

Koreanovelas, Teleseryes, and the “Diasporization” of the Filipino/the Philippines

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In a previous paper, the author had begun discoursing on the process of acculturating Korean/*Hallyu* soap opera aesthetics in television productions such as *Only You* (Quintos, 2009), *Lovers in Paris* (Reyes, 2009), and *Kahit Isang Saglit* (Perez & Sineneng, 2008). This paper attempts to expand the discussions of his “critico-personal” essay by situating the discussions in what he described as the “diasporization” of the Filipino, and the Philippines, as constructed in recent soap operas namely *Princess and I* (Lumibao, Pasion, 2012) *A Beautiful Affair* (Flores, Pobocan, 2012), and *Kailangan Ko’y Ikaw* (Bernal & Villarin, 2013). In following the three *teleserye* texts, the author observes three *hallyu* aesthetic influences now operating in the local sphere—first, what he called the “spectacularization” of the first world imaginary in foreign dramatic/fictional spaces as new “spectre of comparisons” alluding to Benedict Anderson; the crafting of the Filipino character as postcolonially/neocolonially dispossessed; and the continued perpetration of the imagination of Filipino location as archipelagically—and consequently, nationally—incoherent. The influences result in the aforementioned “diasporization,” an important trope of simulated and dramaturgically crafted placelessness in the process of imagining Filipino “communities” and their sense of “historical” reality, while covering issues relating to the plight and conditions of the diasporic Filipino.

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After a decade of its constant presence in the Philippine market, the extent of change brought about by the “Koreanovela” in the landscape of Philippine television is clearly noticeable and merits reevaluation. The Koreanovela, a term invented by local TV networks to refer to soap operas imported from South Korea—essentially part of the popularization of *hallyu*¹ across the nation—has become an interesting text to study, as it is primarily the most consumed piece of Korean popular culture in Philippine mass media, and is thus a major factor in what is considered by the scholar as a phenomenal “Korean turn” in local productions. Of course, the steady acquisition of Koreanovelas by the major TV players, and the distribution of soaps in major time slots, indicate the popularity and viability of the drama series to various audience brackets and markets. The continued presence of Koreanovelas, particularly in primetime, meanwhile also signifies the continuing internalization of the Korean aesthetic by local productions—and by aesthetic, we mean the formal aspects of soaps translated into the local. Aesthetic, in a sense, refers to “one’s experience of the work” (Fowler,

1973, p. 4), as much as it emphasizes “the characteristics of the work” (p. 4) and implies a critical assessment of their “beauty”. While aesthetics per se deals with the organicity of the work as perceived, we view the term here as conditioned, formed, and defined by cultural contexts.

In the process, big players such as ABS-CBN and GMA 7 have placed their own localized “readings” of productions of the Koreanovela alongside the acquired imported ones through their shows, to seemingly reflect the process of dealing with the demands of transforming production. The demand, it may easily be said, stems from the perceived changing tastes of viewers, some constantly consulted in extensive marketing researches undertaken by these networks. While data is still scant on the direct relations of the production reformatting and audience demands—network representatives in a number of hallyu fora participated in by the researcher usually mention how, for example, hallyu compelled the tighter plotting or fast-paced storytelling evident in soap operas today—the Korean turn is steadily being manifested in several productions, particularly in ABS-CBN, where the local soap genre was first to be called the *teleserye* (a compounding of the words “tele,” an abbreviation of television, and “serye,” the series), and where the teleserye as a text continuously expands its narratological breadth, by crossing borders and locating the fictional Filipino in a much more global sphere. The researcher supposes that this gesture of crossing borders is largely connected to the aforementioned Korean turn, where Korea is transformed into an imaginary for national mobility, an emerging narrative of the nation, to borrow from Homi K. Bhabha (1994). In an earlier work, the researcher described this phenomenon in this manner, after presenting a “critico-personal” perspective after many years of consuming the said popular cultural texts:

At least until today, we Filipinos have not yet really undertaken the task of explaining our own processes of acceptance of the image-concepts shown us through the foreign/Asian soap opera.... Koreanovelas seen through a Philippine lens embody a national desire, a national fantasy, not only *for* but also *to be* this nation. Somehow, the consumption of these Koreanovelas expresses the ardent desire for mobility in most of the Philippine audience, a mobility that may finally transport the country to become that hardly believable First World imaginary society. Korea then has become an alternative nation for Filipinos during primetime. (Sanchez, 2012, para. 3)

In this paper, an explication of this Korean turn will be shown by a close reading of three primary soap opera texts, all recently concluded, under ABS-CBN—*Princess and I* (Lumibao & Pasion, 2012), starring Kathryn Bernardo, Daniel Padilla, and Enrique Gil; *Kailangan Ko’y Ikaw* (Bernal & Villarin, 2013), starring Kris Aquino, Anne Curtis, and Robin Padilla; and *A Beautiful Affair* (Flores & Pobocan, 2012), starring Bea Alonzo and John Lloyd Cruz. Preceding the close reading of the soap opera texts will be a historico-critical assessment of the Koreanovela in the Philippines, showing the processes of “naturalization” all throughout its years of popularity in Philippine media—a take-off from the researcher’s initial writings on the subject. This task is seen as laying the predicates of what may be called the consequent diasporization of the Filipino/the Philippines, a cultural logic brought about by the Korean turn, which will be explored towards the end of the paper.

The “Korean Turn”

The Koreanovela is merely an existing peak in the televisual process of change that started with the rise of Mexican soap operas in the mid-1990s. This so called televisual process has introduced innovations, not only in form but also in content, radically changing the viewing habits of Filipinos reared in dramas of epical length and melodramatic proportion—a symptom of the steady presence of possibly accepted literary traditions in popular culture. Historically, the return of democratized television between 1986 and 1988, two decades after the start of the repressive Marcos regime, began the years of revolution, so to speak, of Philippine broadcast programming. The EDSA people-power revolution has instilled nationalistic ferment among viewers, who saw once more unadulterated, tabloid TV news, sensationalizing the drama of everyday life, sanitized and controlled by the previous government for its own intents and purposes. The tendency for the historical became an important aspect of the supposed drama genre of Filipino television after 1986 with the broadcast of the Australian-produced docu-drama *A Dangerous Life* (Markowitz, 1988), which chronicled the pivotal last three years of the Marcos dictatorship, emphasizing the role of the benevolent role of United States in resolving the conflict. It had become a staple in the programming of re-established television networks, particularly the formerly sequestered ones, and one or two years later, a barrage of documentaries in honor of the slain senator Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino and the heroes of EDSA Revolution started airing, contributing to the growing body of “historical” drama for the public to consume and internalize. The historical drama, as it were, tapped into the national grief still collectively shared, as videos of the opposition leader—in life and in death—were shown, as if to continually process his

heroic canonization by martyrdom. Eventually, grief as primal material presaged the turn for the entertaining, that is, for real programs providing *aliw* (entertainment, basically), as Soledad Reyes (2000) had once described it; this *aliw* returned with a vengeance with the traditional tropes of grief and suffering, and began shortly the introduction of new genres of drama pitted against each other—drama anthologies showcasing prime or upcoming actors and actresses (usually wonderfully directed); drama programs produced *à la* film (later to be called *telesines* by GMA 7); and drama series set in the typical Filipino romance mode.

The said drama series usually banked on effective formulae to attract a following—interesting pairs called love teams, astounding manorial or feudalistic settings (often to be contrasted with the urban sprawl of shanties in urban environments, popularized by Lino Brocka in his 1980s films), and complex plots (and subplots) that keep audiences hooked for years on end. Eventually, the measure of soap opera success became its staying power. The rule was logical: the better the soaps performed in the ratings games, the longer the soaps aired. This had been the case of *Mara Clara* (Cruz, Jr., 1992-97), which launched the career of soap opera “queen” Judy Ann Santos, and later, of Claudine Barretto via *Mula sa Puso* (De Ramas et al. 1997-99), the story of which was even expanded into a “second book” for want of a better conclusion for its much-abhorred *kontrabida* (antagonist) who had to be run over by a truck in order to definitely die. Lead characters were made to suffer terribly in the hands of their stock oppressors—wicked grandmothers or stepmothers, scheming mothers or aunts, and in some cases, fathers or uncles who made sure to create so much trouble for the heroes. The Philippine soap opera, post-EDSA revolution, seemed to be a continuous processing of the supposed national grief that originated in the Ninoy myth. This form of practice, by way of oppression as spectacle, peaked in the mentioned 1990s entry—or re-entry?—of Spanish and Latin American soap operas such as *La Traidora* (Marte Televisión, 1991) and more particularly *Marimar* (Sheridan, 1994), a phenomenon that was specter-like for all its Spanish colonial flair. Undeniably, Filipinos were easily enthralled by the poor blonde heroine who grew up by the sea, and who eventually became the object of desire of the son of the patriarch of the nearby *hacienda* (estate). The poor girl, who turned out to be an heiress to a business empire, suffered much in the hands of her husband’s family—a sure hit formula for the grief-stricken nation that would fall readily for any rags-to-riches stories, during a time of rotating brownouts and political strife. After all, the Spanish were themselves the founders of this tradition of grief, and the Spanish soaps may just be deemed a reminder of this heritage, seen in various colonial literatures like the enduring *Pasyon* (the traditional literary narrative of Christ’s Passion).

In a study that dealt with this Latin American invasion, Joseph Salazar in Shim, Heryanto, and Siriyuvasak (2010) discoursed at large on what he termed as “global soap operas” and described *Marimar* as one that resuscitates “the colonial imaginary” (p. 287) though not simply reflecting “the domination of foreign systems imposing itself to a particular locality” (p. 288-289), but also instead manifesting “how the colonial experience has entrenched itself within the totalizing systems of globalization” (Shim, et al., 2010, p. 289). *Marimar*, and the many others that followed suit, gave local soaps a run for their money—*Mara Clara* for instance had to be transferred to primetime from its late afternoon slot, its traditional bastion during which female audiences—homemakers and home-keepers, basically—are believed to be taking their *siestas* (literally, afternoon breaks). As a game changer, the importation of Latin American soap operas—and foreign soap-opera importation in general—became an easy alternative market mode for networks. This phenomenon, however, did not completely deter the peddling of local dramas. As may be seen, the eventual productions of local versions of these Spanish language soaps, as the new millennium approached, showcased the Filipinos’ constant drive to revolutionize drama by taking the various foreign soaps they had procured and embarking on textual “naturalizations”, to borrow a term from the critic Virgilio S. Almario (2013), who in many of his works of literary criticism, underlined Filipino ingenuity as a reaction to foreign encroachments on the literary tradition.² This trend found another creative challenge with the rise of “Asianovelas” (soap operas imported from China or Japan), the first of which was the phenomenal 2001 Taiwanese soap *Meteor Garden* (Cai, 2001), and eventually the emergence of Koreanovelas on the scene.

In relation to the Koreanovela, the concept of the Korean turn is a development in the continuing research of this scholar on how Koreanovelas had been perceived and received by local productions in the country. The term “local productions” in this discourse is to be understood as comprising the primary gatekeepers in the market, an aspect often ignored in existing audience reception studies; even the hallyu studies done by many scholars in Southeast Asia, such as the ones spearheaded by Chua Beng Huat, primarily focus on regional audience perceptions. The Korean turn as primary reading—and “reading” by way of “viewing”—of the Korean soap operas, first took place in the production period, particularly in the acquisition of the foreign soap operas for local consumption. The next important phase of the development of the Korean turn was that of translation, or what is usually called in the Philippine context the *Tagalization* (the popular term for the Tagalog or Filipino translation of foreign soap operas) and dubbing of the soap operas, where barriers to basic understanding are at once crossed,

in a more practical and communicative level. This phase was very important in understanding the Korean turn because this was where the linguistic, and consequently cultural, processing was undertaken. A soap opera, as in any cultural text, is a language that embodies not only the stories of its fictional characters and settings, but also their located worldviews. As in the usual translation processes where two cultures formulate an interface, the translation and dubbing of a Korean soap opera re-establishes what the researcher calls the “cross-textuality” of a drama series, a heteroglossic dialogue between two popular cultural consciousnesses—in this case, the realms of the Filipino and of the Korean. As text, a soap opera is a space where various readings exist and open themselves for consumption. As a soap opera is written (and “written”, in the Barthian sense), embedded in it are various discourses peddled to viewers, aside from resolutions to dramatic conflicts.

For instance, in the Tagalization of Korean soaps, discourses have been opened, especially after they had been relocated to a Filipino context, where realities are primarily estranged from the projected First-World environments in the series. Also begging to be read in the soap opera text is what has been described in American soap studies as the “adversarial relationship we traditionally assume to exist between artistic and economic interests under capitalism” (Allen, 1985, p. 129). The soap opera as we know it shares the long-held perception of being a genre of mass writing, and therefore a low art form, an attitude now considered obsolete but continuously being dismantled in cultural theory. Issues of gender, class, and in this case, race, are also covered by this dialogue as the translations provide new instances of depictions of characters and their positions as men or women, their class concerns and consciousness as individuals, and their views of the world as Koreans. What only estranges this time is the fact that locally, the actors and actresses in these soaps speak Filipino; and some expressions and dialogue may from time to time be observed as idiomatically lost. The transformed sound and sense however still embody the cross-textuality, the very manifestation of the dialogue that made the Korean turn possible. Translation is very important in the process for it had become the tool by which the cultural differences had been unlocked and rendered sensible.

Clearly, the content of the Koreanovela as high point in the said televisual process is nothing different from what is traditionally viewed as viable in the Filipino market. While coming from a different worldview and aesthetic, the type of TV melodrama that comes from South Korea speaks well of the same grief Filipinos continue to process since the country attempted to regain its democratic and civil liberties in 1986. For some

insiders in the broadcast industry, as reported by Rina Jimenez-David (2012), “recognizing and building on the qualities that draw local audiences, including a powerful storyline, Asian family values, good-looking actors, and superior production values” (para. 10), are mere consequences of this most recent televisual development. In this researcher’s initial discourse on the Koreanovela phenomenon, however, the Korean turn has been seen as comprising two processes—the transformative and the acculturative. First, the transformative process took place when TV outfits themselves bought up franchises of particular Korean soap operas to localize and produce them. ABS-CBN’s *Lovers in Paris* (2004), a trans-production of the Korean original, featuring KC Conception, Piolo Pascual, and Zanjoe Marudo, localized the Korean story, but interestingly discussed issues of the Filipino diaspora in Europe over the long run. The transformation process of trans-production was also employed by GMA-7 when it produced local versions of *My Lovely Kim Sam Soon* [which became *Ako si Kim Sam Soon*, (Zapata et al., 2005) featuring Regine Velasquez, *Stairway to Heaven* (Raney & Alejandre, 2009), which starred Dingdong Dantes and Rhian Ramos, and *Full House* (Reyes, 2009), which had Richard Gutierrez and Heart Evangelista. The aesthetics, of course, is largely Filipino, since there seems to be no clear desire to re-process the culture from which the originals were coming from – and of course this procedure is deemed unnecessary.

Eventually, Korean aesthetics and worldview have slowly been acculturated in the process of transformation, as exemplified by trans-productions such as *Only You* (2009) on ABS-CBN. Cinematic shots, reflective of the Korean and clearly Buddhist worldview of humanity and the picturing of human smallness in the presence of the vast natural surroundings, are just one of the more notable current practices by Philippine television in the transformative process—an aspect that is clearly lost in translation in a televisual culture steeped in personality close-ups and existential monologues. It must be noted that the Korean soap opera, as part of the larger hallyu phenomenon, is a product of a historical engagement between neighboring countries Korea and Japan—two cultures that in recent years embraced a clearly cosmopolitan consciousness in each of their various cultural practices peddled in the global market. This engagement is thoroughly discoursed by Chua Beng Huat (2012) when he geographically situated the popular cultural phenomenon in East Asia (Korea and Japan, of course, plus China, and the rest of the former Indochinese peninsula, including Singapore) where there are, regionally, similar aesthetic and cultural resonances, as far as audiences are concerned. Quoting Iwabuchi (as cited by Chua, 2012), Chua relates Korean drama to Japanese “trendy” drama which “featured beautiful men and women who are young professionals,

adorned in high fashion clothes, dining in upscale restaurants, living on their own in well-appointed apartments in the city” (Chua, 2012, p. 2). This trendy mode, adds the scholar, was “localized” in some manner by Korean productions, entangling the individualistic depictions to “familial relations” and thus complicating the romance mode, “mixing the romance and family-drama genres” (p. 2). As “sources of soft power” (p. 7), Korean dramas helped in the “emergence and consolidation of the regionalization of media industries and pop culture” (p. 8).

The discussion on East Asia is easy to pursue in terms of aesthetics, one that is however transformed in the Philippine context. In an earlier audience reception study, Jeongmin Ko in Shim, Heryanto, and Siriyuvasak (2010) noted one Chinese subject’s feeling of “connection to our tradition” (p.138), upon watching the Korean hit period soap opera *Jewel in the Palace* (Jo & Lee, 2003). For the informant, the soap projects “the pure shape of Confucianism” (Shim, Heryanto, and Siriyuvasak, 2010, p. 138). The noted similarities among others, the scholar says, influenced “the booming of the Korean Wave in the Southeast Asian region” (p. 143), though in the case of the Philippines, a clearly transformational approach is to be observed because of the obvious distant “structure of identification,” per Chua (2012, p. 89), with that of the Korean culture as embodied in the Koreanovela. While there is clearly “an active engagement” (p. 89) by way of “a virtual but intimate relationship with characters in the drama” (p. 89), the Filipino experience of Koreanovela perception only goes as far as translation and dubbing to domesticate and resonate with the foreign, and does not completely penetrate whatever aesthetic is present. Chua mentions an “exotic gaze” (p. 93), (a touristy gaze at that) that transpires in most transnational reception studies of Koreanovelas, but we argue that much of it is consumed in the Philippines as a vision of a Third World imaginary, aspiring, as said earlier, for economic mobility in the globalized world where “characters on screen don international fashions” (p. 93). Thus, the rhetoric of the “shared culture of Asianness” is lost, though not totally, since for Chua, “realistic and sophisticated portrayals of what they called ‘Asian’ ways of expressing various kinds of relations and emotional attachments among the characters” (p. 94) are present. Philippine culture, schooled in the convents for 300 years and trained in Hollywood for half a century, seems on its way to reclaim its Asianness after all, through the transformative experience of the Koreanovela.

The transformative process, we may conclude, was the direct response of Philippine television production in attempting to make the Korean Wave its own. It was the space where local talents first drew on the Korean dramatic mode to enrich their own productions. In trans-producing the works, they

were able to understand, to “close read” the works in order to understand the mechanisms of production, as texts, with the hope of fully creating their own versions, albeit literally at first. Acculturation meanwhile already implies an evolution of the genre as informed by the Korean Wave, among other influences. Philippine production does not only gather material and inspiration from Korea, but from other cultural wellsprings and sources. For instance, there still persists a strong Spanish and Latin American influence in the way we produce drama. Hollywood also continues to define much of our production, with America continuing to be the primary ideal. The exercise of transformative processing however led to an Asianization of sorts in Philippine teleseryes, and that is Asianization on various remarkable levels. Geographically, the Philippines found itself discoursing with Asia through drama with the ABS-CBN teleserye titled *Green Rose* (Santos et al., 2011), also a trans-production of a Korean original. The story happens not in one place, but in two—Manila and Seoul, South Korea. The characters moved in and out of these shared spaces, embodying cultural engagements and exchanges along the way. Another soap opera that attempted to Asianize—and the researcher uses this word to mean a way of positioning on a regional and individual level—was Jericho Rosales’s starrer *Kahit Isang Saglit* (2008), also happening in two settings—Manila and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. In this collaboration of ABS-CBN and the Malaysian counterpart Double Vision, Rosales teamed up with Malaysian actress Carmen Soo to render a transnational action and romance-packed narrative. The soap relates the story of Rosales’ character searching for justice. He eventually meets the woman played by Soo, a Malaysian, who would be his love interest in the quest. Discourses of interracial love, organized crime, and cultural differences made this teleserye a groundbreaking, border-crossing text.

The idea too of temporality had been acculturated in the Philippine dramatic production, though this is not entirely Korean, but may have been hammered down by the Korean dramatic engagements. The length of the teleserye, though still dependent on market acceptability, was redefined by the way Koreans produced their Koreanovelas, as they have been shown here. The soaps came at set broadcasting periods, and the plots are usually delineated to follow the template of a compact, fast-paced, storytelling mode. This process of acculturation changed the way viewers saw teleseryes. After some time, there occurred a shift away from the draggy stories, or the too complicated ones that seemed to go nowhere in particular. The key phrase is “to compel,” and Koreanovelas were perceived to be the compelling sort of shows that were generally fast-paced, perhaps because of their conventional brevity. *Mara Clara*’s story went too far in keeping a most valued diary of secrets out of sight for three months—ironically placed on top of a TV set

accessible to all major characters would usually pass by. When Filipinos saw the urgency and the development of characters in *Marimar*, and eventually in the likes of the *Endless Love* (Yoon, 2000) series, the idea of variety had probably been broached and sold. The audience didn't have to contend with stories going on and on for years just to be entertained, after all.³ The Koreanovela, or the telenovela option (as in the *Marimar* tradition) proposed the alternative and the revision to the Philippine televisual form. In recent times, TV5⁴ offered what it termed the “sineserye,” a soap opera that ran for exactly a month. Its first offering was titled *Sa Ngalan ng Ina* (O'Hara & Red, 2012), the comeback show of Philippine superstar Nora Aunor, in a family-political drama that depicted corruption and massive electioneering, greed for power and money, and what any loving mother would do to save her family from such turmoil. Earlier, ABS-CBN offered *100 Days to Heaven* (Praico & Lim, 2011), an astute story of a greedy toy company businesswoman owner, who was killed in an accident and sent back to earth as a little girl to make up for her misdeeds. The premise was for her to complete the mission straightening things up in 100 days, and the soap opera aired episodes around that number—with some discreet expansions of course, since the series became a hit.

Three Teleserye Texts

These two processes previously mentioned continue to embody the Korean turn, as the local broadcast industry continues to acculturate in the programs selected for this study. For instance, *Princess and I*, a teeny-bopper soap opera, is clearly inspired by various Koreanovelas which feature stories of royalties, like the Korean hit *Princess Hours* (Hwang, 2006). *Princess and I* (2012) is told as a modern-day fairy-tale story: the lead star, Kathryn Bernardo, grows up in the Philippines as an ordinary girl. Unknown to her, she is the lost crown princess of a fictional kingdom called Yangdon, and the story revolves around this revelation. The program, like *Lovers in Paris*, was shot in a foreign county, in Bhutan, to provide authenticity to the requisite estrangement of the story. Bernardo's character however provides an interesting insight into this discourse of the Korean turn, particularly her ending up growing in the Philippines. As a baby, the young Bernardo's character was saved from various threats against her life. She ends up under the care of an Overseas Filipino worker (OFW) in Yangdon, who brings her home to the Philippines. The OFW was not aware of the royal lineage of the child. Bernardo's character eventually returns to Yangdon, but not before weathering several storms, and braving a major threat to her life again. The Korean inspiration is not very difficult to prove, as the very idea itself of “royalty” is an unusual development Philippine contemporary storylines

which would rather locate, time and again, the settings to territories of landed gentries, for instance.⁵ The researcher also finds worth mentioning the hallyu look of both lead actors Daniel Padilla and Enrique Gil, whose matinee images depict and aspire the mode of “Asian-ness” peddled by hallyu. The teleserye’s concept also does not break away from the formula of mobility aspired for by the audience with the heroine as their representative figure. The tradition of grief for oppression as well is still very much present in the soap with the “Imeldific” figure of Gretchen Barretto’s character as queen scheming for the crown princess’s station.

Often ignored in this text however is the locational relationship bridged by the local and, at once, the foreign. The mediator in this case is the character of Sharmaine Suarez, playing the OFW Esmeralda who saved the baby princess from her oppressors in the kingdom. While the soap does not directly try to discuss issues of diasporic work, as in many others, it locates the Filipino as worker in local and foreign spaces, and the work that she or he does becomes the dialogical point, where the fictional “local” and “foreign” converge. This convergence also brings about subplots on the divisions within Yangdon, which apparently breaks into a rift between the “Eastern” and “Western” kingdoms, as represented by the competition between Gil, the prince and son of Barretto’s character, and Padilla, who is also, in a surprising turn, a Yangdonese prince belonging to the competing kingdom. The presence of a Yangdonese community in the Philippines, a group whose members had apparently fled from the fictional country because of threats to their life and property, also manifests this local-foreign convergence. On first reading, the so-called convergence may remind us of the allegorization of a political state, reminiscent almost of the age of the *madilim, gubat na mapanglaw* (literally, the deep, dark forest), and the *sukaban* (traitor) of Balagtas’s *Florante at Laura* (1838). However, the geopolitical issues being recalled here show us some important insights regarding our country’s being characterized as postcolonially or even neocolonially dispossessed. The presence of the figure of the OFW already presupposes the diasporic discourse here. However, the fictionalizing gesture of the soap opera, the imagination of a “community” in a volatile, divisive situation, such as the aforementioned one in Yangdon, seems to make this soap opera a reconfiguration of current historical situations in the Philippines. The idea of dispossession is very important in the reading of this soap as part of the Korean turn because it is its central theme. The motif of dispossession begins with Bernardo’s character, almost deprived of her royal throne. She is dispossessed of her right to the throne, and also of her ethnicity and history. Her two leading men similarly suffer dispossession; Padilla’s character, as mentioned, also mysteriously finds himself in the Philippines, and recovers

his past when he discovers his true identity while pursuing the princess. Gil's character is, in the end, the embodiment of dispossession because of the crisis in his kingdom. His perspective ends up as the primary point of view of the character narrating the whole event of the teleserye. When he decides to turn away from the cruel world and become a monk, he recalls his unrequited love for the princess, and insists that he is the "I" in the title *Princess and I*, a linguistic, narratological gesture that speaks of this desire to reclaim a self in the story.

The story of *Princess and I* mutates into a metaphor for dispossession, and to a certain extent, postcolonial and/or neocolonial dispossession. In an almost Russian Formalist turn, the soap defamiliarizes viewers by way of an altered version of Philippine historical and contemporaneous contexts where the diasporic experience, political destabilization, and grand evil schemes are a daily fare. Yangdon, the foreign land quite underdeveloped, mirrors our own republic's sadness, a point that compels critique, for it transports itself to the Philippines by way of the fictional town called Santol, the supposed Yangdon of the Philippines, a subtle reminder of the boat people from Vietnam who in the 1970s crossed the West Philippine Sea and reached parts of Luzon fleeing their country's war. Dispossession as drama entails the necessity for recovery—of the self, of truths, even of locations; and that has been, primarily, the premise of the story. However, the issues of dispossession would be deepened further by the second text, *A Beautiful Affair*, which is literally beautiful, having been shot in a scenic imaginary—that of Vienna, Austria—an enduring representation of Europe and its place in our culture as "spectre of comparisons," appropriating the articulations of Benedict Anderson (1998). This soap opera's premise is very much different from *Princess and I*, not only because of its genre—this is heavy drama we are talking about—but also because of its location of Filipinos, not as diasporically marginalized—that is, choosing to be *in* Vienna for employment, but more so as visitors, as tourists. Primarily, the characters of Cruz and Alonzo are both heartbroken; Cruz has just discovered his mother's death, and Alonzo has just caught her boyfriend cheating. Both go to Vienna to heal, and consequently cross each other's paths. This touristy gaze of the characters is observable in many hit Koreanovelas, like *Lovers in Paris*, but clearly the gaze is unlike the one possessed by the Filipino character. When Korean characters visit foreign lands in Koreanovelas, they sport a gaze that may be Asian but is nevertheless informed by their First-World consciousness and realities. The gaze transforms when the Filipino is transported into the European space; the gaze reiterates the marginal position of the perspective, and this gaze is the same one used when viewers imbibe the Korean, First World ideal in ordinary Koreanovela viewing.

The meaning of “looking” here changes too, considering the *demonios de las comparaciones* (the spectre of comparisons) first disclosed to us by Rizal in his *Noli Me Tángere*, and as mentioned above, discoursed extensively by Anderson (1998): Europe, for the longest time, has haunted the Filipino collective memory, and by learning the Koreanovel language, it has been allowed once more to disturb this process of re-imagining ourselves. While the re-imagination is subliminally performed, as can be seen in the scenes where the star-crossed lovers are enjoying the scenic surroundings of the European city, their being re-located in the European space becomes a meaning-making practice of returning to the origins of our postcolonial imaginaries. This researcher, in the previous study mentioned earlier, surmised that in watching hundreds of Koreanovelas, Filipinos had steadily wound up accepting Korea as their new ideal imaginary (Sanchez, 2012, para. 3). As a new fantasy of mobility, Korea had become the reflection of a collective desire for economic, social, cultural, and spiritual freedom. Korean mobility, that is, the ease in being in another geographic space which is equally progressive, has consequently been learned in our televisual Korean turn, but with different results. In this specific case, the Korean turn has made us engage once more with our agon with the West, a culture which Korea most dynamically embraces today. Curiously, this “re-turn” to the West also instigates in the soap opera’s home front a “subversive” specter of the millennial, as represented by the cultic movement that was narrated as growing in number and material resources while the two main characters contended with the figure that completes the story’s love triangle: the character played by John Estrada.

The “cultic” aspect of the teleserye became a perfect—even revolutionary—counterpoint to the spectral re-presencing of colonial Europe in the Filipino popular imaginary. In the end, it was revealed that Cruz’s mother (who is still miraculously alive), played by Eula Valdez, was part of the cult that intends to build a complex in preparation for Judgment Day. In the middle of it all is a large realty empire owned and managed by the family of Estrada’s character, a trope of the Koreanovela, which usually locates drama in the corporate realm. This “re-location” to the corporate setting displaces the usual Filipino domestic setting, where characters often move around the unitary institutions and constitutions of the home. While the dynamic is still familial—and the concerns of the characters are still very much controlled by the idea and ideals of the “family”—the story resituates itself in struggles for control and positions, which are apparently important in the “success” of finally completing the building of the cult’s Judgment Day complex. This tower-like structure was said to “welcome” the descent of the divine (which is eerily represented by the idea of *liwanag* [light or

enlightenment]), and while awaiting the return, the members are asked to prepare their *loob*, reform and even offer their lives in an almost Iletian fashion (and yes, *pasyon*), although bordering on organized crime, quite a specter itself in many soap operas after the Korean turn. The corporate institution is utilized as a dummy of the local cult, and this, the researcher supposes, is an unprecedented creature of the Korean turn, as the soap “spectacularizes,” so to speak, the haunting of the European space.

Our idea of spectacularization in *A Beautiful Affair* is what may be deemed as the mediation “by images” of “a social relationship between people” (Debord, 1994, p. 13). The spectacle, according to Debord, is “both the outcome and the goal of the dominant mode of production” (p. 13). He also adds that “it is the very heart of society’s real unreality” (p. 13) epitomizing

the prevailing model of social life..... In form as in content, the spectacle serves as total justification for the conditions and aims of the existing system. It further ensures the *permanent presence* of that justification, for it governs almost all time spent outside the production process itself. (p. 13)

Quite interestingly, the Filipino viewership gaze as trained by watching Korean novels has turned onto itself in the case of *A Beautiful Affair*, a reflexive development in current soap opera characterization. After learning the method of internalizing this desire *to be* Korean by way of “fantasy production,” loosely borrowing from Tadiar (2004), it moves on to set its sights onto Europe, where the biting cold and melancholia that once distressed *ilustrados* (in Philippine history, literally, the enlightened) in history haunted it and made its presence felt once again. Though again, there is clearly no attempt at a direct critical confrontation, the beauty of Vienna as a synecdoche of colonialism seems to instigate rebellion back home, as can be seen with the millennial cultic specter, which in the discourse of Reynaldo Ileto (1979) paved the way for a coherent understanding of the revolutionary self in history. Not all soaps after the Korean turn however were symptomatic of this attempt at narrativizing the coherence of a national responding self, as can be seen in the third and final text for this study, *Kailangan Ko’y Ikaw*. This soap opera, like *A Beautiful Affair*, offered a story yet again of a love triangle. Like the brothers John Lloyd Cruz and John Estrada in the previously considered text, Kris Aquino and Anne Curtis play sisters here who both fell in love with the character of Robin Padilla, a policeman on a mission to restore the besmirched honor of his father. The father of Aquino and Curtis, played by Tirso Cruz III,

was apparently involved in a crime syndicate, and earlier on had a hand in the demise of Padilla's father. Organized crime is a major issue in the teleserye, foregrounding Padilla's quest to solve the mystery of his father's death and dishonor. The "re-presencing" of local dispossession however surfaces when his wife (Aquino's character) suddenly falls ill and leaves for a location unknown to her husband.

The surprising turn of a plane crash somewhere in the waters of Hong Kong and Macau leaves the policeman looking for his wife while still pounding pavements in his search for justice—two events that would rather intersect, despite their disconnectedness, toward the end of the story. A good part of the teleserye devotes time to Padilla's search for Aquino in Hong Kong and Macau, amid leads that his wife was still alive and kept by kidnappers. From then on, Padilla turns into some sort of a TNT (*tago nang tago* [literally, constantly in hiding], because of his undercover job and lack of proper travel documents) fugitive, whose presence in foreign space recalls common images and characterizations of the Filipinos in diaspora—lost, and as in the first soap studied here, dispossessed. As a trope of incoherence—the story is incoherent in itself—the teleserye "re-locates" the characters in lands where Filipino workers abound, but not really discussing anything significant about them. Dramaturgically, all three texts—*Princess and I*, *A Beautiful Affair*, and this one—craft and perpetuate the placelessness of the Filipino after its televisual gaze was trained in the Korean turn. However, *Kailangan Ko'y Ikaw*—true to a title that seemingly expresses the longing for a lost self (said in the third person)—dislocates the characters in its contrived visions and revisions of the story, an option that it had to take considering the personal controversies that befell Kris Aquino in real life during the time of the teleserye's airing. The "dis-location" of Aquino in the story, and her being found in the end, participates in what all three soap operas had been performing all along—that of redefining and expanding the possibilities of the concept of the diaspora in the Philippine context. To make sense of this, the Korean turn may be understood as compelling for the return into the etymological wellspring of the word, the scattering of the seeds. This "scattering" however assumes another meaning when its Filipino equivalent, *pagkakalat*, is recalled, in the context of *Kailangan Ko'y Ikaw*. The word's two senses—*pagkakálat*, or dispersal, and *pagkakalát*, or disorientation, *being* all over the place—point to the effect and affect of the Korean turn after Filipino teleseryes began taking on subjects that required some form of confronting contemporary historical realities (among them, Filipino migration). While Aquino was certainly *nagkakalát* in her personal life while making *Kailangan Ko'y Ikaw*, the story disperses the fictional selves that could have been coherent in the first place, a dispersal that echoes the

impossibility of unity in our archipelagic condition—hence, the incoherence. While the presence of the foreign in this teleserye continues to perplex the researcher, the very fact that the setting was deliberately re-turned to Asian space provides an interesting development, transcending common allusions to globalization and the position of the Filipino as a global citizen.

The theme of *Kailangan Ko'y Ikaw*, more than love enduring all odds, is the enduring search for a displaced self, especially in fragmented (and fragmenting) situations such as this one in the teleserye. This soap, by any standard, is considered a flop, but nevertheless, its fragmentation—in terms of idea, story, and method—fascinates the researcher in the sense that it brings together a disembodied notion of diaspora/nation in diaspora, whatever it now means. To say the least, Hong Kong and Macau here are indulgences that merely provide a less meaningful counterpoint to the Philippine space, where injustice and organized crime thrive—in differing forms and scales. It must be remembered that in the beginning of the story, the character of Curtis fakes her own kidnapping to extort money from her own father. The “inflicting” of crime upon one’s self, among other “criminal” gestures, easily reminds us of the possible influences of Korean novels like *City Hunter* (Jin, 2011) and even of the recently concluded *That Winter, The Wind Blows* (Kim, 2013) and *The Innocent Man* (Lee 2012). It is also symptomatic of how Filipinos continue to desire being “transported” in their imaginaries, not necessarily as a means to escape (as in the obsolete notions of popular literature as escapism), but as a way to reach some forms of probable mobility. No matter how paradoxical, this of course is far from possible, thus the “criminal” turn of being fragmented in the visual spectacle. The audience, as it were, continues to “despair” this disembodiment, and returns to the fount of grief founded by traditions of local television productions after 1986, quite serendipitously, in the person of Aquino, the daughter of the slain senator-martyr.

This disembodiment typifies what may be called the process of diasporization participated in by the three texts studied for this paper. In *Princess and I*, the soap recalls the familiar image of the OFW to discourse on what seems to be a changing diasporic dynamic, where not only Filipinos participate but also the rest of the world. Our allegorical reading becomes a space of contention where conflicting interests and advocacies emerge. In its simple desire to provide a reworking of a Cinderella story, the soap opera attempted to transcend the much discoursed, much lamented contract work migration by presenting a narrative space that heteroglossically opens itself to migration movements and exchanges. Linguistic slippages though prevent it from transcending fully—and it really has no pretense to do so. In certain episodes, the show fails in its attempt at “creating” a fully functional and

realistic country that may be called Yangdon by allowing its own supposed citizens to speak in Filipino, instead of the Bhutanese language designated for the country. In a particular scene, the Yangdonese Constitution, said to be composed by the country's elders in centuries past, was "read," uttered, surprisingly, in elegant Filipino, as if it was its lingua franca. This is also observable in the code and accent switching of Gretchen Barretto and the Yangdonese King, played by Albert Martinez. This gesture of setting the Filipino national—and Filipino, the language, the supposed repository of culture—in a foreign space diasporizes the country, both self and land. This all-over-the-place-ness of the soap counts as a form of legitimizing (and, possibly, critiquing?) our lost selfhood and nationality in the global sphere, inasmuch as the second text, *A Beautiful Affair*, involves itself in re-locating this lost selfhood by dramatizing how a self comes into full form when distantiated, that is, diasporized, exiled into the colonial land.

Conclusion

Interestingly, *A Beautiful Affair*, in its deeper structures, speaks of the revolutionary potential of placelessness, thanks to the internalization of the Korean fantasy production. Among the three texts, this one is the most postcolonially readable, as it seems to recall the spirit of the "unfinished" revolution of 1896, though rather unconsciously. The indulgent diasporization here of the middle and the upper classes, as represented by John Lloyd Cruz and Bea Alonzo, is necessary in order to expose the pitfalls of the colonial specter, now being used by the global institution of hallyu to woo audiences to continue consuming Korean ideas and ideals—a thing to be interrogated constantly. *A Beautiful Affair* is indeed a beautiful affair of the diaspora, however problematic, but the third text which stars Kris Aquino, a signifying practice unto herself, becomes the embodiment of the horrors of diasporization. The presence of the diaspora here is as indulgent and mystifying as Aquino herself, and Padilla's sojourn in recovering the absented wife in the supposed Asian Las Vegas proves to be ironically "Imeldific," following, though metaphorically, Barretto's in *Princess and I*. The return to etymology, and the recall of the diasporic sense in Filipino, illustrates for us the failures of this soap opera after its Korean turn. It failed because it was too literal, and unlike the two earlier teleseryes, only uncovered what is already obvious—our senses of fragmentedness, dislocation, and dispossession—without even trying to break these down into anything sensible, in a critical, discerning fashion. The teleserye's plot itself is illustrative of how diasporization became merely a fact of necessity. *Kailangan Ko'y Ikaw* must thence be seen as a cautionary tale on how the Korean turn can make or break us. As TV executives continue to sideline

the signifying practices of production (as experienced by this researcher in various instances), more and more meanings are being produced, such as this revisionist one on the diaphora. Diasporization here is developed as an uninterrogated idea of looking, not only at the popular characterization or fictionalization of the Filipinos in global culture, but also at the ways this phenomenon, so to speak, disperses whatever is left of our national ideas and ideals.

In a way, teleseryes, being legitimated texts, and despite foreign influences (Korean or Spanish), should be seen as still participating in “narrating” the nation, especially when they take on diasporic subjects or issues along the line of Filipino positionality in global or transnational space. To disassemble the Korean turn in the Philippines, and to show how it manifests in local soap opera productions, help in providing moments of discerning critique, particularly as more and more productions tend to “contextualize” stories and discussion, as a matter of providing resonance and verisimilitude. As narrations of the Filipino nation—at home, or *at home* in diaspora—the teleserye, after the Korean turn, is slowly turning into an agency of suggestive expositions where methods of seeing the self and the world (originally East Asian) are slowly being translated into meaningful interrogative instances of our being assigned to be part of the community of the global south.

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Notes

[1] *Hallyu* is the collective term referring to all forms of Korean popular culture marketed in the global sphere. This term, also known as “Korean Wave” (Korea.net, n.d., para. 1) is further explained as “[referring] to the phenomenon of Korean entertainment and popular culture rolling over the world with pop music, TV dramas, and movies” (para. 1). The term *hallyu*, the website also adds, “was first coined by the Chinese press in the late 1990s to describe the growing popularity of Korean pop culture in China” (para. 1). It has since then taken the world by storm.

[2] The poet, scholar, and critic Virgilio S. Almario, Philippine national artist for literature, has argued countless times that Philippine culture had reacted vicariously against colonial encroachment by “naturalizing” colonizing institutions, like literary works. For more of this, the researcher suggests the reading of his recent book, *Ang Tungkulin ng Kritisismo sa Filipinas* (2013).

[3] In a period where most teleseryes have been running for months on end, a current exception to the “rule” is *Be Careful with My Heart* (Jeturian et al., 2012-present), a morning soap launched in 2012 featuring Jodi Sta. Maria and Richard Yap. Sta. Maria plays a *probinsiyana* (province lass) who dreams of becoming a flight attendant, and Yap, the owner of an airline company. Their paths would cross and intertwine. The soap was phenomenal, despite “backsliding” into the standard Filipino romance mode; it still runs as of this writing, despite negative public commentary regarding the “padding” of its storyline. The researcher wrote about the teleserye and its public affect in 2013 for the *Philippine Graphic* magazine.

[4] TV5, the network owned by communications mogul Manuel V. Pangilinan, seems to be the only network showing once-a-week soap operas, reminiscent of the British and American series of past and present times.

[1] To some extent, this “return of the royals” may be another “backsliding” into the tradition of the *awits* and *koridos* of the Philippine literary yesteryears, where kings and queens, knights and princesses, and sundry other magical personages thrived. For more about this, please refer to Resil Mojares’s (1983) study on the Filipino novel.

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