Ordinary People (2016) on Netflix: Street children in Manila—"Only rich people get to buy other people"

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There are an estimated 3 million homeless people in Manila, the capital of the Philippines. A commentator adds that the city also has "approximately 250,000 homeless children; however, that number could be as high as 1 million. Children leave home and end up on the streets because of the excessive beating from their parents, poverty or sexual exploitation."

Ordinary People (*Pamilya ordinaryo*), from the Philippines and directed by Eduardo W. Roy Jr., is not new. It came out a number of years ago, in 2016. But it is now available for streaming on Netflix and it is worth watching. It is not perfect, but it is far more insightful than most films these days. It is oriented in the right direction.

Jane (Hasmine Kilip) and Aries (Ronwaldo Martin) live on the streets of Manila. She is 16 and he is 17. They are married and have a newborn, a boy, whose name, Arjan, combines their two first names.

Their life is not exactly idyllic. They steal what they can. They take handouts. They bathe from faucets when they can. They live among the garbage, sleep on cardboard. Abused themselves, at times they abuse each other. There is a certain degree of solidarity among the homeless, but not all that much. It's a dog-eat-dog condition.

The sale of a stolen phone provides Jane and Aries with a little cash, enough for a photograph of the infant. A transsexual, Ertha (Raymond Lee), tries to get close to Jane, jokingly offering 10,000 pesos for the baby at one point. But is it a joke? While Jane and Ertha are shopping for diapers, the latter takes the baby for an instant so that Jane can take some items in her arms. We don't have enough cash, Ertha says, let me go to the nearby ATM. That's the last Jane sees of Arjan.

She searches all day and all night. "The transsexual stole my baby." Aries yells at her—how could you be so stupid? You were scammed. He hits Jane, adding to her misery. They and their friends look everywhere. They file a complaint with the supermarket, even though the security guard assures them the store is not responsible.

Aries worries that the cops might arrest him on sight, so Jane goes into the police station by herself. A middle-aged policeman humiliates the teenage mother. "Show me how you breastfeed your baby," "When did you lose your virginity?" She retains her dignity, explaining about the newborn, "Whenever he cries, I sing to him." The cops will obviously do less than nothing. Jane meets a friend there, in the lockup. He expects to be there for years. He is 16, an "adult," and it's a murder charge. The kid tells her, have fun and do foolish things when you're young.

The young couple barely evade being taken under the wing of what seems to be some awful Christian outfit, with a shelter like a prison. They run like hell from this "help." A local radio station takes an interest—for a few minutes. Treated like a lower species in an on-air interview, perhaps some sort of interesting animal, without the normal feelings of a human mother, Jane tells the radio show hosts, "Of course, I have an attachment to my baby." Jane and Aries are pushed out of the radio booth when a "celebrity" arrives.

Someone claiming to be Ertha's mom insists she can help the pair—all she needs is 10,000 pesos for fare and food. Is it another scam? Probably, but Jane and Aries struggle to raise the sum anyway. Aries prostitutes himself. Jane visits her mother, who says she has no cash whatsoever. As to where the stolen baby might have ended up, the older woman suggests, "Only rich

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people get to buy other people." Finally, each of them in too much misery, Jane and her mother angrily curse one another. After her daughter has gone, Jane's mother mutters under her breath, "Fuck this life."

Aries carries out a robbery outside an ATM. He gets caught momentarily, but somehow escapes. The couple do not have nearly the 10,000, but give what they have to the woman claiming to be Ertha's mother. They'll probably never see her again either.

A journalist, entirely sincere, wants to do their life story. A televised drama eventually comes out of it. Amusingly, in the television movie, the pair of actors are dirtier and more disheveled than the originals. Jane and Aries give the only photos they have of their baby to the journalists, who carelessly lose them.

They receive a text informing them Arjan has been sold to someone in a wealthy neighborhood. They make their way out there by bus. En route, Aries wonders out loud if perhaps the infant would go on to have a better life with affluent parents. Jane replies that even if he wore golden diapers at his new home, the baby would still be hers.

Security guards prevent their entrance to a gated community. Not to be deterred, Aries climbs over a fence, snatches the infant in the house, who is obviously not their child and returns to Jane. It's the wrong one, she cries out. Miraculously, Aries is able to return the newborn without being arrested. The pair head back to the center of Manila on a crowded bus …

In a 2016 interview, director Eduardo W. Roy Jr. explained that *Ordinary People*, his third feature, was based on an actual event. A homeless couple in Manila had their baby stolen and the case was well publicized. They never found their child. There are "a lot of people like them, street children," he told an interviewer.

In a director's statement, Roy (born 1980 in Manila) noted it was often said that "the teenage years can be the most challenging period of one's life. Try being a teenage parent—sleeping on the sidewalk, living off unsuspecting victims' belongings, playing hopscotch with speeding vehicles. As if those aren't enough, the streets have plenty of dark corners with unknown dangers waiting to come at you the second you let your guard down."

"I wanted to show," the filmmaker continued, "how both ordinary and extra-ordinary the children who live on the streets are. How they'll act and react to a given situation the same way you and I will, and, how things that may happen to a person living in a palace can easily happen to them. How we, as humans, can be very similar and yet be very different to each other."

Not everything is successful in *Ordinary People*. Some of the scenes are repetitive, with too much of Jane and Aries wandering aimlessly about the streets. She is a little whiny at times, not as tough and stoical as someone like this would probably have to be. But Kilip has several quite moving moments as well.

Certain of the characters situated around the central pair are the most effectively drawn, come into the socially sharpest focus: the horrible policeman, the opportunist media types and the various do-gooders. Someone once correctly said that those who merely try to keep the poor alive, or amuse them, do more harm than good and that the proper aim is to try and reconstruct society so that poverty will be impossible.

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