards from international and local media organisations. *Planet Philippines* won the bronze medal in the 2011 New York Festival International Television and Film Awards. In the Philippines, it also received a special citation under the Best Adult Educational/Cultural Program category from the 2011 Catholic Mass Media Awards, and won the Best Documentary Special category in the 2011 PMPC Star Awards for TV. Moreover, it also garnered the Silver Telly Award with Highest Honor in the 32nd Telly Awards, a local awards ceremony

that gives commendation to various programs and television commercials in local, regional, and cable television stations.

Even though the eco-documentary was technically a showcase of the country's flora and fauna, it still touched on some environmental issues and risks related to the Philippine wildlife. Table 2 presents the risks, as well as their causes and possible solutions as reported in the eco-documentary.

Table 2. Specific environmental risks, causes and proposed solutions as reported in *Planet Philippines*

Specific risks	Causes	Proposed solutions
Coral bleaching	Climate change due to human activity	NA
Excessive carbon emission which contributes to climate change and the destruction of the flora and fauna's habitats	Deforestation; excessive use of fossil fuel	NA
Wildlife extinction (resulting in food shortage)	Excessive hunting and fishing; deforestation; destruction of habitats due to human activity	Strict protection (e.g. regulations on fishing in the featured MILF territory)

1.2.3 *Wildlife for Sale*

Illegal wildlife trade is the main focus of GMA Network's 2011 eco-documentary special, *Wildlife for Sale*. According to the documentary, wildlife trade is the third largest illegal or underground industry in the world. It documented several wildlife trafficking trails in the Philippines, including videos on the capture, caging, torture, and sale of endemic and endangered animals in the Philippines and in other parts of Southeast Asia. The sole focus of the media text was to expose the illegal industry but it also exposed possible risks that could be experienced because of it (Table 3).

Table 3. Specific environmental risks, causes and proposed solutions as reported in *Wildlife for Sale*

Specific risks	Causes	Proposed solutions
Epidemics caused by eating of wild animals (e.g. SARS Corona virus, Ebola virus)	Illegal wildlife trafficking; product demand (e.g. pets or wildlife, used for food); deforestation; poverty (indigenous peoples hunt wildlife to sell to stockers)	Refraining from buying wild animals or products from wild animals; stewardship
Food shortage		

1.2.4 *Oras Na*

Oras Na is an award-winning 70-minute television special produced by GMA Network. In 2012, it was awarded the Martine Fillipi Award for Discovery in the 31st International URTI Grand Prix for Author’s Documentary. It was also a finalist in the 2013 New York Festival awards. The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and its partner organisations also named *Oras Na* as the “Best Investigative Story” during the 3rd UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction on March 16, 2015. The eco-documentary exposed the various deadlines of nature that the world and the Philippines will be facing in the near future due to destructive human activities. It generally discussed four major forecasts of looming environmental risks such as total forest denudation, fresh water shortage, and seafood, among others. Table 4 enumerates all the specific risks shown in the documentary, as well as their causes and proposed solutions.

Table 4. Specific environmental risks, causes and proposed solutions as reported in *Oras Na*

Specific risks	Causes	Proposed solutions
2025 – All the forests in the Philippines will become denuded	Illegal or excessive logging by private companies and indigenous peoples; deforestation (deforestation rate is directly proportional to population rate); land conversion (forest land to agricultural, residential, or commercial land); demand for highland agricultural products (forest lands are converted to agricultural lands); demand for wood-based products (e.g. furniture, pencil, paper); excessive mining (due to the high demand for minerals)	Awareness; reforestation; determining protection forests apart from production forests and strictly implementing and regulating this demarcation
2025 – No supply of clean water / fresh water crisis	Overpopulation (increase in the number of consumers of fresh water); excessive use of water; wasteful consumption of water (e.g. leaky faucets, leaving glasses with water);	Refraining from dumping garbage in water systems; refraining from wasting water; instalment of interceptors in water systems
2020 – 70 million people from the whole world will die because of water-borne diseases	contamination of ground and surface water due to pollution caused by garbage dump; urban growth; climate change	
2030 – Shortage of fossil fuels	High demand for fossil fuels	Usage of alternative energy sources (wind power, solar power, geothermal energy, hydropower energy)

Table 4. (Con't)

Specific risks	Causes	Proposed solutions
2050 – No more fishes in the sea	Overpopulation resulting in the high demand for seafood (because the sea is the largest natural or food resource); illegal or destructive fishing methods (e.g. using dynamites); overfishing; destruction of habitats (mangrove forests, coral reefs) that are vital for fish nurseries	Strict regulation on fishing; establishment of fishing seasons to help the fish population rejuvenate; reduction of fishing by 50%; improvement and innovation of aquaculture systems (e.g. mangrove aquaculture); refraining from buying illegally caught fishes

1.3 *Ecocriticism and Media Studies*

While there are scholars who acknowledge that television coverage on environment and environmental risks have positive effects on the awareness and political participation of the audiences, others have been critical towards this notion through their research and commentaries. Such critical works are mostly grounded on *ecocriticism*, which is basically defined as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996: xviii). This specific field of inquiry looks into various textual issues such as the representation of nature or any part of it in different forms of literary and media texts.

Apart from simply describing and analysing themes of ecological and environmental discussions in literary and media texts, ecocriticism also aims to expose the absence of certain perspectives on the mediated discussion of environmental issues and concerns. The presentation of alternative environment-related ideologies, methods, and opinions is also among its objectives. Moreover, it also has to “get beyond the stage of special pleading for a single cause, and to consider what, uniquely, it can offer as the holistic mode of critical thought in the twenty-first century” (Cubitt, 2013: 280).

Ecocriticism was originally employed to analyse the representations and discourses about environment in published fiction and non-fiction literature but ecocritics today have also dived into examining environmental mass media products such as environmental documentaries, news reports, fiction films, drama programs, and the like. Some ecocritical scholars have even looked into the portrayal and representations of wildlife, as well as the discussion of environmental problems and risks like climate change.

1.4 *Research Objectives*

This paper aims to perform an ecocritical analysis on the discourse of environmental risks and risk reduction in the four environmental documentaries described earlier, namely *Signos*, *Planet Philippines*, *Wildlife for Sale*, and *Oras Na*. Specifically, this paper aims to (1) determine the environmental risk and risk reduction paradigm used

in the four eco-documentaries and (2) present additional or alternative paradigms for a more holistic, complete, and objective coverage, reportage, or representation of environmental risks and risk reduction techniques in future documentary productions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Problems with Accuracy and Objectivity in Environmental News and Programs

Environmental and risk communication through the media has been the subject of research and published in several books and academic journals. Most of these are analyses on how the media has constructed and represented the various segments of issues regarding the environment (Anderson, 1997; Valdez and Fernandez, 1999; Humphrys and Williams, 2005; Campbell, 2014). Some, on the other hand, looked into the effects of the environmental media on the perceptions and attitudes of the audience towards different issues pertaining to the environment (Lomborg, 2001; Cox, 2010). When it comes to ecocritical analyses on news representations of environmental problems and risks, two issues usually emerge; accuracy and objectivity.

Humphrys and Williams (2005) noted that by critically analysing news presentations, we could decipher underlying values and ideologies that pervade them. Also, critical analyses could be used to discover the extent, level, and even lack of factual and contextual accuracy and objectivity in news items. This involves concerns on the representations or misrepresentations of reality – of the natural and social world – in both dramatic and non-dramatic genres and the inclusion or exclusion of different sectors and standpoints. Even documentaries and news programmes that are supposed to disseminate and mediate realities could contain representations and discussions that are sometimes incomplete, distorted, biased, inaccurate, or are far from reality (Croteau & Hoynes, 2003: 196).

The international news media, according to Anderson (1997), somehow neglects accuracy and objectivity in their reportage on environmental risks and risk reduction as they continue to dominantly lean on a scientific perspective rather than exploring other alternatives. He found, through analysing environmental news items and literature review, that scientists were the ones usually chosen as experts and primary definers of environmental issues while other stakeholders such as environmental pressure or advocacy groups are reduced to simply being secondary sources.

In the Philippine context, Valdez and Fernandez (1999: 77) claimed that the mass media ignores science in their reportage. However, when they do recognise scientific facts or findings, they tend to sensationalise them, making them “as a source of startling narratives.” The researchers cited specific ways in which sensationalism is integrated in risk reporting such as the mass media’s treatment of health and environmental risks as specific events or series of events instead of regarding them as normal phenomena that are caused by either human beings or nature. Another form of sensationalism as observed by Valdez and Fernandez is the trend of news organisations’ focus on dramatic and sensational stories of risk-affected individuals or groups rather than conveying necessary facts for decision-making and resiliency efforts.

Employing a qualitative frame analysis, Campbell (2014: 58) also discovered that

the framing of environmental risks and natural disasters in what he calls as “factual entertainment television programmes” could be considered problematic. The TV programmes that he studied, which were released in the early 2000s, were found to neglect visual accuracy because of their use of dramatic reconstructions and digital or animated elements in their presentation of issues. The programmes, according to him, dominantly presented a fatalistic perspective on environmental issues. Moreover, due to the usage of visual composition and animated elements in “factual entertainment” TV shows (Campbell, 2014: 58), natural disasters and other risks have been represented as mere “voyeuristic spectacles,” (Campbell, 2014: 58) making them purely audience entertainment.

Such accuracy and objectivity-related issues could be deemed problematic as one school of thought regards the mass media as having a powerful influence on audiences. Lomborg (2001: 39) suggested three effects of the medium on the reception and perception of the audiences of environmental risks and other related issues. First, since the media often provides the audience with facts in an incomprehensible manner, they become insufficiently educated on the matter, thus making them less qualified to take part in a democratic decision-making process. In relation to that, he also posited that the audience can become delusional that they are truly and fully provided with sufficient knowledge, making them believe that they are capable of and equipped for partaking in the debate and decision-making activities for the future of the planet. Finally, the images and information presented by the mass media could often lead to a “far too negative and distorted impression” or perception of environmental problems.

Most of the past studies on the discourse and representations of environmental risks are focused on the analysis and examination of the news genre. Ecocritical analyses of other mass media texts, specifically those of broadcast and film documentaries, have yet to be fully explored in the media research community. This study aims to begin filling that gap by looking into the dominant discourse in four environmental documentaries produced and released in the Philippines.

2.2 Framework of Analysis: Ecotopianism—Principles and Themes

In analysing and reading the media texts included in this research, the principles and themes of ecotopianism were used as criteria in identifying if the dominant discourse on environmental risk and risk reduction in the documentaries are in line with it. Ecotopianism is defined as the “formal and self-conscious ecological utopianism” (Garforth, 2006: 5) or a type of utopian thinking that contains “evocative images of a sustainable society” (Pepper, 2005: 5).

Pepper (2005) identified four principles that characterise ecotopian discourse. He advocates that an ideal sustainable society involves (1) the absence or a minimal presence of human-made interruption of natural or ecological processes; (2) maximum conservation of natural resources, raw materials, and energy; (3) balance between population increase and loss; and (4) the presence of an established and science-based social system wherein human beings will accept and follow the three preceding ideas. This social system often comprises of more underlying principles such as strict protectionism of natural resources, the reversal of the ill effects of industrialisation,

urbanisation, and modernisation to the environment, and the perception of superiority of scientific knowledge over others when it comes to environmental preservation and maintenance, among others (Pepper, 2005).

Garforth (2006) also posited that ecotopian thinking is comprised of three main themes – ecocentrism, sufficiency, and embeddedness. Ecocentrism battles anthropocentrism as the former accords equal value to all living organisms, including human beings as well as their environment. The ecotopic theme of sufficiency recognises the antagonistic nature of economic expansion and acquisition as they are deemed as causes of environmental exploitation, decline, and destruction, which eventually results in risks and hazards. It suggests that human beings should “reject the logic of ‘more’ and articulate the philosophy of ‘enough’,” (Garforth, 2006: 9). It means that human beings should not acquire well-being and satisfaction through material progress “but in spiritual, cultural and intellectual growth” (Garforth, 2006: 9). Finally, embeddedness as an ecotopic theme recognises the existence of separation and alienation between the modern society and nature. It seeks to break that discord and sees physical, emotional, and intellectual closeness to nature as a crucial ingredient in establishing a sustainable society.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative in nature and employed a descriptive research design. Employing an ecocritical approach to textual analysis, the researcher looked into the discourses on environmental risk and risk reduction in four Philippine environmental documentaries produced by GMA Network, Inc. They are *Signos* (2008), *Planet Philippines* (2009), *Wildlife for Sale* (2010), and *Oras Na* (2011).

The documentaries were treated as texts. Croteau and Hoynes (2003) cited the significance of treating media messages as texts that needed to be read or interpreted, saying that they can be reflections of the ideologies, values, and social characteristics of content producers. Also, media content, according to them, could also be reflections of audience preference, as well as the norms, values, and interests of the society. In light of this, the researcher looked into the discussions of environmental risks, its causes and proposed solutions, through the documentaries’ host’s narration, interviews, and *mise-en-scene*.

Data were gathered from the narration of the documentaries’ main host, Richard Gutierrez. All throughout his narrations, he introduces the environment and its problems and risks, as well as their causes and possible solutions or mitigation techniques. The narrations were transcribed.

The interview transcripts were also examined in detail. The researcher identified the interviewees’ views and contributions to the documentaries’ discussion on environmental risks, risk reduction and mitigation. The interviewees’ contribution were classified into five types, which are primary, secondary, tertiary, recommendation, and evaluative. Determining the type of knowledge or information presented by the media through interviews can expose the ideological or theoretical leaning or framework of the mass media content.

The television documentaries' *mise-en-scene*, which is generally defined as everything that the audiences could see or hear from television shows and films that could affect their perceptions and includes the setting or location, costume or attire, make-up, lighting, and camera angles, shots, and framing (Long and Wall, 2009), were also identified and examined. Narrations and interviews were usually coupled with videos that pertain directly to or support the information or data being presented. The types of shots, camera angles, and lighting were identified. The resource persons' visual representations were also analysed. The researcher looked at the camera shots, angles, and movements used in framing the interviewees. Moreover, the interview's location and the interviewees' attires were determined. Textual analysis should include the *mise-en-scene* of any audio-visual media product as they can also be used to gauge the producers, audiences, and the society in general.

All data were categorised and determined whether they come under Garforth's three main themes and Pepper's four principles of ecotopianism.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 *Ecotopianism as the Dominant Framework of Discourse*

The discourse on environmental risks in the documentaries is heavily grounded on utopianism, which is defined by Sargent (1994: 3) as a school of thought or "social dreaming" that looks into an ideal society that is usually totally different from the one in which the "dreamers" are living in. The specific utopian paradigm used in the discussions in the documentary specials is ecotopianism.

The discussions on the causes, which include human activity and population growth, urban development, product demand, poverty, and proposed solutions for environmental risks, which include strict protectionism and regulation and adapting a sense of stewardship presented in the eco-documentaries, are all under Pepper's four principles and Garforth's three main themes of ecotopianism. These are evident through the narration, interviews, and the broadcast documentaries' *mise-en-scene*.

4.1.1 *People as antagonists*

All the eco-documentaries highlighted the common root for environmental risks – human beings. Climate change, the looming shortage of food and water, pollution and other risks were perceived to have been caused by unregulated, illegal, or excessive human activities, as well as the rapid growth of the human population.

All three themes of ecotopianism are evident whenever the documentaries criticise unregulated, illegal, or excessive human activity. Among these activities are logging, fishing, hunting, and wildlife trade.

In *Signos*, Gutierrez narrated that the human race is to be blamed for all the signs of climate change that are affecting us during this decade, saying that "...*tayo ang dapat sisihin kung bakit nagkaganito...* [we are the ones who are responsible for our present state]." In the same documentary, Gutierrez started his conclusion by declaring that "*Tayo ang dahilan kung bakit nagkaganito ang mundo...* [We are the reason why the earth became like this...]."

Rapid population growth is also antagonised as it is deemed to be a threat to nature. According to Smith (1993: 1285), “population growth keeps people in poverty, obliges them to destroy their environments, and leads to deforestation, soil erosion, water shortages, and desertification”—characteristics that are discussed in the documentaries. Corollary to population growth, is the increase in the demand for resources such as food, shelter space, and minerals. This increase, as *Oras Na* highlighted, is the cause for the looming loss of fish population. Forest cover depletion also finds its roots in the increase of population as more people results in a higher demand for residential, agricultural, and commercial space. All four eco-documentaries portray throughout that population growth will result in increasing demand for shelter, agriculture, food production, and resource exploration.

4.1.2 *Urban development as a cause*

It should be noted that all four eco-documentaries pinpointed one specific human activity as the major source of environmental risks, that is, urban development. The discussions in all the eco-documentaries evidently show the dichotomy between urbanised communities and the environment. Cities and nature were considered as two conflicting entities. Urban development and its activities have often been blamed for the decline and decrease of natural resources and the destruction of the habitats of flora and fauna in the Philippines, which would eventually lead to environmental risks that were discussed in the documentaries. As Heyen et al. (2006: 4) highlighted, “urbanisation has long been discussed as a process whereby one kind of environment, namely the ‘natural’ environment, is traded in for, or rather taken over by, a much more crude and unsavoury ‘built’ environment.”

The instances or case studies in the documentaries illustrate that urban development is the cause for climate change, resulting in environmental risks such as coral bleaching, forest fires, submerging of coastal areas under seawater, and food and water shortage, among others.

Apart from that, the modern human being who lives in an urbanised community has now been deemed detached from the environment unlike his predecessors who were found to be living in harmony with nature (Jackson, 1971). The pre-modern perspective on nature, according to Short (1991: 22), is that the environment:

.. is not something that can be cut into pieces and sold in parcels. Land is not a place or space within a larger spatial system. On the contrary, it is seen in terms of social relations. The people, as part of nature, are intimately linked to the land... The land itself is the possession of the group as a whole. It is not privately partitioned and owned.

Short’s description of the pre-modern perspective on the environment could be seen in the lifestyle of the pre-Hispanic inhabitants of the Philippines. Such harmony has brought a good sustainable relationship between human beings and nature, which brought about natural conservation. However with the arrival of colonial powers, they formulated and implemented projects that aimed to exploit the natural resources of the country (Department of Environment and Natural Resources, 2012). From then on, the Philippines empathy with nature declined.

This trend of apathy is portrayed in case studies presented in *Oras Na* where direct links between unregulated garbage dumping and fresh water shortage have been established. In the documentary, the interviewed scientists and academics pointed out that the main reason for the decrease in clean surface water from rivers, seas, and lakes in the country is due to unregulated garbage dumping in water systems, as well as the absence of effective water treatment facilities in the Philippines. As illustrated in this case, the culprits have lost their attachment to the water, as part of the commons, due to their need to dispose of their wastes.

In *Signos*, highly industrialised countries were highlighted as the major contributors for emission of greenhouse gases. Excessive use of fossil fuels was deemed as one of the main causes for accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, thus causing the greenhouse effect, which in return causes climate change. Those countries have been portrayed as industrial communities that have become emotionally detached from the environment due to their desire to grow economically. This detachment causes them to overlook the effects of industrialisation not only to the environment but also to developing countries.

Oras Na and *Wildlife for Sale* also portrayed hunters, poachers, fisher folks, and farmers as human beings that are emotionally and spiritually detached from nature because they tend to cater only to their personal economic needs rather than the preservation of the environment and natural resources.

4.1.3 Poverty and product demand as motivations

Poverty and the increasing demand for space and raw products was widely highlighted in *Wildlife for Sale*, *Planet Philippines*, and *Oras Na* as some of the major causes of environmental risks. Through the case studies, interviews, and facts shown, the eco-documentaries suggested that businesses, demand for products, poverty, and the lack of livelihood have become enemies of the environment.

In an interview in *Wildlife for Sale*, a trader admitted that illegal wildlife trade, especially the sale of endemic and endangered species, is a highly lucrative business. Indigenous peoples and rural communities interviewed in the same documentary also admitted that they turned to poaching because of the lack of profitable livelihood. As shown in the documentary, wild animals are sold as pets, food, or as an alternative cure for certain diseases. These statements reveal the prevailing and massive market for exotic, endemic, and endangered wildlife.

Wildlife for Sale also studied the case of a myna poacher from the Palawan tribe. According to him, a full-grown myna can be sold from 300 to 400 pesos to stockers. Although this amount may seem minuscule, it is apparently enough for a simple or impoverished Filipino family to survive for at least a couple of days. Down the transaction line, the price of the myna increases.

Another example is *Wildlife for Sale's* story on captured Chinese fishermen in Puerto Princesa, Palawan. Their aim was to catch a large number of sea turtles in Philippine waters and sell them as house decorations and food back in their country. Incidentally, turtle meat and turtle-based ornaments have a huge market in China.

Poverty and product demand is further criticised in the conclusion of *Wildlife for Sale* where Gutierrez confronted the problem, saying:

Walang iisang kasagutan kung paano ito mahihinto dahil hanggang walang alternatibong hanapbuhay na makikita at hindi sapat ang kaalaman ukol dito, mas mananaig ang kagustuhan kumita kahit mali. [There is no single solution to stop this problem [wildlife trade] because unless there are alternative livelihoods made available and there is a lack of information on the issue, the desire to earn money would still prevail even through wrong means].

4.1.4 Ecotopic solutions as the only legitimate solutions

In all the four eco-documentaries, the programme host subtly narrated a call for a better or ideal world, where the environment experiences less or no human interference. This call for a better and ideal world, as well as better protection and interaction with nature, is an exact representation of an utopian mentality that criticises the current and existing state of affairs (Pepper, 2005).

Two of the solutions posited in the four documentaries are strict regulation and protectionism. This is in line with ecotopianism's principle of the need for absent or minimal interruption of human beings on natural or ecological processes and the principle of maximum conservation of natural resources, raw materials, and energy. This mentality is similarly shown in the documentaries.

Environmental protectionists believe that developing countries perform ineffective management of protected and species-rich areas, causing a lax version of biodiversity protection (Wilshusen et al., 2002). In all the eco-documentaries, the Philippines was portrayed as being unable to effectively protect its natural resources. This assumption was used as a justification by the documentaries to call for stricter regulation of the harvest, sale, and consumption of natural resources. These suggestions were either narrated by the host or presented by interviewees.

An example cited in *Planet Philippines* is the well-protected coastal areas of the Mandaya tribe in Brgy. Lukatan, a Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) territory in Mindanao, where there is a strict law against overfishing and poaching of turtles. *Oras Na* also presented a similar story regarding a 2010 tuna ban that was enacted by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, where large-scale tuna fishing was prohibited in international waters. The reduction of fishing efforts by 50%, as suggested by Dr. Perry Alino of UP Marine Science Institute in *Oras Na*, also required strict implementation to ensure maximum and continual compliance. Similarly, the suggestion for shark fishing regulation in *Wildlife for Sale*.

Strict regulation is the running theme for a majority of the proposed actions. One example discussed in *Oras Na* is the call for the allocation of lands for production and protection. This proposed solution requires regulation to prevent humans from interfering with the ecological systems of the protected forests. According to the documentary, protection forests are areas where activities such as logging, mining, and agriculture will be prohibited, while production forests will be open for such.

This is somewhat similar to *Wildlife for Sale's* call for the creation of more wildlife sanctuaries where human intervention will be strictly prohibited.

The other general solution suggested by the documentaries is stewardship or a heightened sense of responsibility towards our consumption and production. All four eco-documentaries recognise the significance of human effort in environment and biodiversity conservation. Stewardship is a part of the ecotopian view of the world as it represents an important ingredient in achieving the “evocative images of a sustainable society” that Pepper (2005) posited. This is in line with Pepper’s fourth principle of ecotopianism, which is the establishment of a social system wherein human beings live an ecocentric lifestyle. Stewardship is also in accordance with Garforth’s theme of ecocentrism. Moreover, it is in conflict with the present status quo, where people are deemed emotionally detached from the environment. Diego (2002 as cited in Chirisa, 2010: 47) outlined the fundamentals of stewardship:

Sense of totality, as opposed to isolationism that describes individualism;
Political sense, hailing ideological context and orientation of the actors;
Sense of autonomy, espousing the idea of building capacities of the local communities; Sense of reality, superseding paternalistic and foreign values that ignore local realities; Sense of continuity, putting at the center of everything process-oriented innovations; and sense of respect, eternising local people’s realities over and above actions by temporary actors like NGOs.

Those fundamentals are considered the primary rules of stewardship because it “hinges on the abilities by the stakeholders...to discover their correct position and role” (Chirisa, 2010: 47) and are present in all the documentaries.

Two kinds of stewardship were presented – individual and collective. As seen in *Signos*, Gutierrez spoke through four short segments about specific steps that individuals could do in order for them to fulfil their environmental responsibilities. Among these include unplugging electric appliances when not in use, using energy-efficient light bulbs, and decreasing the average amount of garbage dumped per person.

On the other hand, pluralistic or collective stewardship is evident in the narrator’s use of collective words and phrases such as *tayo* (we) and *mga tao* (humanity), in all his calls for conservation. For example, in *Signos*, Gutierrez narrated a challenge saying, “*Tayo ang dahilan kung bakit nagkaganito ang mundo kaya tayo rin dapat ang magwasto nito* [We are the reason why the earth became like this, that is why it is us who should conserve it].” Also, in *Oras Na*, experts called for collective efforts in the reduction of wastes that are being dumped within and near the country’s water systems. Similar calls were made in the same documentary’s case study on Bugang River in Antique, which is considered the country’s cleanest river. The case study revealed that one of the main reasons why the river remained pure is due to the collective efforts of the surrounding communities who use it.

The narrator in *Planet Philippines* also communicated the importance of stewardship and responsibility in the documentary’s conclusion when he said, “...*kung gagawin natin ang ating tungkulin na protektahan ang maliit na bahaging ito ng buong mundo,*

malaki na rin ang maitutulong natin upang mailigtas ang mga likas na yaman ng ating planeta [If we choose to fulfill our responsibility to protect this parcel of the world, it would already give a large contribution in the efforts of saving our planet's natural resources].” He added that human beings have this responsibility as they are the more intelligent and capable species in the planet. Again, the writers chose to use collective words such as *natin* [we] and *atin* [our].

In *Wildlife for Sale*, the interviewees encouraged the audience to accept the responsibility as protectors of wildlife by totally refraining from purchasing endangered and endemic animals, as well as other products from the country's fauna. An example of this is when one environmental expert said that “When the buying stops, the killing can.”

4.2 Looking into Alternative Paradigms

The broadcasting of a single perspective in broadcast news and public affairs programmes is ethically questionable as some of the normative values of a journalistic product are objectivity and the discussion of a more holistic idea of things. Evidently, the documentaries failed to disseminate perspectives other than ecotopianism. This paper, therefore, presents three alternative paradigms that the eco-documentaries failed to present. These are transgressive ecotopianism, indigenous or traditional knowledge, and eco-Marxism.

4.2.1 Transgressive Ecotopianism

Ideal and scientifically-sound as it may seem, ecotopianism fails to provide a holistic paradigm in the discussion of environmental risks and risk reduction. Pepper (2007: 292-303) presented four problems or tensions of ecotopianism, which are “the dilemma of the direction of social change,” “the dilemma of universal values,” “tensions between modernity and post-modernity,” and “scale and local-global tensions.”

The constant reiteration of the documentaries regarding the importance of strict government intervention and regulation, which is highly ecotopic in nature, permeates an aspect in the protectionist argument that says “emergency situations require extreme measures” (Wilshusen et al., 2002: 21). Conversely, post-protectionist advocates claim that such a recommendation is flawed as it automatically assumes that governments purely work for the collective welfare of their constituents, disregarding the possibility that their officials may have other agenda.

Pepper (2005), in response to this, suggested the transgressive potential of ecotopianism, which could be deemed as a more balanced, realistic, and socially just form of ecotopian thinking. He wrote that “ecotopias need to emphasise heuristic spaces and processes rather than laying down blueprints” (Pepper, 2005: 18), adding that regulations on environmental use should be based on the social and economic relations that are at play in the communities where the government seeks to implement them. Moreover, government intervention and regulation should not be just a “form of abstraction unrelated to the processes and situations operating in today's ‘real world’” (Pepper, 2005: 18).

Instead of exclusively following the current utopic perspective, media practitioners should include discussions following “transgressive ecotopianism” as a framework. Sargisson (as cited in Pepper, 2005) listed some characteristics pertaining to such. First, he said that transgressive ecotopianism poses a chance for people to think independently from the socially imposed boundaries on environmental usage. Moreover, such thinking perpetuates the mentality that separates the concept of a utopia from its former definition as “blueprints to which all should conform” (Pepper, 2005: 7). This, therefore, says that transgressive ecotopianism is detached from the utopic goal of advocating a good society and an ideal world. Rather, it is now geared towards a society or a world that is formed through negotiation.

4.2.2 Indigenous knowledge: an ignored alternative

Ecotopianism assumes the superiority of scientific knowledge over traditional knowledge. Throughout the four documentaries, only those deemed scientifically knowledgeable such as scientists, environmentalists, biologists, and the like were interviewed to present the causes and possible solutions for environmental risks. This utopian perspective is called by Manuel and Manuel (as cited in Pepper, 2005: 12) as the “dream of reason.” This ecotopic thinking says that “all of society’s problems would disappear if only reasonable and intelligent people controlled things.”

This inequality could be seen through the choice of sources consulted by producers of eco-films, eco-documentaries, and the like. Anderson (1997:134) argued that “media discourse on risk and the environment is largely a discourse framed in science.” Media coverage on environmental risk and risk reduction techniques, as well as other discourses on the natural world, is highly based on the interpretations and opinions from the “voice of science” or scientific experts. They are deemed as the primary definers, leaving other voices in the periphery.

The four eco-documentaries mainly interviewed people who are experts in the field of environmental protection. Although they interviewed some locals or indigenous peoples, their portrayal is problematic. During their interviews, locals and indigenous peoples were represented and portrayed as innocent or ignorant through their setting or background. These backgrounds usually feature their traditional houses, tribes, fields, forests, or the sea. They were also represented as such through their attire. The locals and indigenous peoples were interviewed while wearing dirty clothes. One of them was even interviewed half-naked. Scientists, environmentalists, biologists, and advocates, on the other hand, were portrayed in a more decent way. They were interviewed while they are wearing formal or semi-formal attire. Although some only wore t-shirts, they were relatively clean and free-of-dirt. The background or settings of their interviews were usually in their offices or inside the studio.

Apart from the portrayal of interviewees, traditional and indigenous knowledge were ignored. Strict scientifically-sound measures, as often deemed by media as an effective and ideal way to solve environmental crises, are not absolute solutions to the prevailing concerns regarding the environment. Such actions are under the five core elements of the protectionist argument that Wilshusen et al. (2002: 20-21) considered problematic and flawed. Some of these elements pose that “protected areas require

strict protection” and “harmonious, ecologically friendly local communities are myths” because nature continues to become an underdog whenever there are boosts in human population, urbanisation, and industrialisation.

Strict protection, as utopianism suggests, requires cutting individual liberties and activities in favour of the environment. This is problematic as it neglects the fact that some individuals or some groups are already part of some ecosystems, making them important in achieving and maintaining balance in their environments. In an alternative viewpoint, human activities and development are definitely not enemies of the environment; rather, they could be agents for environmental conservation. According to this thinking, participatory management could also aid in environmental preservation. This type of philosophy believes that there should be a balance in conservation and social needs – a socially just protection paradigm (Forsyth, 2008).

Prill-Brett (2010) suggested that indigenous knowledge should be reconciled with scientific knowledge to produce more socially just development and environmental protection policies. Understanding the knowledge of indigenous peoples can “foster a better understanding of development and provide an innovative methodological incentive in the search for cost-effective and sustainable survival strategies for poor and marginalised communities” (Prill-Brett, 2010: 25). Moreover, she posited that the acknowledgement and practice of indigenous knowledge can provide a more general and inclusive standpoint and paradigm in environmental planning and policy.

Examples of indigenous conservation methods in the Philippines are *pinugo* or *muyung*, a unique forest management technique practised by the Ifugao community in the northern part of the Philippines. This conservation method involves the formation of woodlots or forests on top of each of their rice terraces (Prill-Brett, 2010; Department of Environment and Natural Resources, 2012). The mini-forests are owned by a clan and only members of those clans can utilise the trees from their woodlots. This method has helped in food production, livelihood, irrigation, and soil erosion prevention.

Another type of indigenous forest conservation practice is Mountain Province’s *tayan* or *batangan*. This method allows the collection of timber without encroaching into old-growth forests. There are also Abra and Apayao’s *lapat*, Kalinga’s *imong*, as well as Benguet’s *kidjuhan* (Department of Environment and Natural Resources, 2012). These indigenous practices have actually been recently accepted by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources of the Philippines as scientifically legitimate methods of environmental management and preservation.

In Tanzania, there are unique land management techniques that can be considered as alternatives such as the *ngitiri* system of the Sukuma people. This system, supplemented with tree planting, seeks to regenerate vegetation and to reclaim or revive degraded lands. This technique involves closing degraded land areas from grazing animals for a five-year period to allow the land to regenerate. Once revived, the *ngitiri* will be gradually opened to grazing animals (Mwaura, 2008). There is also the *ngoro* system of the Matengo people. This land management technique prevents destructive effects of surface runoff in cultivated steep slopes (Mwaura, 2008). Another technique is

the *ufipa* mound system from the Rukwa region. There are many others such as the *makinga maji* from the East Usambara and Uluguru mountains as well as Kenyan and South African communities.

These methods together with many more yet to be recognised indigenous environmental conservation techniques from across the globe, have been largely disregarded in the media because the prevailing protectionist paradigm used in today's media implies that "traditional peoples are not able to conserve their resources" (Wilshusen et al., 2002: 21). The absence of discourse on indigenous and traditional knowledge in the eco-documentaries supports the point raised by Lomborg (2001) that the media communicates incomplete and distorted information to its viewers.

4.2.3 *Eco-Marxism*

The neo-Marxist perspective on environmental risks should also be given the chance to be broadcast. Both social ecology and eco-Marxism presupposes that problems and risks in the environment are not caused by "anthropocentric attitudes alone, but follow from systems of domination or exploitation of humans by other humans" (Garrard, 2012: 31).

While there is some truth to unregulated human activity causing environmental risks, the documentaries however, failed to provide a more in-depth discussion of humanity's role. Most environmental risks are treated as mere events or series of events, which Valdez and Fernandez (1999: 80) regarded as a problematic type of media coverage as it has "the tendency to attribute too much responsibility to people for their actions and too little to the social and environmental constraints shaping those behaviours." The documentaries studied in this paper failed to look into such constraints. This is evident whenever they blame the man on the street without taking into account the social class, race, gender, nationality, and the like.

In line with Marxist thought, eco-Marxism acknowledges that structural and class conflict is the key political issue in the discourse of environmental risk communication. Once a classless society is attained, eco-Marxists believe that "environmental disruption, economic exploitation, war, and patriarchy will all wither away" (Pepper as cited in Garrard, 2012: 32).

If a media practitioner aims to provide a more detailed and objective discussion, he or she should make it a point to look into the different stratifications of human beings and the different degree to which each category contributes to the formation of environmental risks. For example, it would be important and insightful to discuss the differences in the amount of greenhouse gas emission generated between different social classes. Gender differences in pollution contribution would also be an interesting discourse.

5. DISCUSSION

This paper examined four eco-documentaries produced by GMA Network to highlight the dominant ideologies and paradigms on the discussion of environmental risk and risk reduction in the Philippine broadcast media. The researcher, therefore concludes that the environmental documentaries have failed to provide a holistic discussion on risk and

risk reduction. It has neglected other paradigms in favour of the dominant one, which is ecotopianism. As seen through *Signos*, *Planet Philippines*, *Wildlife for Sale*, and *Oras Na*, ecotopianism prevails in their discussion on the causes of and possible solutions to risks. This poses various problems as ecotopia, as a form of utopia, is potentially dangerous because it fails to consider the socio-cultural aspects of communities.

It is the mass media's normative responsibility to provide meaningful and relevant information as they "provide much of our understanding of reality" (Lomborg, 2001: 39) and empower the audiences as knowledgeable and legitimate participants in the discussion on the environmental future of the planet.

Also, since accuracy and objectivity are two of the most cherished values of journalism, media practitioners should take the initiative in reporting complete, coherent, and unbiased information so that the audience could be exposed not only to dominant ideologies or perspectives but also to other possible ideas and solutions that may be even more effective than the former. However, the documentaries have provided its audience with a "lopsided" view of reality as it continues to cater only to the appeals of conflict, guilt, emotion, and entertainment, instead of bringing a complete and a wider informative discourse about the problem.

Future producers of eco-documentaries should then make it a point to incorporate other paradigms such as transgressive ecotopianism, indigenous and traditional knowledge, as well as critical perspectives such as eco-Marxism, among others, for they are also necessary in educating the audiences. The problems posed by Lomborg, as discussed earlier on this paper, could be avoided if the mass media truly opens its production doors to other ideologies that are different from the dominant ones. If this were to be implemented, the audience will have sufficient knowledge, which would qualify and empower them to participate in debates, discussion, and in the decision-making process for the future of the planet.

The following recommendations are suggested for further studies. Pope (1996: 7) stated that the media industry has given "little room for individual voices in an industry increasingly dominated by impersonal forces, as media operations and entire networks are swallowed into larger and larger corporate empires." It is, therefore, necessary to look into the political economy of environmental broadcasting and audio-visual production so as to provide more insight into the production staff's motivations of bias, lack of objectivity and factual comprehensiveness.

The production processes involved in the production of environmental broadcast and film products would also be an interesting topic that future researchers might traverse. A study on the differences between ordinary productions and environmental productions would provide a framework for future media practitioners who are interested in entering the world of eco-productions.

Apart from studying broadcast media product under the non-fiction genre, researchers are encouraged to conduct analyses on dramatic programmes and films. Media products under the dramatic genre hold a different set of appeal that capture more audiences than fact or non-fiction based broadcast programmes or films. While they are mostly fiction, it can provide an insight on the paradigms or frameworks

that govern the production of media products that convey environmental values to audiences.

To supplement this and other future ecocritical analyses and studies on media products, research on audience, specifically on their perception and reactions to environmental messages through the mass media, is important. The effects of environmental media messages on audiences are also significant in providing a more complete insight about environmental and risk communication. Studies on the effectiveness of media products in educating and empowering the audience are also highly encouraged.

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