

## Interview

# Interviewing

## Kara Patria Constantino-David

*Julienne Thesa Y. Baldo-Cubelo, PhD*



Ms. Kara David is a multi-awarded broadcast journalist who specializes in writing and producing TV documentaries. Her work spans twenty years of doing news reporting and fieldwork in some of the remotest and most impoverished places in the Philippines.

She currently anchors a noontime news program at GMA News TV, “News to

Go.” Her other regular TV programs are “I-Witness” and “Pinas Sarap.”

She has under her name several medals and trophies from the New York Festivals and the PMPC Star Awards. She has also been named as one of the Outstanding Women in the Nation’s Service (TOWNS). She is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Journalism of the College of Mass Communication of the University of the Philippines Diliman.

I sat down with Asst. Prof. David to talk about her generation of women broadcast journalists in Philippine media.

Q: My first question is about the so-called post Martial law media optimism that was supposedly enjoyed by your generation of broadcast journalists. Did you feel that? And how was it for women entering the industry?

A: Yes, definitely I felt this optimism, and at the same time, the big expectation. Kasi ang boss ko ay babae. Malaking difference kasi na ang boss ko ay babae. When your boss is a woman, 'yung confidence level mo as a woman tumataas kaagad. At noong pumasok ako sa GMA, ang boss noong time na 'yun, at least for the public affairs, 'yung boss pa rin namin ngayon, si Maria Flores. Siya 'yung nag interview sa akin. At noong time na 'yon, 'yong talagang idol ng lahat ay si Jessica Soho. And parang 'pag sinabi mong GMA 7 reporter and iisipin mo kaagad, Jessica Soho. Parang tapos na 'yong era noong time ng tatay ko, [Randy David], na ang mga journalists na mga sikat noon ay sina Louie Beltran, Dong Puno, Randy David, Jose Maraveles, 'yung mga ganyan, na 'yon yung mga parang "journalists". Then comes Jessica Soho, and then suddenly puwede (ang babae).

Ang gusto kong pasukan noon ay "Brigada Siyete" because I knew that Jessica Soho was gonna be there at ang nag interview sa akin ay babae rin, si Ms. Marissa Flores. So it really made a difference. I remember when I was in college I had the impression na nagbabasa lang ng balita ang babae. Magaganda sila, Palmolive commercial model sila. I remember the names of Christina Pecson... pretty face, good diction, magaling mag-Ingles. There was also Patricia Evangelista (not the Patricia Evangelista we see today ha?), Georgette Tengco, Marga Ortigas, Vicky Morales. Ang hindi kasali doon sa typical face ay si Tina Monson Palma na parang very authoritative, credible, no non-sense. Pero 'yong nasa field talaga ay si Jessica Soho. Kaya I thought kung kaya ni Jessica Soho na pumunata sa giyera, nag-cocover ng coup d'état, hindi lang pala kailangang newscaster, puwede ka rin palang maging field reporter. It gave us a lot of inspiration.

With Jessica Soho, there was this sense of being a cow girl, na okay ka naman pala makita in front of the camera kahit hindi ka naka full make-up, may element of rawness, of not rehearsed. So, Jessica Soho did not have the certain air that others had. At that time kasi ganun talaga ang stereotype: Cathy Santillan, Loren Legarda, at iba pa.

When I was a student I knew na hindi naman ako gan'un. But I wanted to be in the news. I didn't want to be in the news pero gusto ko magbalita. In fact when I applied sa GMA hindi ako nag-asam na mag



on-cam, gusto ko nagfi-field. Kasi maganda ang promise at that time of these new happening in the news room. Parang the likes of Jessica Soho who were ahead of me proved that so many things were possible for women in media. Hindi pala kailangang typical na maganda, hindi kailangang artistahin, hindi kailangang naka postura, na meron palang ibang avenues for women.

Q: Do you have mentors who held you back, who told you that it is not an industry for the faint-hearted, na may sigawan sa media, dapat makapal ang mukha mo?

A: Yeah, alam ko 'yan. Nasabihan ako, at napag-aralan ko na ang media ay no- nonsense, ang mga tao ay nagmumura, 'yong deadlines nagpapatong-patong, sasabak sa balita, delikado, mga ganun. But that's what pulled me in. Somehow I have been warned, yes. My parents were very much aware of the trade kumabaga, and as parents they reminded me, cautioned me about many things but it is their nature to be risk-takers kasi. Never was I hindered na huwag 'yan Kara, kasi babae ka. Hindi mo 'yan kaya. Walang gan'on.

Q: With your twenty years in the media industry, paano mo naranasan, kung meron man, na ang pagkababae ng isang mamahayag is something that worked to your disadvantage?

A: Well, meron somehow. Meron naman talaga. I am sure na iis-stereotype pa rin ang mga babae when it comes to the kinds of program given to them. Halimbawa, ay, Kara dito ka sa programang ito, tungkol sa food, sa travel, or 'yong dati about OFWs. Tapos 'yong mga lalaki naman, sa crime, police beat, 'yong maaksyon. 'Yong babae, sa lifestyle, or talk shows na family oriented, magazine type, ganun.

And right now, kasi I host News to Go with Howie Severino. Nakakalokang na 'yong mga audience. Ramdam ko na may expectation talaga na you have to look a certain way: nakaayos, naka kilay ng maganda. 'Yong suot mo, hindi masagwa, hindi rin naman baduy, fit for your age, okay ang kulay sa camera. Samantalang kay Howie, sige kahit ano okay lang. Pareho naman kaming tagapagbalita. So sabi ko, sige bigyan n'yo ako ng stylist. So ayon, hindi ko na s'ya masyadong iniisip. May nag-aayos na sa akin.

Pero in many others aspects, women are really making it in the broadcast industry. Sa meetings, karamihan babae. Magkakaibigan, magkakatrabaho.

Q: Wala bang competition? Media is notorious for this.

A: You know, the thing with competition is, it is subtle. It is not really mentioned outrightly. Pero meron. Sa posisyon ko, I really do not worry much about it siguro kasi matagal na rin ako sa media. So halimbawa, isang program, kung may hosts na babae at lalaki, konti lang naman ang puwede pumalit sa'yo, at least in my level, kumbaga, in my generation. Hindi ko na iisipin 'yong mga lalaki. Sa babae, yes, the competition is there. Iisipin mo rin kung sino ang puwede pumalit sa'yo, but it's not really something that's nakakatakot for me. Ang iniisip ko lang na nakarating naman ako dito kasi go lang ako nang go. Hindi naman ako nagmakaawa or something for anything, for any program that was assigned to me. I just kept this attitude na I just have to be one step ahead of the game with no particular competitor in mind. Basta, kailangan lang galingan all the way.

Q: So what you are saying is that there is an open negotiation process in the media that is, shall we say, consultative and that women can work around with?

A: Sa GMA, yes, I cannot speak for other companies. Kasi nga karamihan babae sa amin. The big bosses are women, at least those directly working with us.

Q: Therefore, masasabi mo bang wala nang glass ceiling for women sa broadcast industry at present?

A: Hhhhhmmm, I'd like to say, it is looking bright for women. Siguro ten years ago, puwede kong nasabi, baka hanggang dito lang ang mga bababe. But with my boss, for instance, she just kept going up and up. She filled positions that used to be men's. So ngayon, siguro wala na. Walang nang glass ceiling.

Q: Some say ang ganitong kultura, itong mabilis na pace, competitive, long hours in the media industry, some say that this is a masculinist culture, patriarchal, anong masasabi mo dito?



A: Yeah, in many ways, I agree with that but I am not keen on naming it as patriarchal or masculine. That is the culture. It's hectic and ngarag. Because it is business. At the end of the day, tulad ko, one should realize kung kelan ka makikipagsabayan, at kung kelan ka mas magiging careful—careful in a sense na mas magdadahan-dahan. Hindi na puwede y'ong go lang nang go.

Q: Should women be okay with this? What about if women become mothers or when they need to take care of parents and the same long hours are expected of them?

A: Hati ako d'yan in a way because I know what you mean. Everything changes when one becomes a mother, or a parent, for that matter.

It's just that mas mahirap kung nanay ka and you work in the media industry. Ako, I got the usual two months leave, medyo nag extend ng konti pero without pay na 'yon. Siyempre, gusto ko i-enjoy ang anak ko, gusto ko magpahinga, maalagaan ang daughter ko, pero I had to get back also kasi may pinapakain na ako this time. Should women be okay with this? How I wish mas mahaba pa ang pahinga ng mga nanay. It's not just for them, but for their children too. I hope in the future, women journalists, or all parents, should be given more paid days.

Q: Speaking of which, was this your frame of mind when you became a mom? I am very interested in how you have done it, or doing it—the balancing between work and personal life?

A: Well, as a single mom, I know that my circumstance is very different from the usual arrangement of people having families. Kailangang kong maging very conscious with the fact that I couldn't in any way fail this because my daughter has only me to back her up. Of course, my parents are there always but I am her Mom and difficult as it may seem, ako talagang trabaho lang talaga ako. The balancing is not easy. Kailangan kong magtrabaho. Kailangan kong siguraduhin na ang programa ko ay panonoorin ng tao para naman tuloy-tuloy. Pero, hindi na katulad ng dati na wala pang anak na sige, anytime, anywhere, let's go get that story, cover that news. This time, I have to take care of myself, my health. Kailangang tamang kayod lang.

In a way, klaro sa akin ang priorities ko. Klaro sa akin na ang mawawalang oras sa trabaho ay hindi sayang na oras. Oras s'ya para sa sarili ko, para sa pamilya ko.

Q: As a journalist what are your dilemmas when it comes to elevating the discourse on gender, or any discourse, in Philippine media?

A: For me, there is a right time for specific content. Kung kritikal, sige i-tackle mo s'ya pero gawin mo s'yang maiintindihan ng mas marami. I-present mo s'ya na panonoorin s'ya kahit ng ordinaryong tao. On the other hand, your story can be mababaw but you can present it na mas malalim. Or kung ang story ay malalim, you can present it na mas light, mas madaling panoorin, i-laymanize. And slowly and hopefully kung nasanay na ang audience na manood ng makabuluhan at mga seryosong mga topic na ikwenento in layman, baka later on, kaya na nilang manood ng malalim na kwento sa paraan na malalim pa ang pagkakakwento. So babalansihen lang s'ya.

Q: Tama ba kung sabihin ko na you are still optimistic about the Filipino audience?

A: Of course! Of course! The fact na buhay pa yung show naming I-Witness, is a testament na hindi bobo ang Filipino audience. Kasi ilang years na ba kami, 18 years na ba kami? Nakalimutan ko na kung ilang years na kami. The fact na nagsu-survive pa rin ang isang documentary program na one topic, one doky, one show, na dati ay unheard of, na dati ay hindi panonoorin kasi ang karaniwang panonoorin ay 'yong mabilis, madaling mainitindihan, 'yong mabilis ang editing, 'yong chopsuey. Tapos biglang magpapalabas ng mahaba, mabagal na mga narratives at nagsu-survive pa s'ya hangang ngayon at hindi na lang kami, ang dami nang docu programs—Reel Time, Frontrow, even sa ABS-CBN, merong Mukha, so ah okay, may hope. Ibig sabihin, we can continue doing this.

Q: And the fact that there is one whole channel na mas current affairs ang orientation, GMA News TV, says a lot.

A: Yes, at also there's the fact na ang katapat namin ay entertainment



program. We're still surviving. The fact na nasa ere pa kami, hindi naman kami masyadong nilalampaso ng kalaban, ay okay, may nanonood pa. Ibig sabihin, may hope pa. I'd like to think na 'yong mga topics na tina-tackle namin sa I-Witness ay hindi naman mababaw, malalim naman ang pagkakakwento pero nanonood pa rin ang mga tao, is a source of optimism, di ba, na tuloy 'yong laban? Pero hindi ako masyadong naniniwala doon sa masyadong radikal, 'yong rebolusyon na laban na alternative kaagad 'yong ipapalabas. Kasi naniniwala ako na it's how you work with it, with the system. Ang reyalidad ay negosyo ang media and we cannot survive if we don't rate, if people don't watch us and advertisers don't put their ads on us. Meron talaga kaming ganung klaseng obligation. Pero hindi ibig sabihin n'on na kailangang maging alipin ka na ng revenues, ng advertisers. Kaya pa ring gawin mo 'yong trabaho mo na tagapagdala ng balita, ng kwento, ng totooong kwento, and at the same time, nag re-rate.

Q: So you have achieved so much in your career. What else is in your bucket list? Any wild plans for the future?

A: Shocks! Siguro madi-disappoint sa akin 'yong mga tao pero nasa slowing down mode na ako ngayon (laughs).

Q: Slowing down can be wild kasi against the flow sya...

A: Napagod na ako sa competitive life. It will come to a point when you don't want to be in the rat race anymore. And on na ako sa point na, hindi naman retirement, pero sa level na I choose really carefully the stories that I do. Parang pakiramdam ko ang buhay ko as a journalist, hindi s'ya dapat magtapos on-cam. And if I remain in the competitive state, in the rat race, magiging hanggang doon na lang ang buhay ko and legacy ko as a journalist na alam ko meron pa akong ibang maiaambag as a journalist kahit hindi ako on-cam. So like teaching, ganyan...

Q: Kumusta naman, so far (ang teaching)?

A: Okay naman, so far, iba s'yang mundo (laughs). I love teaching. Iba ring level of work s'ya. And 'yong foundation work. Ito talaga 'yong

ibang mukha ng pagiging mamamahayag ko. Naniniwala kasi ako na hindi dapat sa on-cam nagtatapos ang buhay ng isang journalist. E, 'pag reporter ka, 'pag sinabi sa'yo na tapos ka na, extra ka na, tapos na 'yong trabaho mo. Pero ako gusto ko may extension pa s'ya. Kaya I have my foundation or the people that I interviewed, the people I visited, whose stories I featured, this time I can do something for them. Ang IP (indigenous people) communities of the Philippines ang aking passion, so I am doing something for their communities. So 'pag pinutol ko ang aking on-cam ties with them, hindi ibig sabihin na pinutol ko na rin ang off-cam ties ko with them.

So we have scholarship for them, infrastructure projects for their communities. Ang IPs ang aking soft spot kasi. Kaya nasa slowdown mode na ako. I just retained just a few programs at GMA. Hindi na ako reporter. Gan'on. Slowing down mode na talaga ako. Hindi naman ako mawawala sa media kasi kailangan ko pa rin kumita ng pera. But I have realized na being a journalist is really about telling stories. It's just that you don't just have to be on-cam to be able to tell the stories of people. There is a full life outside it.

Julienne Baldo-Cubelo: Maraming maraming salamat!

## **About the Interviewer**

**Asst. Prof. Julienne Thesa Y. Baldo-Cubelo, PhD** is a communication and media scholar and a development worker, teaching at the Communication Research Department of the College of Mass Communication of the University of the Philippines Diliman. She has an M.A. degree in Women and Development Studies and a Ph.D. in Communication. Her regular teaching load in the undergraduate and graduate classes includes the following courses: Qualitative Research, Communication and Socio-cultural change, and Gender and Communication. Her research interests include gender, women, family communication, participatory communication, and ritual communication. She is also a breastfeeding counselor and a natural birthing coach.