

## Modes of Resistance in a Globalizing Popular Culture Industry\*

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Some contend that increasing globalization will blur the lines between nations and cultures because the world will become one global village that partakes of one culture. In the Philippines, however, instantaneous accessing of global information and cultural products remains a privilege only of an elite minority. The economic and social situation for the majority has not changed dramatically since the colonial period. It is, therefore, difficult to imagine that within a decade or two, globalization will remove national boundaries and obliterate differences between and among cultures. The Philippine experience also shows that the seemingly powerful influence of the American popular culture industry and the onslaught of American pop culture products have not resulted in the wholesale Americanization of Filipino pop culture products. Certainly, pop culture forms were borrowed but producers altered the formula and content to articulate their own view of the world and the Filipino self. Today, the Filipinization of television has reclaimed for the mass audience their space and power. This process initially resulted from the liberalization of, and experimentation in, the media and recently from the migration of English shows to cable TV. For the popular culture industry in the Philippines, therefore, globalization is turning out to be beneficial. The technology enables producers to reach out to Filipino communities worldwide and, at the same time, arms the regions with the means to speak. We are today witnessing not uniformity but multi-cultural diversity.

### Introduction

There are those who feel that the issue of national culture and identity has been rendered moot and academic by the reality of the globalization of information, of the culture industry, and of economies. Mainly because of the global reach of satellite communications and internet service, individuals in any part of the world have instant access to events that take place, ideas produced, art and culture created and performed, products manufactured by other societies and cultures around the globe. It is argued that increasing globalization will blur lines between nations and cultures because the world is now but one global village and partake of one global culture.

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This idea of a homogenous global culture, hastened by advances made in cyberspace and mass media, has become so widespread that it has alarmed even popular novelists such as Michael Crichton. The global icons he mentions as he paints a grim scenario in his novel *Lost World* are as familiar to Filipinos as to any other nationality:

Mass media swamps diversity. It makes every place the same. Bangkok or Tokyo or London, there's a McDonald's on one corner, a Benetton on another, a Gap across the street. Regional differences vanish. All differences vanish. In a mass media world, there's less of everything except the top ten books, records, movies, ideas. People worry about losing species in the rain forest. But what about intellectual diversity — our most necessary resource? That's disappearing faster than trees. But we haven't figured that out, so now we're planning to put five billion people together in cyberspace. And it will freeze the entire species. Everything will stop dead in its tracks. Everyone will think the same thing at the same time. Global uniformity (Crichton 1995: 339).

Globalization, however, is not an altogether new phenomenon. In the Philippine experience, this may be viewed as but another name for Hispanization or Americanization or neocolonization. It is an all too familiar process in which the imperial powers or the advanced capitalist states are seen to dictate the terms in the economic, political and even cultural spheres. Nations weakened by decades and even centuries of colonization would then seem to have hardly any chance for assertion and articulation. Yet a reexamination of past and present Filipino popular response yields challenges and resistance to the hegemony of the imperial powers, though these have not always been overt. A case in point is the popular culture industry which, because of its use of technology, is perceived to have such a globalizing reach and homogenizing power. A study of the Filipino popular culture industry, however, reveals spaces within the industry where Filipino producers and consumers create their own moments of power to resist a homogenizing culture and articulate their view of the world.

This paper is an attempt to study the impact of globalization on the Filipino popular cultural industry. Specifically, it focuses on the soap opera and other television productions which have often been interpreted as too heavily influenced by the American pop culture industry but which, upon close scrutiny, have been sites of resistance.



### "Americanization" of the Filipino Popular Culture Industry

As early as the turn of the century, in the midst of a raging Filipino-American war, Filipino writers were already satirizing Filipinos who easily adapted themselves to the ways of the new colonizer and aped American culture. Revolutionaries called them "*Ameri-Kain*" [literally "lovers of American food"] (Diokno 1994). Teodoro Kalaw attacked them for being afflicted with a disease he termed "*estrangheritis*" [from the term "*Estranghero*" meaning foreigner] (Lipang Kalabaw 1907). Years later, Nick Joaquin would refer to them as "*sajonistas*" [Saxon], a popular term, he explains, used by those who sneered at their compatriots whose "fear and hatred of the Gringo was turning into dazzled awe and affection" (Joaquin in *Filipino Heritage* 1978: 2733). That sneer soon gave way to unabashed admiration for Anglo-American culture and consumer products as the English language became entrenched in the public school system introduced by the colonial government as part of its "benevolent assimilation" policy.

Urban-based masses whose very poverty prevented them from finishing school and from mastering the difficult foreign language did not escape the influence of Americanization as the popular culture industry brought American music, the latest dance craze, Hollywood and the soap opera to Philippine soil. But while the elite enjoyed the original American cultural and consumer products, the masses had to content themselves with what were ridiculed by the educated as "*bakya*" (literally the wooden slippers worn by the poor but which became the derogatory term of the elite for Filipino pop culture) and were thought of as but copies and caricatures especially because they were in the native language. In the meantime, the rural folk and indigenous cultural communities in remote areas continued to thrive in their traditional cultural forms until portable radios, TV, cassette recorders, video machines brought pop culture products to their world.

■ To be sure, the Filipino popular culture industry was highly influenced (and continue to be influenced) by trends from and forms of American pop culture, and by the nature of the industry itself. Far from the tradition of cultural creation as a community undertaking in which they were nurtured, the masses who are the target audience of the industry have no participation in the production process. Pop culture is produced for them, not by them.

To be sure, the Filipino popular culture industry was highly influenced (and continue to be influenced) by trends from and forms of American pop culture, and by the nature of the industry itself. Far from the tradition of cultural creation as a community undertaking in which they were nurtured, the masses who are the target audience of the industry have no participation in the production process. Pop culture is produced for them, not by them. Cultural products like cartoons, radio or TV shows, comics, movies, even music are churned out like goods coming out of an assembly line in a factory. The masses are treated, categorized and analyzed as consumers: for example, the educated elite is the A-B audience and the masses comprise the C-D market. There are ready-made patterns or formulas and these are usually based on how the producers view the taste of their potential audience. Producers, for example, are said to have already set ideas on what will click with the masses and therefore, rarely innovate or veer away from formulas. Thus, popular or mass culture (whether foreign or local) is criticized by mass culture theorists as trivial, formulaic, debasing:

The fusion of culture and entertainment that is taking place today leads ... to a devaluation of culture .... Amusement itself becomes an ideal, taking the place of the higher things of which it completely deprives the masses by repeating them in a manner even more stereotyped than the slogans paid for by advertising interests .... Inwardness, the subjectively restricted form of truth, was always more at the mercy of the outwardly powerful than they imagined. The culture industry turns it into an open lie ....

Pleasure always means not to think about anything, to forget suffering, even where it is shown. Basically, it is helplessness. It is flight; not, as is asserted, flight from a wretched reality, but from the last remaining thought of resistance. The liberation which amusement promises is freedom from thought and negation (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972: 139).

But even in such a system, it is simplistic to conclude that mass consumers have become too manipulable and have been rendered too impotent and mindless to intervene and articulate their choice or that the industry has become so homogenous it is devoid of tension and contradiction and has no space for forms of innovation, diversity or modes of resistance. In the case of the Filipino popular culture industry,



it is a form of elitism to consider it a mere caricature of foreign culture, to dismiss the persistence of the theme of oppression and suffering in Filipino films and soap operas as the masses' high level of tolerance for persecution, to read the insistence of the mass audience on a happy ending as just the masses' desire for fantasy and escapism. In many instances, too, the producers' own treatment of their mass audience as mindless accounts for their failure to innovate.

### Re-reading the Filipino Soap Opera

Except for the fact that soap companies were also their main sponsors, Filipino radio and TV soap operas were never caricatures of and are nothing like their American progenitors. While American soap operas take their audience to the colorful and intrigue-filled worlds of wealthy clans who own vineyards (Falcon Crest), run the oil industry (Dallas) and rich corporations (Dynasty, Guiding Light), and enable them, even for just an hour or two to fantasize, cry vicarious tears and escape the boredom of their lives, the Filipino soap operas reproduce for the mass audience the same bitter and oppressive conditions of their lives. The Filipino soap opera immerses the audience in the seemingly never ending suffering of the main character at the hands of the arrogant rich landowner (the current top-rating *Valiente* now on its sixth year and the recently ended *Villa Quintana*), the scheming stepfather and his conniving daughter out to keep the main character from learning the truth of her real parents (the just ended *Mara Clara*), the cruel stepmother (Anna Luna), the ill-tempered mother-in-law and unfaithful husband (the 1960s long-running *Gulong ng Palad* [Wheel of Fortune]). From its beginnings in the 1930s to the present, the theme of oppression has become intrinsic to the formula of the Filipino soap opera. Instead of the flashy lifestyle of the rich, the constricting world of the poor dominates the TV screen.

If indeed this popular culture form is essentially escapist, why would the mass audience continue to support TV dramas that are daily reminders of the misery and powerlessness they should want to escape from?

Critic Nicanor Tiongson explains that the theme of suffering and oppression links the TV soap opera, film, the serialized novel to the traditional dramas of the *sinakulo* (the drama version of the *pasyon* or



Passion of Christ), the *comedia* so popular with the masses during the Spanish colonial period and the *zarsuela* of the turn of the century. I would add the *kundiman* as well, a plaintive song of unrequited love that became a popular revolutionary song form among members of the *Katipunan* and later social movements. But, writing in the mid seventies when Filipino critics and scholars were just starting to understand the popular mind and to develop critical tools for the study of Philippine culture, Tiongson interpreted the dominance of this theme in Filipino popular culture forms as signifying masochism or the disvalue that "*mabuti ang inaapi*" (it is good to be oppressed):

The dramas ... entertained by squeezing one's tear glands dry and making a river of one's nose. Mass audiences delighted in masochistic entertainment by empathizing with facile stories about poor-but-beautiful-*kasama*-girl drowning in a torrent of abusive words from wicked *donyas*, or about maudlin moppets subjected to physical violence by *madrastas*, or of tubercular husbands coughing their life away in the arms of wives who eke out a pitiful life from washing other people's clothes ....

To be sure, there is nothing wrong with suffering per se, or with persecution per se .... What is wrong and reprehensible is masochism, or the love of being persecuted and of suffering, which sometimes expresses itself among Filipinos in an unhealthy feeling that one is not conforming to Christ's teachings if one is not suffering something or the other. This value expresses itself in a psychotic drive toward self-flagellation .... In our context, this value becomes a vice, especially because it makes Filipinos accept all suffering, even if the suffering is unjustly imposed on them by foreign or local oppressors (Tiongson 1976).

To brand the Filipino masses as masochists, however, is to deny them their humanity. No individual, let alone large numbers of people, would ever cling to enslaving conditions for the love of it. Subsequent researches would later reveal that this preoccupation with stories of suffering and hardship and with the desire to shed tears was not peculiar to traditional folk and commercialized popular culture but could be said of the cultural creations of the rank-and-file members of radical social movements as well. For instance, former *Huk* commander Hizon (Benjamin Cunanan) asserts that the rousing of militancy and revolutionary fervor



among ordinary farmers was more effectively done through plaintive songs like the *kundiman*:

*Ang mga magsasaka, dahil sa kalagayan nila, para silang bilanggo. Parang pag nakita nila ang ani nila na walang matitira, malungkot sila. Kaya noong panahon na iyon, napakabisang ikanta ang kundiman — umiiyak siya dito. Ang damdamin niya ay natatangay hanggang sa hindi mo mapigilan siyang magmura, hanggang sa ang layunin niyang lumaban ay buo na (Maceda 1996: 96).*

(Because of their condition, farmers were like prisoners. They are sad every time they see that nothing is left of their harvest. That is why during that time [he refers here to the 1930s when the Socialist Party of the Philippines was organized] the *kundiman* was so effective' — it made him cry. His feelings were stirred until you could no longer prevent him from cursing, until his resolve to fight is firmed up.)

It was not masochism that made revolutionaries and Huk guerrillas turn to the *kundiman* as their song of protest but because it was expressive of the pain and suffering of their lives. As explained to me once by Flaviano Aliga, a former Huk guerrilla and composer of many Huk songs:

*Ang kundiman ang popular sa amin. Kasi ito ay isang daing at ang buhay namin ay isang mahabang daing (Maceda 1996).*

(The *kundiman* was popular among us. Because it is a wail, and our life is like one long wail.)

It is not farfetched to find the spirit of resistance in the persistence of the theme of suffering and oppression in Filipino soap operas.

What keeps the mass audience glued to their favorite soap opera despite the overpowering presence of images of misery and suffering is the hope that one day, there will be a reversal of fortune: the good will eventually triumph over the evil; suffering will be rewarded; the oppressed child will finally be reunited with her/his true parents; poverty will end even if *deux ex machina* style. Critics in the 1970s assail this soap opera formula as escapist largely because resolutions to problems do not arise from the characters' deep understanding of the roots of their suffering or



from any conscious intervention on their part to change their social condition:

But aren't the toiling masses entitled to a few minutes of forgetfulness? Can they not eat of the lotus and drink of Lethe to alleviate their own sufferings? Are we so unkind as to take away from them, the last rays of hope that will make them go on fighting for dear life?

But it is precisely this hope that is questionable. Giving people hope that they can change society is antipodal to giving them hope in an oppressive status quo. For what but the latter is the false hope perpetuated by our movies (and likewise, our soap operas) — a false hope that convinces those who suffer because of injustice that they need not think of their real problems of food and shelter because the world is still beautiful, and Nora Aunor still gets Tirso Cruz, Snooky finally gets smothered with parental love, and Fernando Poe, Jr. will save us all. This is the hope that springs eternal from dreaming of Messiahs and miracles amidst frantic singing and dancing and circuses without bread (Tiongson 1976).

Still, this kind of resolution is really no different from the revolutionary optimism that always serve as conclusions to cultural creations produced by radical movements. Resistance fighters cannot hope to survive the bitter conditions of revolutions, wars and struggles without the hope that freedom will one day be attained, all suffering will end and the oppressed will one day be empowered. To a people who have seen no change in their social conditions from the colonial times to the present, and whose view of the world is constricted by their exclusion from education and other social benefits, could not the soap opera be their expression of hope and articulation of their desire for change?

It is important to point out that other critical works have shown that the Filipino masses were never overt in their cultural expressions nor were they simply passive receptacles. The work of Reynaldo Ileto (1979) on the *pasyon* and other foreign-influenced cultural forms during the Spanish colonial period which were earlier interpreted as colonial instruments of subjugation that engendered passivity and submission offers an alternative reading which opens popular culture forms like the soap opera to possible new interpretations:



Even if we, for the moment, limit our attention to the *Pasyon Pilapil*, as a text, its bearing on popular movements and social unrest can already be seen .... In its narration of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection, and of the Day of Judgment, it provides powerful images of transition from one state to another, e.g., darkness to light, despair to hope, misery to salvation, death to life, ignorance to knowledge, dishonor to purity, and so forth. During the Spanish and American colonial eras, these images nurtured an undercurrent of millennial beliefs which, in times of economic and political crisis, enabled the peasantry to take action under the leadership of individuals or groups promising deliverance from oppression. One of these groups heralded the country's passage from the dark, miserable, dishonorable age of Spanish rule to a glowing era of freedom (Ileto 1979: 18-19).

### Changes in the Soap Opera

In general, we have been too harsh in judging products of the popular culture industry and its consumers, too focused in the overt standardized signs as to discern subtle changes taking place in the form and the industry. Too often, signals in the industry are being misread.

The late Valerio Nofuente, an avid popular culture observer during his lifetime, once criticized the world depicted in the Filipino soap opera as constricted and narrow as the TV screen on which it is viewed. This was with reason because in the 1970s, the manufacturing of the Filipino soap opera was confined to the studio with the characters simply moving from sala to kitchen, from dining room to bed room. Such a set, he argued, practically imprisoned the soap opera to themes of dreary domestic oppression (Nofuente in Sagisag, July 1979).

In 1992, producers of the top-rating *Vallente* brought the soap opera out of the studio, hired popular movie actors Tirso Cruz III and Michael De Mesa as lead actors to make the production commercially viable, went on-location and meticulously recreated an hacienda and a typical Filipino barrio to dramatize the age-old conflict between the all powerful landowner and the exploited tenants. Within this oppressive feudal structure, close friends turn into bitter enemies, love between an heiress (Maela) and an hacienda worker with a mysterious past (Gardo Vallente) blooms but meets obstacles; the Braganza family (primarily Teo and his mother Doña Trining) use their economic wealth to defile the law, bribe

government officials, kidnap barrio lasses, order the imprisonment or salvaging of poor tenants; the tenants seek a way out of their enslavement. *Valiente's* San Dionisio is a microcosm of Philippine feudal society. *Valiente* may very well be the fresh wind Nofuente dreamed of for the Filipino soap opera.

The soap opera became so successful that where other soap operas were abruptly ended and replaced when Mexican telenovelas became the rage on Philippine television in 1996, *Valiente* survived and managed to retain its number one position. What may account for *Valiente's* survival is the balance achieved by the soap opera between formula and innovation and the respect it has for its mass audience. Scriptwriter Gina Marie Tagasa insists that *Valiente* has no pretension to being anything other than a formula soap opera:

You put in tears, you follow the formula of a hero and a villain; but I see to it that my characters are not stupid. If you have a stupid character, you have to be consistent. If your character is intelligent, don't make him stupid by making him mouth stupid lines. That is balance. Other writers in their eagerness to be pro-masses make their characters dumb. I see to it that even the oppressed are given retribution (Tagasa in Thea Maceda 1995:57).

However, the long six-year run *Valiente* has been enjoying on Philippine television may be its own undoing. Six years is far too long to sustain the interest of the audience. Already, credibility of characters and plot is being strained, the storyline is overstretched and its avid followers are likely to become exasperated with Gardo's still unresolved mysterious past.

### The Mexican Telenovela Rage

The reason why there had been very little innovation in the Filipino soap opera before *Valiente*, had to do with the stereotype image the industry had of the mass audience. Classified as C-D (low income group), they were generally thought to be uneducated, undiscerning, superficial, trivial, simple-minded and often unintelligent. Producers were content to give the mass audience cheap sets, overstretched and dragging episodes, and one-dimensional characters. The industry became complacent with formulas that had proven successful for decades and thus hardly

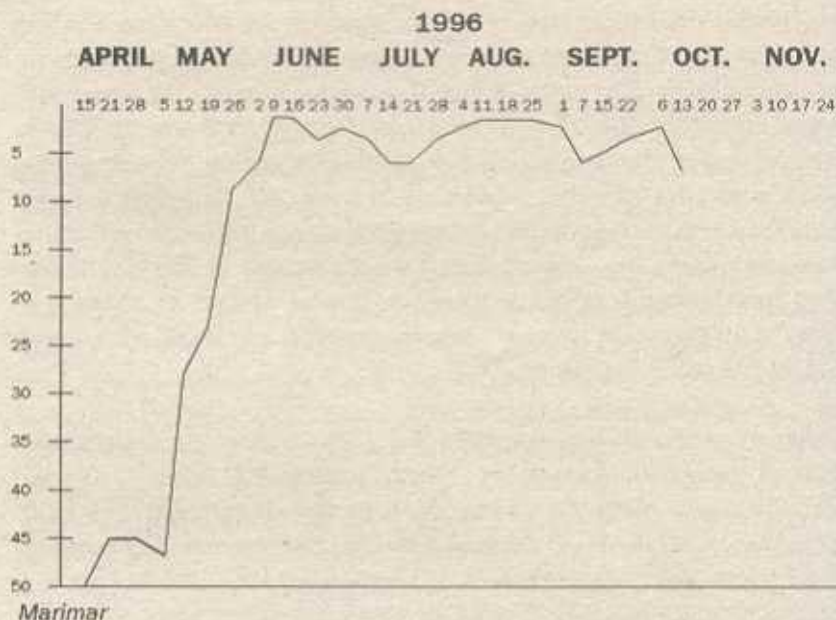


encouraged innovation. Despite the changes that are taking place in the composition and nature of the mass audience, only a few producers in the industry took cognizance of this. Though the viewers may have been getting tired of the soap operas being manufactured for them, they really have no way of communicating their discontent except through media ratings which the television networks closely monitor. Ratings is the only venue by which the viewers can exercise power over the industry. But the networks have to know how to read the signs as well. In late May of last year, the viewers sent out a message strong enough to shake the complacent television networks into reprogramming, killing shows and reconceptualizing the Filipino soap opera.

When Radio Philippines Network (RPN-Channel 9) bought the Mexican telenovela *Marimar* for a cheap price of PhP 20,000, its sole intention was to make it a filler between its News Program and its 7:00 p.m. show. A sequestered network with financial problems, it could not afford to compete with the hour-long highly rated ABS-CBN TV Patrol, a news program in Filipino or to produce a soap opera that would rival GMA Network's *Villa Quintana* which had a powerhouse cast. Little did RPN know that it had struck a gold mine with *Marimar* when it had the telenovela dubbed in Filipino and aired at 6:30 p.m.

Before *Marimar*, soap operas hardly figured in the top 20 primetime TV shows largely because it was difficult to sustain the interest of the audience on a daily basis. Evening soap operas were programmed into the early evening hour (6:00-7:00), a time when many potential TV viewers would still be commuting from work. Moreover, to break into the magic circle, these would have to compete with other once-a-week local and foreign TV productions which would usually feature stars with a large following like Dolphy, Richard Gomez, Sharon Cuneta, etc. GMA 7's soap opera *Villa Quintana* did manage to occasionally rate #19 and #16, but this was considered a fluke in the industry. Within the second month of *Marimar*'s showing, *Villa Quintana* dropped to #40 and thereafter never rated in the top 50 shows until its demise in October, 1996.

*Marimar* first showed itself in the media ratings as #50 on April 15, 1996. By May 2, it was #28, by May 28 it was #9, and by June 8, it had climbed to #1. Thereafter, it was consistently in the top 10 primetime shows until its concluding episode in mid-October (see Figure 1). Never before had a soap opera so captured the imagination of an entire nation



**Figure 1**  
TV Ratings of *Marimar*

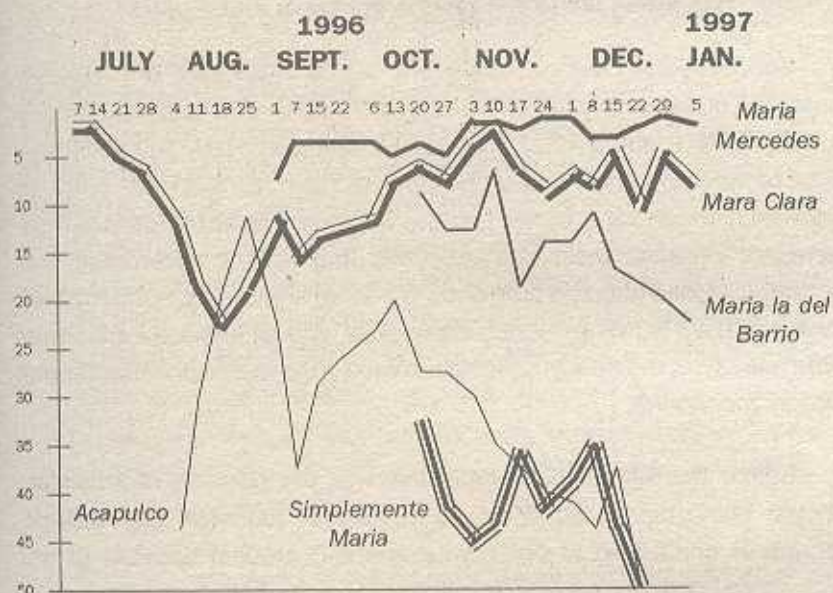
that families changed their dinner time, schoolchildren (enamored by the talking dog Fulgoso) came home early to finish their assignments, office workers hurried home, stores and restaurants switched on the TV set so that no one would miss each episode. *Marimar* was watched by both rich and poor, professors and college students from elite universities, young and old, and all types of people.

The popularity of a telenovela like *Marimar* is easy to understand within the context of the tradition of the Filipino soap opera. Its storyline is familiar to viewers: the revenge of beautiful Marimar (played by Thalia) against the cruel and oppressive stepmother and stepsister of Sergio, son of a wealthy owner of the hacienda where *Marimar's* grandparents work as tenants. It also ends the way Filipino soap operas end: Marimar, the victim, triumphs and is reunited at last with her lover. *Marimar* is set against a similar feudal backdrop with beautiful Latin American actresses and handsome actors who look like our Spanish *mestizas* and *mestizos* and are therefore not foreign-looking to most Filipinos. But unlike the tedious Filipino soap opera which takes years to unfold, this telenovela is quick-paced with its many subplots resolved within the week and has



a duration of only a few months. Its lavish sets are also a stark contrast to that of the usual Filipino soap opera.

The phenomenal rise of this foreign show forced the other networks to undertake drastic measures. ABS-CBN felt so threatened it cut to half its Filipino newscast and transferred its top-rating afternoon soap opera, *Mara Clara*, to the same time slot as *Marimar* in an attempt to lure away the faithful followers of *Mara Clara* from *Marimar*. The local show did challenge the Mexican telenovela for a month, but its audience soon shifted back to the latter. The network was forced to quicken the pace of *Mara Clara* and mercifully brought it to its end last February. It bought Mexican telenovelas as well, but only Thalia's (the star of *Marimar*) *Maria Mercedes* with a similar poor versus rich theme made it to the top. Other Mexican telenovelas — *Acapulco* and *Simplemente Maria* — did not share the fate of *Marimar* or *Maria Mercedes* disproving the belief that *Marimar* would open the floodgates to foreign shows and would damage local productions (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2**  
TV Ratings of Mexican Telenovelas  
Other Than *Marimar*

Lenny Parto, Vice President for Programming of GMA Network, views the success of *Marimar* positively. According to her, *Marimar* has challenged local producers into coming up with faster-paced soap operas (*Esperanza*, *Mula sa Puso*, *Ikaw na Sana*), more exterior shots, better executed storylines, and more intelligent productions which viewers deserve. They are also experimenting with more varied themes (Interview with Parto, April 1997).

The phenomenal rise of *Marimar* but the poor ratings that other Mexican telenovelas are currently getting from viewers serve to bring home the point that the Filipino mass audience are not as mindless as critics project them to be. Nor are they avid consumers of anything foreign. The global popular culture industry is making available to consumers a wider variety of menu to choose from. But the local mass audience will select that which makes sense to them according to their own cultural codes. This is their way of speaking back, of articulating their own selfhood.

### **Filipinizing the TV Networks in the Era of Globalization**

Soap operas, however, represent only a small slice of Philippine television programming. They are aired in the early afternoon (1:30-2:30 p.m.) or early evening (6:00-7:30 p.m.), eating into only one and a half hour of what is considered prime time (6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.) in television. Prime time shows are the source of revenue for television networks because these are the ones that attract advertising. The commercial load of prime time shows, on the other hand, is determined largely by their TV ratings. Since today, local productions dominate prime time television, the ratings of these are what large television networks are closely monitoring.

Before the mid 1980s, prime time was the preserve of American shows. Prime time catered mostly to the A-B audience (high income groups as contrasted to the low-income C-D groups) because of the widespread belief in media that this was the audience advertisers would prefer to attract. Moreover, there was the notion that the C-D which represented the working class, generally slept early and thus, it was senseless to support local productions in Filipino. Especially during the



period of Martial Law, television networks did not have to compete with one another because media was owned and controlled by Marcos and his cronies. No one at that time challenged the hegemony of English programs in media.

That situation changed dramatically after the February revolution. Blazing the trail for the Filipinization of television programming was the management headed by G. Noel Tolentino that was installed by the Aquino government in the sequestered IBC-13. Charged with protecting the assets of the station, the new management was surprised to discover that the station was a top money earner and was in fact leading the other networks in terms of rating. Yet it did not enjoy the prestige of being #1. It seemed that the reason for the station's high rating was the local entertainment shows that IBC-13 was home to mostly Tagalog movies and station-produced local sitcoms. This type of programming, however, was largely unrationalized. The new management built on the strength of the station towards the Filipinization of the network:

*Basta Pinoy — sa Trese.* This is not just a slogan. It is a vision of what we have always wanted Philippine television to be: the home of local productions that are expressive of the Filipino heart and mind; the active mediator between the public and the significant issues and events of the day; the provider not only of entertainment but also of enlightenment; the imparter of Filipino social and cultural values. It defines the basic thrust of IBC-13's programming a strong bias for more local productions, a striving for balance between entertainment and public information, and the recognition of its social role without losing sight of the need to earn profits. "*Basta Pinoy sa Trese*" expresses IBC-13's corporate goal: for the larger Filipino audience to identify themselves with the station because it speaks of them and for them, because its shows are produced by them, and because whatever is Filipino is to be found in IBC-13 (Tolentino 1987).

IBC-13 then opened its primetime to innovative sitcoms, gag shows and even political satires.<sup>1</sup> It also aired Filipino movies on prime time, and balanced this with documentaries. Shattering the myth that talk shows are only for the educated A-B audience and should therefore be in



English, IBC-13 launched *Truth Forum* (this was later renamed *Public Forum*), the first talk show in Filipino hosted by sociologist Randy David and using a forum as a format. Its maiden show in November 17, 1986 which featured Bernabe Buscayno (NPA Commander Dante) broke into the top twenty shows for that week.

IBC-13's Filipino programming caused GMA-7 to reformat its own English programming and for ABS-CBN to follow the track that had been opened up by IBC-13. Today, with IBC-13 still enmeshed in sequestration and ownership problems, ABS-CBN and GMA-7 have become the industry leaders with 90 percent of their shows in Filipino.

But with globalization looming ahead, and global popular cultural products now easily accessible through satellite communications and cable TV, how long will local television network be able to stick to their Filipino programming?

Interestingly, the networks are not worried. Lenny Parto points out that cable TV affects only a minority. In terms of audience share, it has lured only 3-12 percent of local TV viewers (see Figures 3 and 4) (MPI Peoplemeter, 5 April 1997). This is the A-B market that was once privileged with prime time English shows. Parto foresees that globalization will even lead to the complete Filipinization of local television. This means that competition among the networks will be even stiffer and will improve local productions as has already been happening.

To be sure, evening sitcoms still draw the most audience (i.e., *Home Along the Riles* [*riles* is the Filipino term for train rails] which stars top comedian Dolphy and is about the funny situations families of squatters who live alongside railway tracks get themselves into; *Abangan ang Susunod na Kabanata* [Watch Out for the Next Episode], a weekly sitcom using a typically corrupt politician's family to make commentaries on current political and social issues).

But social consciousness has managed to seep into movies and dramas made for television. Once considered too deep and too depressing for television, some of these TV dramas have received very high ratings.



Figure 3. CHANNEL SHARES BY DAYPART

MORNING (6AM - 12NN)												
	CH 2	CH 4	CH 5	CH 7	CH 9	CH 13	CH 21	CH 23	CH 29	CH 31	CH 27	CABLE
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
9712	44	6	5	14	11	9	-	3	*	-	1	8
9714	49	3	3	13	15	4	-	3	*	-	1	8

EARLY AFTERNOON (12NN - 2PM)												
	CH 2	CH 4	CH 5	CH 7	CH 9	CH 13	CH 21	CH 23	CH 29	CH 31	CH 27	CABLE
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
9712	34	2	3	45	5	2	*	3	*	*	*	5
9714	33	2	3	46	9	2	*	1	*	*	*	3

MID-AFTERNOON (2PM-6PM)												
	CH 2	CH 4	CH 5	CH 7	CH 9	CH 13	CH 21	CH 23	CH 29	CH 31	CH 27	CABLE
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
9712	41	4	3	31	4	7	*	2	*	1	1	5
9714	43	3	4	29	6	6	*	1	*	1	*	6

PRIME TIME (6PM-10PM)												
	CH 2	CH 4	CH 5	CH 7	CH 9	CH 13	CH 21	CH 23	CH 29	CH 31	CH 27	CABLE
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
9712	34	2	9	20	11	18	-	2	-	*	*	3
9714	34	3	7	19	13	18	*	2	*	1	*	3

LATE EVENING (10PM-12MN)												
	CH 2	CH 4	CH 5	CH 7	CH 9	CH 13	CH 21	CH 23	CH 29	CH 31	CH 27	CABLE
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
9712	29	4	10	18	6	18	1	5	*	2	1	6
9714	31	4	8	19	13	13	1	4	*	1	*	6

\*Below 0.50%

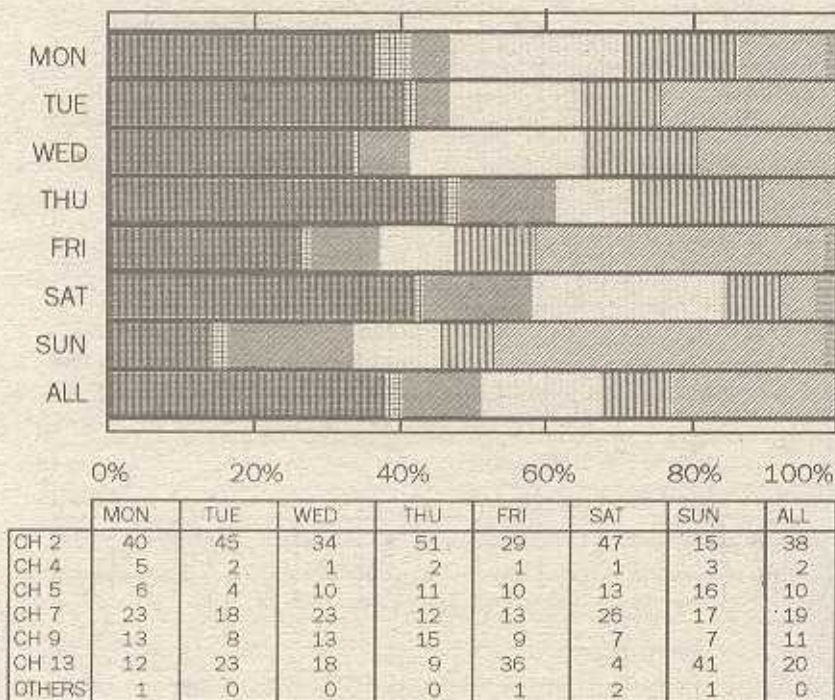
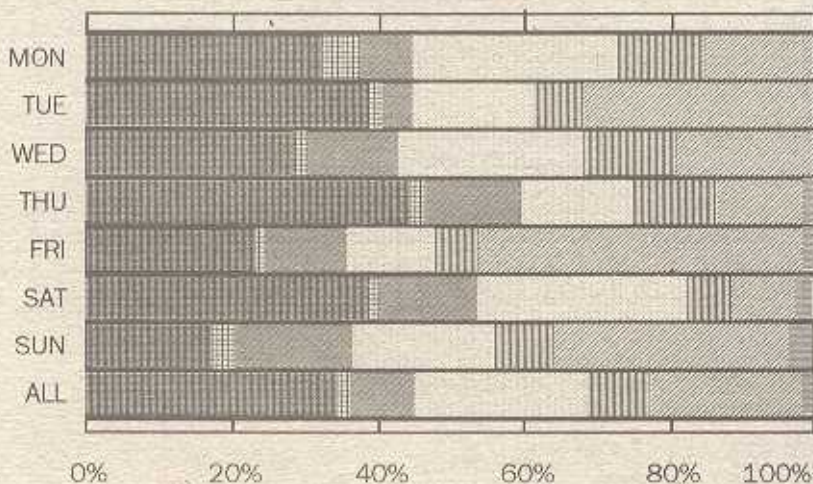
9712 (March 16-22, 1997)

9714 (March 30-April 5, 1997)

Source: MPI Peoplometer

**Figure 4. AUDIENCE SHARES**








March 9-15, 1997

**7:00-9:00 PM****7:00-10:00 PM**



	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN	ALL
CH 2	36	42	35	47	26	41	19	35
CH 4	5	2	2	2	1	2	3	2
CH 5	7	4	9	11	11	12	17	10
CH 7	28	17	25	14	13	29	19	21
CH 9	12	7	12	13	6	8	8	9
CH 13	12	28	17	11	42	8	33	22
OTHERS	0	0	0	1	1	2	3	1

						
CH 2	CH 4	CH 5	CH 7	CH 9	CH 13	OTHERS

Source: MPI Peoplemeter

For example, "*Sa Bawat Patak ng Dugo*" (For Each Drop of Blood), a story written for GMA-7's weekly *True Stories* about an overseas domestic helper in Singapore who fought back and won her case against her Singaporean employers who had inflicted both physical and mental torture on her, rated #12 in the weekly top fifty shows. Recently, another feature of the same weekly show, "*Hatol Kamatayan*" (Death Sentence), which was about agricultural workers who were forced to plant marijuana because their lands no longer yielded them enough to survive on not knowing that the penalty for this when caught was death, rated #18. Considering that *True Stories* is in the same time slot as the popular *Maalaala Mo Kaya* (Can You Remember) and does not have popular stars to attract the mass audience, the ratings received are significant and indicate audience receptivity to progressive ideas so long as dramas end with victims receive justice (*Sa Bawat Patak...*) or at the very least, are given hope (*Hatol Kamatayan*).

The viewers today do not just communicate their reaction to shows through the weekly media ratings. They are now more assertive. They do not just watch, they call in or send their criticisms to the networks.

As the two big networks are finding out, the global technology of cable TV is helping decentralize news and cultural products. Today, cable TV viewers can watch news emanating from the regions in their own regional language. Documentaries on varied social and cultural issues are shown on CNN, Sky Cable and Citinet. A cable TV channel is also beaming the Filipino films of the movie company Viva on a 24-hour basis. What all these



signify is diversification of cultural products and information, rather than homogenization of culture. Global technology has also allowed the networks to beam their programs to Filipino communities in different parts of the world. Rather than uniformity of culture, global technology is allowing more multi-cultural exchanges among communities within a nation and among nations.

### Conclusion

The prospect of globalized uniformity grows frighteningly ominous each day when we focus our sights only on surface signs such as the proliferation of malls in Metro Manila and urban centers all over the country where the imported brands of Armani, Esprit, Guess, Naturalizer, Guess, Gap, Benetton, Christian Dior, YSL, etc., abound; the presence of transnational fastfood franchises like MacDonald's, Pizza Hut, Shakeys, Kentucky Fried Chicken, etc. even in rural areas; the blaring of American Top 40 in many FM radio stations; etc. As we switch on our sets to watch HBO or CNN, and as we communicate to other academics through e-mail and surf the internet, we forget that instantaneous accessing of global information and cultural products remains a privilege only of an elite minority in the Philippines. Majority of the populace do not have the money to buy the imported brands or the cable-ready TV sets or the high memory PCs to enable them to directly benefit from global technology. The economic and social situation for the majority has not changed dramatically since the colonial period. It is, therefore, difficult to imagine that, within a decade or two, globalization will blur national boundaries and obliterate differences between and among cultures.

Philippine experience has also shown that the seemingly powerful influence of the American popular culture industry and onslaught of American pop culture products did not result in the wholesale Americanization of Filipino pop culture products. Certainly, pop culture forms were borrowed, but producers altered the formula and content to articulate their own view of the world and the Filipino self. The persistence of the themes of oppression and retribution for the victims reflects the mass audience's voice of resistance to an unjust status quo and, at the same time, hope for redemption from their poverty. For a long time, this



message was suppressed by foreign-influenced critical standards and the privileged voice of well-entrenched English programs. Today, however, the Filipinization of television that resulted initially from the liberalization of and experimentation in media and recently from the migration of English shows to cable TV has reclaimed for the mass audience their space and power.

For the popular culture industry in the Philippines, therefore, globalization is turning out to be beneficial. The technology is enabling producers to reach out to Filipino communities worldwide and, at the same time, arming the regions with the means to speak. We are today witnessing not uniformity but multi-cultural diversity. ♦

### Notes

- \* Paper Presented at the 3rd European Philippine Studies Conference, Aix-en-Provence, France, April 27-29, 1997.
- 1 Among the local productions introduced by IBC-13 were: *Sitak ni Jack* (*sitak* is the inversion of the word *taksi* or taxi), which featured characters of a taxi company undergoing all kinds of mishaps and utilized the taxi as a venue for political and social commentaries; *Hapi House*, a wholesome family show that imparts Filipino family values; *Goin Bananas*, a non-rating show on the former BBC-2 which became IBC-13's #1 show because of better execution and a highly creative and flexible format; *Bamio Balimbing* (*balimbing* is a fruit that has many sides and is the traditional image for a person who easily switches sides in politics), focuses on the foibles of typical characters found in a *bamio*, employing Filipino wit to comment on political and social issues of the day; *Sic O'clock News*, a political satire on then current national and international news using the format of a news program.

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