

Media and the Diaspora: An Introduction

No other nation arguably relies on remittances from its overseas citizens as much as the Philippines does. Initially intended as a stop-gap measure during the declining years of the Marcos regime (the same way it had worked for South Korea), the strategy of deploying local workers to take advantage of foreign employment opportunities transmuted into industrial-scale labor export, eventually becoming the country's only viable means of production after the collapse of medium-scale industries brought about by neoliberal economic policies imposed by the International Monetary Fund in the wake of the late-1990s Asian financial crisis (Burgess and Haksar, 2005). World Bank data (Mohapatra et al., 2010) evince that although in Asia, China earns more from its own nationals who work overseas, it also supports a sizeable migrant-worker population—including Filipinos—who in turn remit significant amounts of money to their home countries. Moreover, the income provided by other countries' overseas workers enhances, rather than bolsters, their countries' economic performance, in contrast with the Philippine situation.

The presence of diasporic Filipino communities, comprising mainly Overseas Filipino Workers or OFWs, in several countries all over the world constitutes a network of citizens with complicated and occasionally conflicted identities—nostalgic for home yet resentful at the reality that no feasible work opportunity can be found therein, setting up long-term familial arrangements in countries where they will remain alienated even from their own offspring, hoping for an end to a crisis condition as second-class citizens where the promise of betterment may lie in turning one's back on a lifelong system of beliefs and structure of feeling. The size of the OFW population, estimated at between 10.46 million to 13.5 million as of 2012 by the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (2012), indicates a fairly steady

trend of Philippine citizens, the majority of them women, leaving for work abroad and confronting the challenges of variable host-country regulations, a demand for steady income based on higher, sometimes unrealistic, ideals, the responsibility of fulfilling familial duties while being physically absent, and the expectation of retiring from overseas work with sufficient funds to maintain a comfortable lifestyle. On the other hand, the Philippines also has its own community of non-Filipinos, not as large even in comparison with other countries that have more numerous members of their population working overseas, but enough to also have an impact on contemporary conditions.

Plaridel invited media scholars to provide appraisals of media imaging, practice, and consumption among the Pinoy diaspora as well as the foreign diaspora in the Philippines. From the responses we were able to assemble seven contributions that develop this theme across various media, in varying directions. In “Living Through the Parameters of Technology,” Ma. Rosel S. San Pascual looks into the role of long-distance communication in transnational parenting among OFW mothers in Singapore via their use of communication media and technologies—often the only means available to manage their parental functions. Another study of the use of media among OFWs, this time located in Hong Kong, is “Mediated Health Across the China Sea,” by Jan Michael Alexandre C. Bernadas. The study looks at the potentially urgent situation of controlling possible bird-flu outbreaks among a mobile and liminal group overseen mainly by household employers. The recent spate of street protest actions in the former crown colony, where the overseas community performed a variety of functions and the local protesters shared the same qualities of mobilizing while being semi-visible or invisible, demonstrates how important the role of communication is.

The question of identity comes up in the next three articles. Earvin Charles B. Cabalquinto’s “At Home Elsewhere” looks at how ABS-CBN station IDs construct for overseas viewers a transnational impression of their homegrown “*kapamilya*” (familial) image, using the Christmas season as an occasion for engendering such a collective identity. Louie Jon B. Sanchez’s “Koreanovelas, Teleseryes, and the ‘Diasporization’ of the Filipino/the Philippines” turns inward, inspecting how the process of adapting the aesthetic strategies of the extremely popular Korean TV dramas results in “diasporizing,” or dispossessing, Filipino characters as a means of approximating the First-Worldness of the original. Brian Saludes Bantugan’s “Mainstream Care Work Films” asserts that the melodrama subgenre of OFWs in foreign settings is a new genre because of postmodernist processes.

The focus on Philippine cinema culminates in two complementary perspectives. “Phantom Limbs in the Body Politic” by Joel David traces the diasporization of the Filipino, as well as the Philippines, in foreign cinema. Andrew Leavold’s “Bamboo Gods and Bionic Boys,” on the other hand, surveys the output of the foreign film community in the Philippines as well as the production of home-grown movies for foreign audiences, including what might stand as the most comprehensive (though still bare) filmography of titles, nearly all of which he maintained copies in a video shop he had owned in his native Australia.

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