

The Pinay as Fun, Fearless Female: Philippine Chick Literature in the Age of the Transnation

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ABSTRACT

The paper analyzes Philippine chick literature by Summit Publishing – the first to come out with local chick literature via the Summit Books – and as a by-product of its magazine Cosmopolitan Philippines.

This study delves into chick lit's existence given these context(s): 1. the dynamics of publication in this country, i.e., the “literary” versus the “popular”, works in English versus works in Filipino, the “artsy” versus the bestseller; 2. the various kinds of feminism(s) of which the middle class Filipina of today is necessarily part; and 3. the facts of globalization and the transnation that are the bases of the Summit Books' existence, given its links to Cosmopolitan Philippines, and the latter's existence as a local franchise of a transnational magazine.

This paper also looks at the marginalization and suppression that is contingent upon these perspectives of the Summit Books with a view of seeing the possibilities of resistance and rebellion within them.

This project uses as backbone contemporary third world feminist and current Philippine cultural theories that insist on the urgent tasks of relevance and involvement that all contemporary cultural productions by women must face. More particularly, this study uses notions of subjectivity and agency, and the processes of negotiation these allow, towards an analysis of where these women's texts necessarily belong to. This kind of analysis is utilized precisely because these texts traverse across the oppressive and the empowering, the status quo and the possibilities of rebellion, and the powerless and the powerful. In the

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end, such negotiation is seen as Summit Books' contribution to the contemporary creation of the Philippine feminine – one that demands that no text be reduced to just its class origins, or just the popular.

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A little more than two decades ago, scholar Resil Mojares said of Pedro Paterno's *Ninay*: "no work before it by a Filipino author is closer to the general conception of the novel" (135, 1983). There would also seem to be a very simple reason for Mojares' reading of *Ninay* and of its author, Paterno: "the fact that no one before him (Paterno) was of a more cosmopolitan outlook" (135). Mojares goes on to say that unlike those before Paterno who were writing the "Late Colonial Narratives", the latter was influenced by his exposure to Spanish and European novels (135). And while it is true that *Ninay* may leave much to be desired as far as its being a novel is concerned, Mojares asserts that it's not bad for a first effort.

I say, it's not bad for something written in 1885, because a century and almost a decade later, came novels that can truly claim this "cosmopolitan outlook" for which Paterno – and *Ninay* – have become classics.

In 2002, *Cosmopolitan Philippines* – the local version of the international *Cosmopolitan Magazine* – sold with its October issue a short novel by Tara FT Sering called *Getting Better*. It was thin enough to come with the packaged magazine, and with a Pinay covergirl – Miriam Quiambao, if I remember correctly – there was no way I was going to pass it up. Suffice it to say that I wasn't a big fan of the magazine then, despite the fact that the managing editors of times past were U.P. graduate students who, one can assume, have a good sense of what's "politically correct" for the Pinay of this day and age. But too often they'd prove that there is a limit to what can be done in these positions of power, and any copy of *Cosmopolitan Philippines* I would get my hands on proved this to be true: make-up and clothes, love and sex, stereotypes and archetypes rule the pages of this magazine.

But a free book? And a novel for the generation judged to have a limited attention span for reading? As far as I was concerned, this would make for its possible saving grace. And one that a lot of

Cosmopolitan Philippines' readers apparently appreciated. Along with that October issue was a survey to find out if readers wanted to see more books like *Getting Better*. Other than the fact that the issue was sold out (Hidalgo, 77), the results of that survey were apparently positive enough to keep the books coming. By the early part of 2003, *Drama Queen* by Abi Aquino came out as a Summit Book, followed by Maya Calica's *The Breakup Diaries* and M.D. Balangue's *Mr. Write*, in between which was the sequel to *Getting Better*, Sering's *Almost Married*. That's four Summit Books in one year, in an impoverished country where reading and books are at the bottom of anyone's list of priorities.

This paper shall analyze the production of chick literature by Summit Books as popular literature in the context of the conditions of literary publishing in this country, the transnational bases of its production (which is *Cosmopolitan Magazine*), and the bigger globalized world and fragmented pockets of affluence/poverty it creates. In this sense, it will be grounded in theories of post-/neo-colonialism that insist on the reconfiguration of struggles versus the continued contingent oppression(s) of world capital and transnationalism. Given these contexts, this paper will then look into the strengths of the Summit Books in its use of language and the theories of feminism or the lack of it, and its limitations given all its possibilities. This will also be the beginning of what will be analyzed as the consistent creation of the contemporary Philippine feminine – the constructed images of being Filipina since the turn of the millennium – by popular culture images and portrayals (books, magazines, movies, advertising, the internet).

In the end, it is also hoped that productions such as the Summit Books will not simply be disregarded, that popular literature will not be dismissed, and that Philippine chick lit – as with all productions by women – may be fueled with the possibility for change. And revolt.

A "LITERARY" CONTEXT: CONTEMPORARY LITERARY PUBLISHING AND PINAY CHICK LIT

In the seminal study on Philippine book history *Tagalog Bestsellers of the Twentieth Century, A History of the Book in the Philippines* (2008) by Patricia May B. Jurilla, she historicizes the presumption that there is a lack of readership in the country. To her, this glosses over two

things: first, the existence of a popular kind of literature, and therefore a readership for the Filipino romance novels and the Bible (56); and second, the fact that in the 21st century, what has been deemed “literary”, which has no readership, is Philippine writing in English (73). To Jurilla, it has been a consistent disregard for, or a looking down on, writing in Tagalog that has allowed for the lamentation of “no readership!” by the literary establishment in this country (73-75). At the same time, it is this production in the vernacular that proves the fact that literature is/can be popular here (77), and even, that we might have our own version of “bestsellers” in the form of these popular literary productions (79).

Publisher Antonio A. Hidalgo has a similar assessment of the terrain of literary publishing in the country, asserting that

Filipinos read books that they think they need or want. This accounts for the sustained success of large publishers that specialize in romance novels in Filipino and in religious books. (October 2007)

As with Jurilla, Hidalgo also deals with publishing in English vis-a-vis the acknowledgment of the popular. To wit:

<...> there is a mismatch between what many of our best writers write and the needs and preferences of most readers. Too many Filipino writers write in English, while most readers read in Filipino; the best writers concentrate on writing fiction, while most readers want information books; because of class differences in lifestyles and experiences, the content of the best Filipino literature in English is often at odds with what most readers want from fiction, so they turn, instead to telenovelas, formulaic romance novels in Filipino, and lately, badly-written ghost and horror stories in Filipino. (November 2007)

It becomes obvious though where Jurilla disagrees with Hidalgo: while the latter judges writers and texts as “the best”, the former’s project is precisely to look into those texts that have been deemed unworthy of study because they are “formulaic,” or are in the vernacular, or are popular. In fact, Hidalgo’s assertions prove the worth of Jurilla’s study of these popular literary publications, and the truth in her premise: that

<...> the literary bestsellers of the Philippines during the twentieth century were the writings that the local literary establishment particularly ignored, dismissed, or condemned.

They were written in Tagalog, in the forms of the metrical romance, the novel, the comic book, and the romance novel. They provided cheap, formulaic, and escapist entertainment. They achieved immense popularity and remarkable commercial success in their day. An earnest study of the history of the book in the Philippines would be remiss – and would not be earnest at all – if it were to ignore, dismiss, or condemn further these publications. (79-80)

The bases of Jurilla's study, and her interest in the popular publications, are well-placed in the context of a literary publishing that has had a tendency to see the popular as different, or worse, as irrelevant. Here, both Hidalgo and Jurilla again agree: that the division between the popular in the vernacular and the "literary" in English is a symptom of the conditions of the "great divide" between the elite and the masses of this country (Jurilla 74, Hidalgo Nov 2007). The popular is being read by the *masa*, and the elite? Well, they have to compete for what Hidalgo says is

<...> the tiny, but affluent, A and B market (variously estimated at 7-12 percent of the population) <which> should be the audience for Filipino literature in English by the best writers. (November 2007)

To Jurilla, this market is made up of the "Filipinos who are more inclined to read books as a habit or a pastime and who can afford to regularly buy books <...>" (73), though she assesses that these Filipinos "typically belong to the smaller sector of Philippine society, the upper and higher-middle classes which count for just a little over 1 percent of the population" (73). This would exist as readership for Philippine literature in English, except for one problem: this market is

<...> extremely Westernized and prefers books by foreign authors. This is why our largest book stores all carry many more foreign literary titles than local ones, often 20 or more foreign titles for every local one. (Hidalgo Nov. 2007)

To Hidalgo, it is what he calls our "postcolonial situation" that's to blame for this lack of support for local books in English; for Jurilla, the point is to reconfigure our notions of literary publishing, precisely to include the bestsellers in Filipino that have been deemed unworthy of study or even regard.

But what of chick literature, in the form of the Summit Books, and the market it has appealed to? Where would it lie in the context of the great divide between the popular literatures in the vernacular and literary publishing in English? It isn't for the mass market for sure – not at all for the same market that the Tagalog romances appeal to (ably studied by Jurilla and scholar Soledad Reyes). But it also isn't simply and easily for the elite/elitist reading market segment – definitely not for the 1 percent that Jurilla speaks of; most probably part of the 7 to 12 percent that Hidalgo says exists. The question remains though: what do we do with the popular for a particularly middle class market?

Well, we try and define it for one, and in that sense it is difficult not to look at how these books hew closely to the conventions for chick literature in the U.S. The convention of course, has been the single, urban, middle class woman. In *The Feminist Bestseller* (2005) though, Imelda Whelehan defines chick lit as being different from what she calls the Consciousness Raising (CR) novels of the 1970s in the U.S.:

Chick lit provides a post-feminist narrative of heterosex and romance for those who feel that they're too savvy to be duped by the most conventional romance narrative. It allows for the possibility of promiscuity, illicit sex, ordinariness, loss of dignity, and fallibility, along with all the aspirational features – whether it be clothing, interiors, or food. (186)

All these characteristics of “ordinariness” are interwoven with what Whelehan sees as the chick lit protagonist's emotional make-up – which is telling as well of the readership it presumes:

The new woman of the 1990s and beyond found Bridgit Jones's Diary and subsequent chick lit offerings a warped reflection of the glossy Cosmo woman and the rebellious daughter of the bonkbuster home. <...> the chick lit heroine is sometimes too anxious to make simple decisions and seems instead to celebrate instances where she fails, as well as resignedly suggesting that character flaws are a part of one's unchangeable personal make-up. Chick lit heroines are loved, warts and all, presumably speaking to a reader's unarticulated desire to have their nature shine through and be readily apparent. (175-176)

In all the Summit Books up for study in this paper, this holds true: all the protagonists have issues with the self – be it staying in a bad relationship or unhappily in a job, trying to find her true passion or starting from scratch. They do deal with sex and love, with infidelity and one-night-stands, with the utter lack of sex, without explicitly speaking of feminism or women’s issues. And none of them apologize – for being woman, for being anti-feminist, for being middle class. And as with Whelehan’s assessment of American chick lit, the Summit Books have humor:

The humour is always the self-deprecating kind – things go wrong for the chief characters, wild coincidences happen – but does it actually unseat or subvert the romantic core? That answer is that it uneasily celebrates romance while anatomizing the ways in which romance makes dupes of perfectly rational single women. (186)

Fictionist and scholar Cristina Pantoja-Hidalgo’s introduction to the republication of Sering’s *Getting Better’s* speaks of its success and appeal:

I believe it’s the protagonist’s voice, which is very now, unmistakably contemporary – alternately funny and sad, tough and vulnerable, in-your-face and help-I’m-hurting-something-awful! It’s a voice that readers of Cosmo will be familiar with. It’s a voice that fans of television sitcoms, like Ally Mc Beal and Sex and the City, will recognize. It’s a voice that young and not-so-young urban women – students, young housewives, career girls – will identify with. (77)

It’s this “now-ness”, the contemporary that this paper sees Summit Books as having, in more ways than one, figuring, as it does, not only in the easy reading that these books allow, but also in the fun and “female-ness”, as well as the fearlessness itself, of the production. Both Pantoja-Hidalgo and Whelehan mention *Cosmopolitan Magazine* as integral to the kind of content that chick lit has, and this holds even truer for the Summit Books.

In Whelehan’s study of the feminist bestsellers vis-a-vis the feminist movement in the U.S., the connection between chick literature and *Cosmopolitan* revolves around Helen Gurley Brown and her book *Sex and the Single Girl* (1962), which became a hit.

This brought Brown to the Editor-in-Chief position of *Cosmopolitan* (25, 27), and as such, she was in a position to “shape the ambitions and aspirations of the modern young woman from the mid-1960s right through to the 1990s” (28). In 1998, Brown says in an interview that *Cosmopolitan* has become and is “a bible for young women who want to do better” (in Schuch 1998).

Meanwhile, it is Sering’s position as Managing Editor of *Cosmopolitan Philippines* that would bring her to the Book Editorship of Summit Books and its enterprise of publishing chick literature in the Philippines. This position that Sering finds herself in is something that will later on be discussed as an interesting footnote. What is important to see at this point is the fact that at the very least, the Summit Books broke the monotony of the existing system of publishing apart, spreading good writing around at an affordable price, and in hip packaging, too. As critic-under-fire Adam David has said recently, there is a literary cabal, and they propagate the same kind of writing by “giving birth” to generation after generation of younger writers (6 May 2009). David says that the younger generation must commit literary patricide, slay the ones who gave them workshops and published them in “respectable” books, and go out on their own. Publish as they wish, in whatever way they can (6 May 2009). This reading of David’s of course, is barely considered by the literary world as valid – owing to the language he uses¹ – but it is, by far, the most truthful assessment and most needed challenge to young writers.

A challenge that someone like Sering, via the Summit Books, had taken on, harnessing both the language and technology of the times to come up with something truly new to offer a particular segment of the Filipino reading market. That most of these books talk about what’s fondly called “ka-women-an” is another plus, owing to the disconnect between the feminism in the academe, and the lives lived by real women. By capturing this particular demographic as readers, the Summit Books gives the rest of us who study, read and “live” literature something to worry about. Or celebrate.

Of course the easiest thing to do is reduce this type of production to the class bases of its mode of production. But that would be a shame. It is important to assess literary publications such as this armed with more than class theory. In this sense, this study does follow the path that Jurilla has proven to be valid, which is to study popular literary production because it is but part and

parcel of book history in the country.

For Summit Books' chick literature, it is important to see *Cosmopolitan US* and *Cosmopolitan Philippines* as more than just its contexts. It is rooted in this to be sure, which prompts the following questions: how is the production of the Summit Books particularly about the present conditions of nation given its transnational roots in *Cosmopolitan*? Given the erasure of borders, and the takeover of technology and global capital over our lives, where does Pinay chick literature figure? What images of the feminine does it inevitably create at a time when these images may spell the difference between liberation and oppression?

GLOBALIZATION, TRANSNATION, GENDER: LOCATING THE COSMOPOLITAN THIRD WORLD

The dynamics of gender and sexuality vis-a-vis globalization and the transnation has prompted studies that insist on a diverse eye, i.e., that which will see that this cannot be a matter of the oppressor versus the oppressed anymore, that the binaries are more complex than just pinpointing the victim and violator (Mohanty 1988, Kaplan Alarcon and Moallem 1999, Davids and van Driel 2005, An Ghail and Haywood 2007). This has cut across discussions on Western feminist scholarship viewing feminism in the Third World as other (Mohanty), to sociological studies on gender and culture (An Ghail and Haywood), as well as the problematization of gender, nation, and globalization (Kaplan Alarcon and Moallem and Davids and van Driel). The latter study is a most interesting starting point for this study of chick literature via the Summit Books, as it insists on studying

<...> the production of differences but goes beyond thinking in dichotomous categories and includes the analysis of processes (Davids and van Driel 2001) <...> processes of gender construction (and processes of globalization) are both historically and culturally variable. (7)

In *The Gender Question in Globalization* (2005), Tina Davids and Francien van Driel are fueled by what they see as a way of formulating a political agenda that

<...> focuses on the impoverishment of women <...> This

representation of globalization does not address the complexities of global restructuring; instead it pictures a homogeneous and one-dimensional process. <...> In doing so it neglects the diversities of women's realities. (6)

This, to them, only creates the “representation of women as victims of globalization” (7), something that they find problematic as it is a stereotype of the woman, and globalization as well (7). On this level of symbols, contradictory and conflating hierarchies are created, and Davids and van Driel insist that it is here that we must begin, where we may see the differences and highlight how it is reflected in institutionalized practices (7).

What is most useful for this analysis of chick literature in the age of the global and the transnation, is how Davids and van Driel give us the space to see difference(s), and agency and subjectivity (8) as the next dimension after the symbolic. They assert that there is negotiation with and against the symbolic level of globalization – that which creates the stereotypes and expectations upon gender – and that these depend not just on the “structural positioning and on identities that are ascribed to people, but also on the individual agency of the actors and groups” (8). In this dimension, we are allowed the “dimension of subjectivity, in which individuals shape their own identities” (8). It is here that we engage in the “process of identification of individuals with the multiple identities or aspects of identities that are handed to them” (8).

This is all-important in establishing the grounds upon which the Summit Books stand, and within which chick literature may be analyzed beyond its class-based mode of production. In this sense, chick literature via the Summit Books may be seen as a negotiation: between the stereotypes that the symbolic order of globalization creates of women as oppressed, and the existence of a middle class Pinay subjectivity that can claim to benefit from it; between the global, and the particular Third World locality it has allowed to be created – has fueled into creation, in fact.

And yet this is anything but a celebration of diversity that would only, in the end, allow for globalization to be rationalized as our status quo (San Juan 2008). Instead, this is an insistence on an analysis that is not reductive of literary texts – particularly the popular ones, which is to follow in the footsteps of Jurilla – and which will try and re-assess the ignored or dismissed literary products of the

time and fuel it with some power.

This paper sees this as coalescing with Neferti Xina M. Tadiar's assertions about art in this time of global capital and transnationalization:

If we look at art less in terms of representation than as practices of mediation, we can recognize the way in which specific works might begin to alter our habitual forms of regard and release other possibilities. (14-15)

As with Tadiar, this study is premised on the transnational as a contingent condition to the more general notion of globalization. The transnationalization of countries like the Philippines is about more than just the unequal exchange between what are presumed by globalization to be countries on equal footing; it is the speed with which capital is exchanged:

The rapid rate of technological, commercial and organisational innovation is accompanied by a proliferation of new methods of production, new markets, new products and services, and new systems of financing <...> The accelerated mobility of capital to wherever profitability can be maximised within domestic boundaries or overseas has a particular bearing on population movements. (Brah 626)

While Avtar Brah's essay "Diaspora, Border, and Transnational Identities" (1996) analyzes the literal diasporic movements of women across the world, it is interesting that its analysis hits on some of the premises of the Summit Books production in light of its link to, and beginnings in, the *Cosmopolitan Magazine*. After all, *Cosmopolitan Philippines*' is everything and a product of the transnationalization of the Philippines, and as with the study of chick literature in light of the homogeneous analysis of gender of globalization, it is important that a look at this production is not reduced to the bases of its production.

In truth, *Cosmopolitan Philippines* is interesting not simply because of its transnational roots but also because of its chick literature: in this sense, a reading of its existence will be fueled with a different power given its role in the production of literature in this country.

The Cosmopolitan Third World. Before *Cosmopolitan Magazine* came to have its Philippines version, the original *Cosmopolitan Magazine U.S.* was being bought by *Pinays* who could afford the

P700-P800 peso price tag – probably those in the 1 percent Jurilla mentions. When the right transnational time came for the magazine to cross over to this country, it was certain of an audience. Now at P100 to P120 bucks, that fixed audience expectedly grew. The following assertion regarding globalization is thus crucial with regard to this production, as it places the Philippines, *Cosmopolitan Philippines* in particular, in its Third World context:

Globalization does not imply levelling out. It is not the case that gaps between the First and Third World are gradually closing, and there remain all manner of structural inequalities involved at the level of political economy, access to technologies, ‘information poverty’ and so on. It would clearly be foolish, then, to try to argue for comparability in cultural experience if this is simply dependent on an argument about gradually converging levels of general material affluence or standard of living. Some sectors in some parts of the Third World do have comparable standards of living to those experienced by affluent groups in countries like the UK <...> (Tomlinson, 137)

Which is exactly why something as foreign as the original *Cosmopolitan Magazine* can have a particular market in a country that has 80% of the population below the poverty line. Walter Homolka (1996) asserts that in fact, the particularity of markets is due to the onslaught of what co-editor Kenneth Dyson calls new media technologies (1996). To wit,

The fragmentation of media markets, in the United States and especially in Europe with its many cultures and languages, is a reality. Consumers are demanding products, entertainment, and information tailored to their specific needs and desires. The traditional mass media are adapting as quickly as they can (the proliferation of cable television being on prominent example), <...> the key is in diversity, local products for specific tastes and needs <...> books (and magazines) will remain uniquely suited to satisfying the needs of individuals as opposed to faceless ‘consumers’.
(127)

While Homolka doesn’t consider the Third World in his theory of fragmented media markets, this would be what obviously operates in the pockets of First World (and/or semblances of it) that do exist in the Philippines. What this contains is a middle to upper class

market that continues to draw a division between “low” art and “high” art – no different really from what Jurilla has seen as an English literary production that looks down on anything in the vernacular, and that which is popular. It is this middle to upper class that has come to put a premium on individuality and which has found “bibles” in this recent magazine boom. Again, according to Homolka,

Though general magazines such as *Life* suffered (and those that survived, such as *Time*, have by and large done so by resembling television more and more), the secret of success in periodical publishing was soon discovered: tailor the material to a specific group, or even on a specific need of a specific group, and target that group relentlessly. The remarkable success story of magazines in recent years is well-known. Both newspapers and magazines have tailored themselves to the multiplication of roles and identities, the fragmentation of professions, occupations and interests that characterize our century. It may be added that cable television, with its specialized, specifically targeted channels, is attempting with success to do the same. However, it will never be as successful as books, magazines and newspapers, in that order, in satisfying the particular needs of particular consumers. (117)

If the present boom in magazine production in the Philippines is an indication of multiplication of identities, then we are close to an identity crisis. There are magazines for practically every kind of person who’s willing to shell out P75 to P120 pesos, with monthly bible on gadgets and gizmos, on video and computer games, on princesses, on moms, on parenting, on health, on feeding the 20-something and above male macho-ness, on brides, on weddings, on food, on *chismis* and celebrities, on women-stuff, on girl-things, on teenage things, on campus events and heart throbs, on music. But particularly because this is the Philippines, Homolka’s latter assertion of how magazines will never beat books, is problematic. Why? Because in truth, all these multiple identities, all these particular markets, actually belong to just one social class – one that is educated, informed, and moneyed. There is no presumption here that the masses are not going through this multiplicity of identities, but between them and the moneyed class, who would actually have the ability to spend on these identities? To enact them, to push them forth, to perform them if you will, through consumerism? As

Geoffrey Reeves asserts about the Third World in the face of a globalized and transnational marketplace:

<... third world countries are primarily> second markets where additional profits can be made on products which have already covered their costs in primary markets (11). In some instances such markets have been highly protected <...> the types of economic changes occurring in many 'Third World' countries, and concomitant changes in class relations, are rapidly producing markets for audio-visual and other commodities which are worth targeting. These markets may still be narrow in that they are composed predominantly of upper-income earners with a predisposition to consume in particular ways, but are of sufficient size to attract the interest of cultural producers in the advanced capitalist countries, as well as in 'Third World' countries with much greater and more diversified cultural production potential. (12)

The aforementioned "predisposition to consume" of this market, and the particularity that is brought on by the need to be distinct in the sea of sameness that a globalized world would like to encourage, is seen by Tomlinson as the product of what he sees as the deterritorialization of the individual in globalization (137). To him, the onslaught of a globalized marketplace has changed the manner in which we experience culture, for not only are cultural products not always commodities that need to be bought, they are also swiftly moved to markets all over the world for a global public that might not be ready for it.

Cultural products are received with no sense of its cultural context, and they are consumed without any sense of whether one is different from the next, and how exactly they're different. Flip through the Lifestyle Section of the Philippine Daily Inquirer for example, and you'll realize that the lives of our elite, the *alta de sociedad*, is akin to the life of the rich elsewhere in Asia, and U.S. and Europe. They speak of the same food, have the same kind of lifestyle, buy the same clothes. This is what has been seen as the "new rich" by Newsweek Magazine – global families and individuals that feel no loyalty to any one country, but do travel extensively throughout the world, enjoying the fruits of their riches (May 15/ May 22 2006, 46-78).

This is deterritorialization in the extreme sense, although

Tomlinson asserts that for most, this will be experienced on the level of cable TV and the internet where consumers can't help but feel that they're part of a world just because it seems to be within reach. It is in this sense that Tomlinson asserts that while it may be true that there could be a sector in the Third World that might be compared to the quality of life in the United Kingdom,

<...> what is at stake in experiencing deterritorialized culture is not, crucially, level of affluence, but leading a life which, as a result of the various forces of global modernity, is 'lifted off' its connection with locality. <...> it is possible to argue that some populations in the contemporary Third World may, precisely because of their positioning within the uneven process of globalization, actually have a sharper, more acute experience of deterritorialization than those in the First World. (137)

While it's easy to imagine that *Cosmopolitan Philippines* is in fact something that simply pushes for this deterritorialization of culture where localities cease to be clear, given its production of the Summit Books, this discussion becomes more complex than that. Brah allows for this complexity in her insistence that deterritorialization is in fact, a complex term and concept, particularly as it is applied to notions of border writing and the analysis of literature. To wit,

The concept of "territory" as well as its signifieds and significations is a contested site in diaspora and border positionalities where the issue of territorialization, deterritorialization or reterritorialization is a matter of political struggle. The outcomes of these contestations cannot be predicted in advance. In other words, the move from a literary text to "world as text" is much more fraught, contradictory, complex and problematic than is often acknowledged. (628)

Brah's analyses of deterritorialization as a political struggle is all-important in light of the Summit Books' existence as an off-shoot of *Cosmopolitan Philippines* magazine. It is this paper's argument that in fact, that through the Summit Books, *Cosmopolitan Philippines* becomes more than just a pawn for globalization and all its contingent oppressions.

Location, Urbanity, and the Pinay Cosmo Chick.

Pursuing my argument that the class origins of the Summit Books, and its roots in transnational *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, are not the end-

all and be-all of these publications, it is important to see that as per Tomlinson's theory, the Summit Books is not "lifted off" from the locality within which it exists. Metro Manila, impoverished as the majority of its parts may be, cradles the lifestyles of people who seem to be living in the First World, or a place similar to it. The question for the Third World writer and text, particularly those in English, is "which locality do you belong to?" And yet as far as the Summit Books are concerned, this isn't even a valid question. The characters in the stories locate themselves in the Philippines, in the Makati and Ortigas business districts, in the gimmick places of Malate, Makati, Libis, and Boracay, in the condominiums and apartments that have risen in the metropolis. It's middle class, it's urban, it's cosmopolitan (pun intended). And unapologetically so.

This of course begs the question: how do we look at the spaces within which these texts have been created, without dismissing these as merely middle to upper class? Is it as simple as using Davids and van Driel's assertions about diverse subjectivities and agencies in the throes of globalization and transnationalization? Here, the existence of these spaces and the creation of the literary work that locates itself within it would be deemed as valid by default (as with all other existing spaces). But also we must imagine this as a site of struggle, as Brah has asserted, because particularly for the Philippines and its women, it is nothing but that.

In *Fantasy Production, Sexual Economies and Other Philippine Consequences for the New World Order* (2004), Tadiar emphasizes the lives that are created and that evolve from the locations that deterritorialization has dissolved into capital. Focused on the migration of women as Overseas Filipino Workers, Tadiar highlights how these women have "stepped off the proper timeline, out of synch with the forward march of national history <...> the bodies of feminized Philippine labour exceed the territorial control of the nation state" (112).

But the politics of these women's removal from the State's imagination and creation of nation is not necessarily something that applies to the cosmopolitan women that Summit Books' chick literature creates. The more important question in the context of this popular production therefore is: what of the women who stay because they can afford to? What of the women who live through and with the dominant culture that is being created by the speed of exchange in the transnation? How are they creating nation here, in

the spaces that they know and which they deem as theirs?

What might be more useful for this analysis of Summit Books' chick literature, over and above its deterritorial roots in Cosmopolitan Philippines, is the notion of location. Here, we may again take on Brah's assertions on diaspora, borders and transnational identities. To wit, feminist politics have constituted an important site where issues of home, location, displacement and dislocation have long been a subject of contention and debate. Out of these debates emerges the notion of a "politics of location" as locationality in contradiction – that is, a positionality of dispersal; of simultaneous situatedness within gendered spaces of class, racism, ethnicity, sexuality, age; of movement across geographical and psychic borders. (628)

This is precisely what the Summit Books work with: a locationality in contradiction. It exists within the middle class spaces that are necessarily ambivalent and confused, negotiating with the existence of other spaces beyond its own, speaking as part of the bigger locality within which these middle and upper class spaces exist, undoing itself as often as it re-creates its world. To Brah, this politics of location doesn't "predetermine what kind of subject positions will be constructed or assumed, and with what effects" (628). The Summit Books' creation of these spaces as valid, and its insistence on these women's lives as true, is therefore replete with a politics of location – one that is informed by deterritorialization, yes, but maybe even more so, one that is fueled by notions of the cosmopolitan and its creation of the feminine, and all the contradictions inherent in that.

This brings us back to Tadiar and her analysis of the urbanity of Metro Manila as created by the fantasies and dreams of the necessarily female imagination in the context of a masculine nation-state in the throes of modernity (77-112). The urbanity of Summit Books' chick literature is what may be seen as "cosmopolitan" about it, as premised on a real locality. In *Gender, Culture and Society, Contemporary Femininities and Masculinities* (2007) Máirtín Mac An Ghail and Chris Haywood assert that "different material conditions and attendant symbolic signs produce different effects in local geographical spaces" (68) which allows for the concept, for example, of fatherhood to be different in the various cities of Britain, particularly "cosmopolitan" in London (68). This is, as well, what

Tadiar works with in relation to Metro Manila.

Metro Manila, as it now stands, is a testament to these wayward forces of desire as well as to the fantasies of “development” and transnational modernity. Far from being entirely the consequence of the failed and haphazard dreams of big men, weak and strong states, or global capital, it is the complex result of a multitude of individual and social desires seeking expression through means of representation and production which are ultimately owned and controlled by a small few. (111)

In this sense, the cosmopolitan and urban that Summit Books’ chick literature establishes as a valid middle to upper class location, is still contested and political. It is the amalgamation of many other women’s – and men’s – desires, even those that these middle class texts themselves silence and/or consider as secondary. In fact, to Whelehan, “at the heart of <chick literature> is desire” (205), for sex, yes, but also for all of “one’s cravings” (205). This is why the representation of the woman in chick literature in general, as well as Summit Books in particular, is one who lives the discourse of consumption (Philips 240 in Whelehan).

This of course happens within Summit Books’ insistence and establishment of these women’s own particular urban and consumerist spaces, in the streets of Metro Manila and its extensions. And in this sense, this can also be seen as a refusal to disattach itself from the bigger Third World nation it belongs to. It is in this sense as well that *Cosmopolitan Philippines* isn’t simply a pawn of globalization, nor is it easily and simply a product of its transnational roots. Through the Summit Books’ insistence on defining the Filipino middle class woman, as single and career-oriented, independent and fabulous, in the proper context of its impoverished nation, *Cosmopolitan Philippines* becomes more powerful than we could have possibly imagined. And *Pinay* chick literature, in this sense almost seems like a dare: I’m the cosmopolitan, middle class *Pinay*, in the context of third world Philippines, and I will not apologize. Instead, hear me roar!

And roar she does, as chick literature necessarily responds to the local feminism(s) this younger generation has grown up with, as it continues to question as well, the current literary establishment’s requirements of form. In the process, it creates this image of the

feminine – a contemporary creation of the image of the Filipina, the *Pinay*, in the urban locations within which she thrives, and through which she lives.

THE PINAY IN THE REAL WORLD: A LIVED FEMINISM, TOWARDS THE FEMININE

Despite critiques to the contrary, or maybe precisely because of it, I find that it is even more important to welcome the Summit Books into literary publishing. It, after all, gave out its first-ever novel for free – even Alberto Florentino’s effort at spreading Philippine literature around meant shelling out money for his Peso Books circa 1970s. More importantly, it dared to do what so many wouldn’t even think of doing: work on and for a generation considered as one that doesn’t read or whose reading material isn’t exactly what’s considered as “literature” or “literary” in the eyes of the academician or teacher of literature. The Summit Books also shamelessly write romances for the contemporary Filipina in her early 20s to late 30s, something that most *Pinay* academics wouldn’t even think of doing as her exposure to feminist thinking tells her that it’s just plain unacceptable: the stereotypes, the happy endings, and need for “the man.”

This act of writing of what can be considered a contemporary *Pinay* romance novel in English is undoubtedly a major contribution to the current Philippine writing by Filipino women, where marginalization remains as the key and overriding concept. At a time when the major publishing houses are run by women, and the women academicians and teachers of literature are quite well-entrenched in the sphere of the academe and literature, this is everything and strange.² The aforementioned conclusion of Jurilla about the literary establishment in the country is again useful here: it is not so much that people are marginalized here based on gender, as they are based on the language they write in.

In all the first five Summit Books included in this study, there is no sense of a marginalized woman. At most, all that one gets is a set of female protagonists who show vulnerability not only to the lack or loss of “the man” in their lives, but even more so to the prevailing perception of society about them. In *Getting Better* (2000) and *Almost Married* (2003) by Sering, 20-something Karen doesn’t only go through the motions of recovering from a broken-up

engagement, finding a new guy, being uncertain, and then recovering again; she also goes through this whole process in the context of a current *Pinoy* society represented by what her parents think, what her old highschool friends think, what officemates would see, what her conscience would tell her. And it's this conscience in the form of Kach's bestfriend in Abi Aquino's *Drama Queen* (2003), of Monica's Tita in *The Breakup Diaries* (2003), and of the "other woman baggage" of Teri in M.D. Balangue's *Mr. Write* (2004) that there is a sense of the modern *Pinays'* sense of propriety. What's great about all these characters is that it's not about being oppressed by the society as and through conscience. Instead, it's about main characters that have a pretty good grasp of just how far they can go – conscious as they are of how it would be perceived and what it would in the end entail – in the context of having lots of boys, easy sex, well-kept secrets, and friends who will understand.

These are, undoubtedly powerful women, not because they are feminists, but because while they may be on the perennial search for "the man" or "the self", they are also grounded in the realities that surround them and how far they can really go within its boundaries, beyond its rules. None of the books preach about how to be an empowered woman; instead they show how the contemporary, modern *Pinay* finds empowerment in the different things that she wants to have – a job, a boyfriend, a career – and the particular things she wants to be – a girlfriend and lover, a wife, a good friend, a successful career person. All very middle class dreams to be sure, but also all very real concerns.

It is in this way that the Summit Books inevitably create the image of the living and breathing Filipino woman – the *Pinay* – as a constructed feminine. The more elaborate discourses on femininity of course, have come from literary theorists such as Luce Irigaray (*parler-femme*) and Hélène Cixous (*écriture féminine*), both of whom study the speech act of women as distinct from that of men (in Robbins, 155, 169). To Irigaray's "speaking woman" and Cixous' "feminine/female writing", the act itself of using language already renders the woman as feminine (in Robbins, 155, 169). This study though, seeks to see the feminine as a construction beyond language, and towards images constructed. For the Summit Books in particular, this has meant the construction of a Filipina womanhood for a particular sector of society that may be, or actually is, able to act on these requirements for being "feminine".

Marjorie M. Evasco, among many other feminist scholars, has looked into this construction of the feminine in local magazines – pre-transnational magazines – and has expectedly seen the stereotypical images of the Filipina:

<...> the innocent and virginal girl; the virtuous, self-negating woman; the silent, suffering wife and mother; the faithful and constantly-waiting sweetheart; the dutiful sister or daughter; and the benevolent aunt who chooses single-blessedness for familial duties <...> On the negative side of the spectrum we have the images of the fallen woman, the insufferable nag, the angry bitch, the seductive temptress, the despicable whore, and the frigid spinster. (167)

All these stereotypes, of course, don't apply anymore. *Cosmopolitan Philippines* and the Summit Books, in fact, blow these stereotypes apart, steeped as it is in a feminism that highlights women's ability to be of independent mind and body (with its contingent sexual liberation, love problems, etc.), at the very least. Whelehan's study of American chick literature doesn't only zero in on its aforementioned core of desire, but on its existence *vis-a-vis*, if not strange relationship with, feminism. She says,

The main requirement to qualify as chick lit is that the books are about young women (usually no older than their mid-thirties) and that this period of a woman's life be treated as a special category of concern. This emphasis on youth and the difference between this and a previous generation of women is at the centre of all chick lit writings: chick lit is built on a tacit acknowledgment that feminism has failed to speak to "ordinary" women<...> (214)

It is in this way that there remains a disconnect between the popular construction of the feminine, the female, the *Pinay*, and existing Philippine feminist cultural scholarship. The tendency has been to only see what is deemed as the politically incorrect stereotypical portrayals, versus what could be powerful and empowered images in light of contemporary times, and the underlying conservatism that the transnation and global capital would like to maintain. This is why these images of the contemporary *Pinay* that Summit Books creates, the feminine it engenders, isn't at all that easy to push forth, not only because it's not in the mold of the usual empowered woman as the feminists and women's activists would like us to see, but

because it is ultimately a break from the tradition that is still Maria Clara.

The latter image of course, is still repeated across popular culture, over and above realities of promiscuity, annulments and sex videos, and embodied by icons such as Sharon Cuneta and Judy Ann Santos, even after getting married. It is also the convenient fall back when women cry battery or oppression by males, the Church, and government. And it is the Summit Books' break from this consistently encouraged conservative conscience – if not its break from what's "usual" – that will allow for its placement alongside other Philippine novels that are deemed as new, if not revolutionary. Or at the very least, important.

In "African Literature and Cultural Politics", ample space is given to modernity and how it has affected the usually tradition-laden African novel (Darby, 1998). Using the novel as an example of a text that would fit into the umbrella that's neo-colonial, modernity is seen by Phillip Darby as something that represents

<...> the contemporary processes of cultural and economic change which represent a break with or an adaptation of traditional values and forms of social organization, and which are often perceived as related to the intrusion of the external world. (167)

Darby goes on to assert that the main characteristic of what he considers the "modernized" African novel is its focus on the individual character's autonomy as distinct and separate from the social organizations to which he or she belongs.

The use of modernity here is only in relation to the traditional, and it is in this way that the Summit Books would be up against some resistance. There are, after all, no Maria Claras here,³ even when the Church and Pinoy conservatives would like to think they still exist and need to be encouraged. Neither are there any feminists of the schooled, academic kind – none of the theory-spewing, angry women we have been made to imagine feminists as. That this brings us back to Mojares' study on the Philippine novel only establishes Summit Books' place in the history of the novel's production in the country. After all, Mojares asserts that it is what may be considered as "traditional" that allows different texts to hold on to the distinction of being "the first Filipino novel", or at

least, the first of its kind, in its break from tradition.⁴ This, the Summit Books can undoubtedly take credit for.

But while the Summit Books' assertion of the modern – contemporary – *Pinay* may be seen as breaking free from the traditional conceptions of the Filipina's oppression and empowerment, and while this does inform its place in the tradition of what may be considered as the Filipino novel, there is so much more to the Summit Books than just this. Its creation of a particularly contemporary *Pinay* feminine is also informed by its insistence on a particular kind of articulation.

CELEBRATING THE COLLOQUIAL: THE PINAY FEMININE WRITES/SPEAKS

Hidalgo, in the earlier quote, commented on the reasons behind the appeal Sering's *Getting Better* had on Cosmopolitan Philippines' readers. What she referred to as a language that's very "now" (77) is actually something that's not only seen in Sering's two novels, but in the three other novels included in this study. Hidalgo's example of what she sees as "dialogue that's both clever and credible" (77) is actually what this paper sees as the Summit Books' collective and most powerful break from tradition.

"Jan, his name is Bert Reyno. Bert is bad enough," you hiss. "Bert Reyno pa!"

"What's his real name ba? Baka naman you can sort of invent a new nickname."

"Robert Redford Reyno."

"Tang ina naman."

"And Jan, he goes to the gym a lot daw. Plus he loves Sex and the City."

"Ay wala na. You've got yourself a new shopping friend."
(78)

The power of dialogue like this lies in its uncompromising stance on how real people sound when they speak to each other in this country – even when they may have English as their first language. Undoubtedly of a social class that's comfortable enough with English

to use it with friends and family, the main characters in these novels are also well-situated in this country's linguistic idiosyncrasies as they seamlessly and comfortably – and the writers shamelessly allow them to – shift from English to Filipino in exactly the same way that we do in our everyday lives. This isn't about making *tusok-tusok* the *fishballs* of the old *kolehiyala* stereotype, but a current and questioned usage of two languages that the Pinays these books represent can't quite live – or think and speak – without.

These books also portray the fact that in our everyday lives, no matter how much we live in English, the rest of the Philippines doesn't. In Aquino's *Drama Queen*, while the same kind of dialogue as in Sering's is seen, there is also a clear effort at allowing the rest of the lower-class Philippines speak in the manner they usually do. When the taxi driver overhears Kach telling bestfriend-Nats that she's in-love-with-common-bestfriend-Jorge, he asserts himself and says, "Matindi yang problema n'yo, ma'am." (103); and when in the throes of depression Kach decides to buy herself a pair of shoes but can't quite decide between "red sparkly stilletos" and "Indian-inspired violet slip-ons" (112) the salesgirl in the manner we're familiar with in this country, says "Parehong maganda, ma'am" (113). *Mr. Write* by Balangue even goes a step further by having what has become mainstream gayspeak interspersed with her characters' English and Filipino dialogues. When Teri, along with pa-girl (i.e., gay) bestfriend Moose, tried to sit down and make sense of her sudden liking for Gito, the section of the exchange went:

"I remember genuinely disliking him that night at Sukiyaki Babe then I'd see him sa corridor and he'd always look so intense and shy, and before I knew it I was nervous around him, I liked seeing him in the hallway, ewan! Maybe I'm ready to move on and maybe something inside me is –"

"— is subconsciously looking for a papa, and Gito is very papa-ble!"

Good old Moose, Teri thought. Always there to make sense of things that left her confused and bewildered. (37-38)

The Pinay in the Summit Books is also undoubtedly embroiled in technology – practically make these technologies their bestfriend(s), as these are inevitably part of what makes them mobile and communicating with each other through the mobile phone, the

internet, and email. It's also what allows these novels to have different languages borne of the current modern hi-tech *Pinay* who uses shortcut text messages like C U THER, and whose daily interactions could possibly include email messages and going online as with *The Breakup Diaries* and *Mr. Write*.

Beyond the dialogue, the writing that is in these novels is anything but compromising as far as language is concerned. Obviously adept in writing in English – something that's not surprising at all – the writers of these novels use a language that's fun and easy to read for the *Pinay* reader who's wont to say no to reading anything that's longer than the average magazine article. For the most part it's Sering's *Getting Better* that has kept me buying and reading the Summit Books that have been coming out since 2000, as it begins:

Chapter 1

How to Deal with June

First, pretend that it doesn't bother you. Watch movies about how great it is being unmarried but boyfriend-ed. Single, dating exclusively and enjoying all the perks – you've got a kiss-and-cuddle buddy without the children and commitment, so you should be ecstatic right? Download photos of all the cute men you can find on the internet – single George Clooney is a good start, or go for someone closer to home like a topless and ripped Marc Nelson – and fantasize all day at work about strolling down the beach with each of them, hand in hand, in nothing but a skimpy gold string bikini. Toast to the ladies in *Sex and the City* and chat with your friends about how sex fiend Samantha should be every single chick's role model. Tune out when your parents mention how nice it is that another daughter of a family friend is getting married in the merry month of June, but pipe in with "Didn't Tito Celso's daughter leave her husband after what? Seven months?" (29)

While some of the other novels' beginnings don't make you want to get deeper into the books, a good sense of what Sering may have in store – what she may as book editor want me to read – has kept me at all the other three books that weren't by her. And a lot of times, it's the writing itself, both the narrative and dialogues, that keep me at the novels.

All these languages — from those borne of the hi-tech, to those borne of the everyday coalescing of English and Filipino, to

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the recent move to mainstream gayspeak like *papa* for boyfriend or lover, and *carry!* for yes! alright! I agree! – allow for a real glimpse of the particular state of our being educated Pinays in urban, middle class to upscale Manila. It also, to a certain extent, establishes the language of Summit Books’ created feminine: as with feminism, its use of language is that which is lived, if not that which is involved in the idiosyncrasies and struggles within the urban space of the metropolis.

It is because of this that the Summit Books cannot be questioned for its language use: it is after all portraying a particular middle class urban educated Pinay feminine, that does truly speak mostly in English – or at least is adept in it. In fact, this is the most powerful jab that these books take at tradition, as it allows the texts, themselves, to be placed – written as they are in English – in third world Philippines. The locationality of contradiction here, is precisely the English language that lives in the writing of Summit Books’ chick literature. And its politics of location is precisely here, in the contested metropolis of desires (after Tadiar), and of silences and the silenced. While finding its roots in the *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, a deterritorializing text, the Summit Books function as a way of levelling off whatever uprootedness its parent-text set out to instill in the Pinay reader, precisely because more than its awareness of its location, it is conscious of its possibilities at breaking tradition by living truthfully in this space.

A FOOTNOTE AS BEGINNING: THE CREATION OF A FEMININE/FEMALE COSMO BOOK EDITOR

What is most interesting to me about the existence of the Summit Books though, is that while it is on the one hand, different from those that came before it and has tread where others wouldn’t, it is also quite the same as far as who gets the chance to take on positions of power in the sphere of publishing and writing is concerned. As mentioned earlier, much credit goes to Sering who wasn’t only the first novelist but also the first Book Editor of Summit Books⁵. Her rise to this position didn’t happen overnight, but it was something that was waiting to happen if one looks at those who became publishers and writers of literature in our context.

Akin to the rise of privately-owned presses in the Philippines in the latter half of the 1800s (123-125), and how the novel as a

form was a product of the middle class involvement in business and its belief in “secular democratic values” (170), Sering’s position of power itself may be seen as having its roots in the relationship that Mojares asserts existed between “journalism and the rise of the novel” (172). To wit,

Many of the early novelists were printers and journalists. Such early writers as G.B. Francisco, Iñigo C. Regalado, Juan Abad, Lope K. Santos and Jose N. Sevilla were printers and intermittent journalists. This fact is of significance in the study of the origins of the novel for the apprenticeship of these writers in printshops and periodicals – apart from encouraging the kind of literary values associated with print – must have also habituated them in that secular, democratic outlook which belongs to the bourgeois world vision of the early novel. (172)

As far as this paper is concerned, Sering may just be the *Pinay* contemporary version of these male writers of old. For not only was she previously Managing Editor of *Cosmopolitan Philippines*, she also just happens to be a well-awarded and often-anthologized fictionist and a known M.A. student of the Creating Writing program in the University of the Philippines. Of course she isn’t made of exactly the same mold as the Regalados and Abads who according to Mojares were also deeply rooted in

<...> the native tradition of the corrido, pasyon and duplo
<...> they were practitioners of these forms or from a family background of native literati whose artistic impulses were shaped by these popular forms. (172)

But Sering did in fact belong to the family that’s canonically headed by the N.V.M. Gonzalezs and Francisco Arcellanas, Jimmy Abads, Cristina Pantoja Hidalgos and Butch Dalisays. A clique, a very small circle, that make up the literati of more recent generations, and one with its own set of rules and limitations, within the discipline of writing and beyond (as recently asserted by David).

The rules, Sering has undoubtedly broken, not only because of the fearlessness and real-ness of the novels produced during her stay as Book Editor of Summit Books, which is a major break from the traditional novels produced by what would be her “literary”/literati family; but also because of her un-apologetic move from the walls of the politically-correct/conscious academe towards

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becoming the fun, fearless, female that *Cosmopolitan Philippines* encourages. Sering, as with all the novels and their characters, is unapologetic about what she stood for as Managing Editor of a magazine that sells make-up, fashion, and a strange if abstract sense of woman – sometimes Pinay – power month-in-month-out. And having become the Book Editor of a fresh and new kind of book production that decided to cater to a market heretofore seen as unreachable, Sering has almost nothing to apologize for.

Almost, because while this is quite a liberating – and liberated – publication in the context of this country, its limitations are also clearly drawn. And yet, in truth, its possibilities are endless. Publications such as the Summit Books could go beyond not just the rules of form as far as literature and publishing are concerned, and beyond the theories of class analysis and deterritorialization, but also into new and brazen – if not bold – content as far as concerns go. A *Pinay* with social commitment, or one with a clear sense of nation maybe? Or say, an activist *Pinay* facing her middle-class contradictions? What of a *Pinay* who actually, and really, doesn't care much for the way she looks and isn't dependent on consumer products for self-worth or self-confidence? Possible, yes. Probable? Not at all.

HOW FAR: THE LIMITS OF THE COSMO PINAY AT WAR

There is no doubt in my mind that in the context of the state of book publishing and readership in the Philippines, the femininity and fearlessness that Summit Books engenders – and all its possibilities – are important to consider and learn from. But it is also all these things that make it fail in the face of interrogation. On a superficial level, yes, it does assert a locality in the face of a globalized world that economically and politically renders us as neo-colonies while it glosses over inequality and particularity. This locality is powerful as well in light of the language it breeds, the world it allows, and the *Pinays* it creates – now portrayed in books that heretofore had yet to be written.

On a deeper, more relevant and urgent level though, it is clear that this assertion of locality in the way that Summit Books does it, is precisely its limitation as well. While the local, in the context

of globalization and the transnation, is a powerful space within which “spaces of alternative imagining: modes of living and memory <may> undo the dominant space-time of the nation-state and the transnational superstate” (Wilson and Dissanayake, 7), it is clear that this is not Summit Books’ project at all. For while these books work with the locality that is Metro Manila and has spawned an “alternative imagining” that deal with “modes of living and memory” (7) of the contemporary *Pinay* within this space, it seems to be oblivious to the possibility of undoing the discourse of the nation-state and the transnationalism that is upon us. This of course, given Summit Books’ context, is understandable. In fact, this may be explained simply by the same thing pinpointed its power: its slogan.

Used by the local *Cosmopolitan Philippines*, “fun fearless female” is a grim reminder of one fact: that the Summit Books are rooted in a transnational corporation that views countries such as ours as satellite and secondary markets from which they may increase their profit margins. This slogan reminds us that the international mother *Cosmopolitan Magazine* continues to be an ideological tool that perpetuates the discourse of beauty and body, career and family, friends and lovers as necessities in a woman’s life, beyond borders and races, color and creed, regardless of whether the satellite edition comes out in Metro Manila Philippines or Kuala Lumpur Malaysia. It reminds us that it is ultimately this mother-company that earns from a discourse that limits women into just the fun, fearless females who may be rooted in their societies, but *only to a certain extent*. In the process, it is ultimately the transnational *Cosmopolitan Magazine* that gains from impoverished Third World countries like the Philippines, where Filipinas continue to believe this magazine’s ideology, hook line and sinker – that is, fun fearless female – even with the particularity of the experience that is *Pinay* and is of a particular locality that is Manila.

The Summit Books then, is ultimately an example of the local as theorized by Arif Dirlik in “Global in the Local”, where he reflects on it as “site both of promise and predicament” (22). To Dirlik,

<...> the local <is> a site of promise and <of> the social and ideological changes globally that have dynamized a radical rethinking of the local over the last decade. <...> (22)

To him though, it is also a sight of predicament, because it is within the “promise of liberalization that localism may also serve to disguise oppression and parochialism” (22). This in fact is what happens to Summit Books, new and powerful as this study has proven it to be in the context of this country’s literary publishing and feminist theorizing. It remains powerful in many ways, including its daring as far as tapping the market of English readers in this country are concerned, and its fearless portrayal of “real” middle class women. Its negotiation of the cosmopolitan and urban metropolis is priceless at a time when it has become easier to be blind to the material conditions of the spaces we inhabit. Its construction of a feminine versus the feminist is as urgent as any other construction that would take into account the real lives of women that are disregarded or silenced by current scholarship.

And yet, Summit Books has undoubtedly proven itself to be a predicament too, a site of struggle and compromise, dealing as it does with a transnational mother-company which asserts very particular ideologies that go against the concept of individuality, empowerment, and politics of space. Instead the international and transnational *Cosmopolitan Magazine* insists that there is but one type of woman in this world regardless of where she may be. According to Tadiar,

In this time of globalization, we witness and experience the detachment of nationality from nation, as the historical crises which define and shape the Philippines becomes sedimented in the bodies of Filipinas. (5 2002)

The Summit Books is necessarily part of this complex enterprise of nationality and nation in the throes of the globalization, and in this sense, over and above its “new-ness” and break from tradition, it is still imperative to demand that it do more. This is, after all a “time of war” as Tadiar asserts (3 2002), when Filipinas are being prostituted in the name of development, and when class differences are used precisely to maintain the status quo. The representation of a cosmopolitan feminine that the Summit Books creates – that of the educated and urban, middle class *Pinay* as necessarily steeped in American and European brands, with the predisposition to spend, and ideologically tied to the notion of fun, fearlessness and femaleness that may be rooted in nation but does remain consumerist – is barely able to survive the nation’s urgent demands at this point.

Yes, it broke away from academic and literary writing rules, as well as the state of the publishing and literary industry in this country; and yes, it has gone where no other educated *Pinay* would want to go for fear of being called politically incorrect. But beyond its form as a novel, its function within the academic and literary publishing spheres, and its readership, what does it truly do as far as negotiating with globalization and its contingent oppressions? What does it do to help the countless middle class women who are made silent by the enterprise of transnational capital? Who are oppressed by it, killed, and rendered dumb by it? Not much.

In the end, the Summit Books is limited by precisely its own power.

And that's no fun at all.

ENDNOTES

¹An ongoing discussion on Conchitina Cruz's blog *Curious Couch* (curiouscouch.wordpress.com), particularly after her entry "To Criticize the Critic" (12 May 2009) proves this to be true: that had David been kinder in his words, had he not named names, then he would be more easily understood, and maybe more people would agree with him.

²Among others, in recent years: Dr. Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo has headed the University of the Philippines Press, after having been director of the Institute of Creative Writing; the current U.P. Press Director is Dr. Luisa Camagay; The Ateneo de Manila University Press has as Director Maricor Baytion, while Karen Cardenas is Director of the Ateneo de Manila University Office of Research and Publications; Dr. Corazon D. Villareal is Director of Research Dissemination and Utilization Office, Office of the Vice-Chancellor for Research and Development, University of the Philippines Diliman; Dr. Margarita Orendain is Chairperson of the Ateneo de Manila English Department; Dr. Corazon Lalu-Santos is Chairperson of the Kagawaran ng Filipino of the Ateneo de Manila. Karina Bolasco is owner and Director of Anvil Publishing Inc.; Gilda Cordero-Fernando has her self-named GCF Books; Virgilio Almario's daughter Ani Almario now runs Adarna Books.

³Note that excluded from this study are Summit Books published from *Tough Love* by Melissa Salva published in 2004.

⁴*Barlaan at Josaphat* for example, published in 1712 by Jesuit Antonio de Borja, only really claims this title based on what Mojares considers to be one thing: that “it is the first long prose narrative in a native language” (59) – obviously a change from the usual corrido and metrical romance, but nevertheless akin to lifestories of saints that were the focus of these latter texts (57). And then there is *Urbana at Feliza* by Fr. Modesto de Castro published a century later in 1864, which claims the title “first Filipino novel” based on what Mojares sees as two things: first, that it is a “work of a Filipino author with a local, contemporary setting” (78), and second, that it marks “the appearance of the native prose narrative or quasi-narrative” (80) both of which, according to Mojares, lead to the creation of the novel as a local form (80). Either way, both these characteristics of *Urbana at Feliza* indicate a break from what would be considered as conventional for that period. The next text that would lay claim to being the “First Filipino novel” would also have these two characteristics, but more than that, it shows a break from the traditional content of what were considered then as mainstream didactic works. *Si Tandang Basio Macunat* by Fr. Miguel Lucio y Bustamante was not only a “more direct narrative” (87), it also allowed for a more realistic didactic text as it put the social mores and norms that Mother Spain wanted to impose on the Filipino citizenry face to face with the liberalism that was beginning to inch its way slowly but surely into the minds of the same citizens (91).

⁵Sering has since resigned as book editor of Summit Books, and according to Summit Publishing, it is for this reason that they have stopped publishing books. For more information see <http://www.pcij.org/i-report/2007/chick-literature.html>.

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