

From Local to Global: Philippine Broadcast Networks and the Filipino Diaspora

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This article presents an overview of the landscape of Philippine broadcast media and discusses how through their international arms—particularly ABS-CBN Global, GMA Worldwide Incorporated, and Pilipinas Global Network Limited (PGNL)—they have expanded their operations to cater to the 11 million Filipinos living and working abroad. Using a political economy framework, the discussion attempts to propose a necessary starting point for further research on the Filipino diaspora that shifts the focus from studies of representations to the role of media institutions in the creation of the diaspora as an audience. The article offers an institutional perspective into how these local networks create and program content for that audience. The article argues that the concentration of economic and political capital and power within media entities continues to legitimize the duopolistic control of ABS-CBN and GMA-7 in local markets and now in the international media landscape.

Keywords: globalization, political economy, transnational media, Filipino diaspora, Philippine mass media

Introduction

Appadurai's (1996) famous work on mediascapes pointed to the important role of mass media at the heart of the global cultural economy. This emphasis on studying modern communication systems and their role in capitalist societies and in the global flow of information, goods, and services has been given importance in recent years (Appadurai, 1996; Bagdikian, 1983; Bettig & Hall, 2003; Croteau & Hoynes, 2000; Gitlin & Barnouw, 1997; McChesney, 2003; Mosco, 1996; Picard, 1989; among others). Williams (as early as 1977) pointed out that:

Studies of ownership and control of capitalist radio and television interlock, historically and theoretically, with wider analysis of capitalist society, capitalist economy and the neo capitalist state. Further, many of the same institutions require analysis in the context of modern imperialism and neo colonialism, to which they are crucially relevant. (as cited in Mosco, 1996, p. 136)

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While the expansion of mass media can be traced to the 1920s and 1930s (Bettig & Hall, 2003), the characteristics of truly global commercial media as we know them today only emerged in the early 1980s as a result of the liberalization of world trade that stimulated the growth of transnational media corporations (TNMCs) through their goal of attaining economies of scale for profit maximization. The growth of communication satellites in the 1960s and 1970s also made it possible for TNMCs to easily and efficiently (in terms of economics and otherwise) operate across borders while also providing instant, interactive communication—a feat that was not previously possible (Georgiou, 2005; McChesney, 2003; Mosco, 1996). With communication industries accounting for \$1.6 trillion in world trade during the 1980s, TNMCs have been crucial to the development of the contemporary global marketplace (McChesney, 2003).

The most important tool for TNMCs in their expansion and production of media-related commodities has been transnational television, which McChesney (2003) has called the “defining medium of the age,” saying that it “provided the basis for an integrated global commercial media market” (p. 2). Transnational television is defined by Barker (as cited in Cabalquinto, 2014) as the amalgam of technology, ownership, program distribution, and audiences operating across the boundaries of nation-states and language communities with the pursuit of profit as its primary goal.

For McChesney, the growth of media industries has been responsible for the greater and more rapid dissemination of media outputs that has influenced much of popular culture across the globe and has served to connect people across time and geographical space. This knowledge of media’s importance in the globalization process forces us to look at TNMCs as institutions that have economic, political, social, and cultural implications. Croteau and Hoynes (2000) see the importance of using the institutional approach when studying media industries because it emphasizes the media production process instead of specific media products or consumption.

It is this context of expanding market share and reaching Filipinos scattered across the globe that paved the way for Philippine mass media to extend their reach. What was the impetus for Philippine mass media to go beyond geographical borders and tap the Filipino diaspora for its market? What strategies did local networks adopt to cater to the Filipino diaspora in the age of tight competition among various forms of media? Finally, how do local networks operating as transnational media companies affect the kind of content being delivered to Filipinos abroad?

This article reviews existing literature to provide an introduction to the relationship between transnational media and diaspora using political economy as a theoretical framework. It also presents an overview of the landscape of Philippine broadcast media and discusses how their international arms—namely ABS-CBN Global, GMA Worldwide Incorporated, and Pilipinas Global Network Limited (PGNL)—have expanded their base of operations to cater to the 11 million Filipinos living and working abroad (Veniles, 2013). To understand the different strategies undertaken by these networks in terms of media infrastructure and content production for Filipinos abroad, I also conducted in-depth interviews, using purposive sampling, with key people from the three major local networks: Leonardo Katigbak, head of special projects for ABS-CBN and one of the brains behind the network’s early expansion in the international market; Ned Legaspi, programming head of The Filipino Channel Manila, under ABS-CBN

Global; Jeffrey Remigio, vice president and head of operations for Kapatid TV International, for PGNL; and Maria Rosario Domingo, head of programming for GMA International.

This article has two goals: The first is to offer an institutional perspective about how these local networks create and program content for the Filipino diaspora, highlighting the importance of studying media as economic and political institutions given that their outputs are “embedded with discourses that emerge around programming and messaging” (Fiske, 1987, as cited in Cabalquinto, 2014, p. 48). The second goal is to propose a necessary starting point for further studies on the Filipino diaspora that shift the focus from studies of Filipinos’ representations in various media texts, a focus that has permeated local studies so far (see Benitez, 2011; Lejano, 2004; McKay, 2011; Pisares, 2011; Raymundo, 2011; Suzuki, 2011; Tan, 2010; Tolentino, 2010; Yu, 2013, among others), to the role of transnational media institutions in the creation of the diaspora as an audience.

As catering to the Filipino diaspora’s needs has now been incorporated within the operations of these broadcast companies, this approach has become one of the instruments for these networks to attain further economies of scale. The resulting concentration of economic (and political) capital and power within media entities continues to legitimize the duopolistic control of ABS-CBN and GMA-7 in local markets and now the international media landscape.

Transnational Media Corporations and Diaspora

Appadurai’s (1996) concepts of mediascapes and ethnoscapas (pertaining to the diaspora) both refer to the importance of unrestricted movement of people, information, and goods as facilitators of influence and innovation between West and East that go beyond issues of homogenization and cultural imperialism. Mueller and Van Gorp (2011) see the media’s role in the diaspora as facilitating the exchange of material and cultural products through the “consumption of (media) images” (p. 4). This is further explained by Appadurai:

But as mass mediation becomes increasingly dominated by electronic media (and thus delinked from the capacity to read and write), and as such media increasingly link producers and audiences across national boundaries, and as these audiences themselves start new conversations between those who move and those who stay, we find a growing number of diasporic public spheres. (1996, p. 22)

However, the diaspora’s engagement with transnational media corporations can be seen not only in the creation of these public spheres but also in the creation of Urry’s (2007) concept of “network capital,” which is defined as a “subjectless, communications-driven and information-based form of networking enabled through engagement with different mobility systems—mobile and computer networks—towards communicative mobilities” (as cited in Cabalquinto, 2014, p. 49).

The more globalization allows for the movement of information across the globe, the more our society becomes organized around the value of circulation. This means that network capital becomes more significant among the range of capital types that Bourdieu (1986) originally proposed because it allows

migrants "access to technologies and infrastructures that circulate texts and meaning" (Cabalquinto, 2014, p. 47). Simply put, even while operating under the imperative to make profit, TNMCs, through transnational television, have also helped diaspora gain access to media infrastructure and content that were previously unavailable to them, in turn giving them the opportunity to lead mobile and mediated lives and to participate in the global circulation of meanings.

However, this access to local content has had varying results in terms of defining one's identity and citizenship. Yu (2010), in her study of Canadian migrants, located TNMCs' role in reintroducing local values, tastes, and practices to second-generation immigrants while reinforcing cultural identities and shared consciousness for first-generation immigrants. Kaur and Yahya (2010) saw the important role of Zee TV in the creation of a sense of nationhood and citizenship through its various programs. Further, tapping Indian communities in Singapore for their talent quests and travel shows was a clear sign that Zee TV recognizes the importance of overseas Indians as audiences.

The concepts of diasporic public spheres and network capital provide us with the understanding that the relationship between transnational media and their migrant audiences is fraught with issues of power and agency. At the same time, these concepts alert us to the need to look at how TNMCs, especially those belonging to developing economies like the Philippines, navigate the complicated terrain of globalization.

The Philippine Broadcast Media Landscape

After the ouster of former president Ferdinand Marcos in 1986 in the now historic People Power Revolution, one of Corazon Aquino's first political moves as the newly installed leader of the Philippines was the restoration of democracy and civil liberties, including the freedom of speech that is now enshrined in the 1987 Philippine Constitution.

Since then, mass media in the Philippines have retained their commercial characteristics, with ownership resting with Filipinos in the private sector.¹ The 1987 Constitution also retained Marcos' previous Presidential Decree (PD 1018) on 100% ownership of mass media by Filipinos with a provision for 70:30 foreign equity in advertising entities (Braid & Tuazon, 2000).

The 1990s saw the unprecedented growth and development of the Philippine communication sector, which at the time was considered one of the most developed in Asia. The growth can be traced to the following: (a) the communication technology revolution; (b) the promotion and protection of the free enterprise system; (c) a return of the democratic space after the EDSA revolution; (d) the liberalization and deregulation of the telecommunications sector, which saw the ouster of several of Marcos' cronies;

¹ Other networks in local free television include the People's Television Network (PTV-4), which is managed by the government; Radio Philippines Network (RPN-9), whose ownership belongs to two more media magnates, Wilson Tieng (Solar News Corporation) and Antonio Cabangon-Chua (Aliw Broadcasting Corporation); and Intercontinental Broadcasting Corporation (IBC-13), which is still being eyed for privatization after being sequestered by the government from a Marcos crony.

and (e) a move toward decentralization, resulting in the growth of provincial media (Braid & Tuazon, 2000,p. 9).

The 1990s also heralded the growth of cable television in the Philippines, which was initially stunted in the late 1960s due to the monopolistic hold of the strongman Marcos' business associates. However, apart from cable television gaining a foothold during this time, local mass media owners, such as Eugenio Lopez Sr. (who, together with his family, was forced into exile upon the declaration of martial law), have not only wrested the ownership of ABS-CBN from the Marcoses but have remained a dominant presence in the landscape of Philippine media until recent times. This business orientation has given rise to a duopoly,² as seen in the ongoing intense rivalry between ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corporation³ and GMA Network Inc.⁴ These two networks, owned by wealthy families⁵ involved in other businesses and politics, command the attention of almost 90% of viewers (Coronel, 2005).

However, before ABS-CBN's revival in the 1990s, GMA was on the top of the network race. GMA's programs then were mostly canned foreign shows, and its news programs were in the English language, which meant that its captive audiences were mostly upper-middle and upper classes (Rimban, 1999). But all that changed when the Lopezes reacquired ABS-CBN. One of their first programming decisions was to introduce *TV Patrol*, a news program that deviated from the typical English news programs of the time since it was all in Filipino. This gamble paid off, and it had a peak average of 65% audience share, which was uncommon for a news program. The success of *TV Patrol* was the result not only of the public's thirst for information after martial law but also of the program's ability to target the majority of the Filipino-speaking population belonging to the lower-middle and lower classes. Its success had far-ranging implications, so much so that GMA (with other local networks following suit) not only changed the format of its newscast from English to Filipino but also started producing original programs in the local language. This shift in language and its effect on the networks' programming decisions has been instrumental in the popularization of television as compared to other forms of media and, as can be seen in the discussion below, has become a significant factor (or a limitation) in the decision to expand to other markets.

In its contemporary form, Philippine mass media, particularly television, still rely on audience ratings to pull advertiser support for products and services. This setup resulted in the prioritization of

² TV5 was acquired by MediaQuest Holdings Inc., a subsidiary of Philippine Long Distance Telecommunications, the biggest telecommunications company in the Philippines. It is headed by business tycoon Manuel V. Pangilinan and major investor Anthoni Salim of Indonesia, and it has become the third player in the local media. While it has the financial resources to rival the duopolistic hold of ABS-CBN and GMA-7, TV5 remains a distant competitor, with the company reportedly losing billions since it was acquired by MediaQuest (Tiglao, 2014).

³ Corporate information for ABS-CBN Broadcasting Network can be found at <http://ir.abs-cbn.com/>

⁴Corporate information for GMA Network Incorporated can be found at <http://www.gmanetwork.com/corporate>

⁵ ABS-CBN is owned by the Lopezes, whose other business holdings include real estate, health services, and public utilities, among others. GMA-7, on the other hand, is 70% owned by the triumvirate of Gozon, Duavit, and Jimenez, whose other business holdings include real estate, insurance, and mortgage firms.

entertainment programs such as locally produced soap operas, soap operas imported from Asia (especially Korean Hallyu) dubbed in the local language, and variety and game shows, among others. These commercial networks have succeeded in creating a mass audience and a mass market for their products across platforms, ranging from television programs to movies, from print publications to recording artists, and extending even to online media.

Filipino Diaspora and Mass Media

In the same study, Yu (2010) recognized the growing importance of the diaspora as an audience and of its engagement with various transnational media, particularly online, as contributors or producers of media products.

With an estimated 2,000 Filipinos leaving the country every day, the Filipino diaspora has become an important area of study for various scholars (see Asis, 2008 for a comprehensive literature review of studies on the Filipino diaspora). However, Filipinos' working or settling in other countries is not a recent phenomenon. Historically, even before the mass exportation of Filipino farmers in Hawaii to work on sugar plantations in 1906 (Denton & Denton, 1986), Filipinos known as Manilamen had settled in Louisiana as early as 1763, after abandoning the Spanish galleons when these docked in Acapulco (Rodis, 1991). These Filipinos brought their system of government (*barangay*), their architecture (wooden houses), and their technology (drying shrimp) to another part of the globe (p. 144).

Current figures from the Commission on Filipinos Overseas⁶ (n.d.) website shows the top 10 destination countries of Filipinos to be United States, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Malaysia, Canada, Australia, Italy, United Kingdom, Qatar and Singapore. The top three occupational fields of overseas Filipinos are in the areas of service, professional (including medical and technical-related fields), and production (transport and labor, among others). These workers are also classified by employment characteristics such as land- and sea-based, both of which have risen steadily over the years (POEA, 2009).⁷ These characteristics provide insights into how networks tap certain markets, especially those with higher concentrations of Filipinos, and strategize so that their programs cater to various regional and cultural restrictions.

⁶ The agency responsible for promoting and upholding the interest of Filipino emigrants and Filipino permanent residents in other countries with the mandate of preserving and strengthening ties with Filipino communities outside the Philippines.

⁷ Figures from Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA) showed that there was a 26.3% increase in sea-based workers (from 261,614 in 2008 to 330,424 in 2009) and a 12.1% increase in the number of land-based workers (from 974,399 in 2008 to 1,092,162 in 2009).

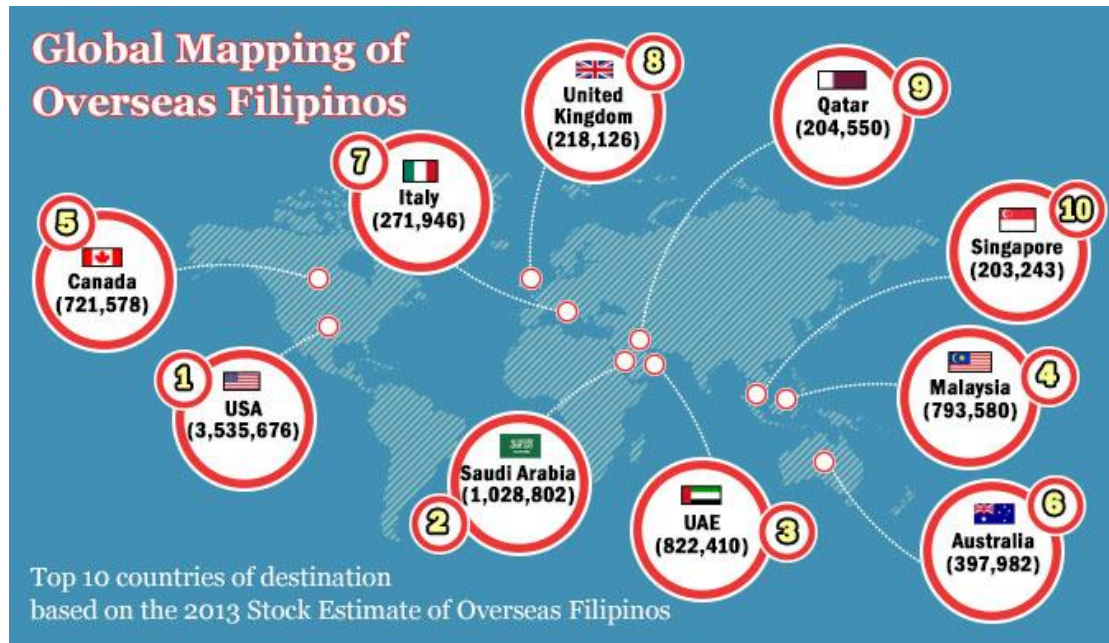


Figure 1. Global mapping of overseas Filipinos.

Source: <http://www.cfo.gov.ph>

Studies that center on the relationship between Philippine mass media and the diaspora are now emerging, but, although departing from issues of representations, they still use media texts as departure points for discussion. These include Cabalquinto's (2014) explorations of how ABS-CBN station IDs contributed to the creation of a transnational audience using the concept of symbolic and network capital, Sanchez's (2008) analysis of how ABS-CBN used *Wowowiee*⁸ as one of its instruments in going global while socializing the Filipino diaspora to the idea of a globalized Philippines, and Brillon's (2010) analysis of various Star Cinema (the film arm of ABS-CBN) movies about migrant workers and how it made use of transnational space to connect it with the Philippine government's policy on migrant labor. The studies adopted a similar approach in prioritizing media texts in the study of local media and diaspora.

However, it was Hookway (2009) who initially discussed how these local networks tried to develop the Filipino diaspora as consumers from the perspective of media institutions, but he focused mainly on the networks' development of online platforms. Hookway explains that the impetus for this was the need for local media companies to extend their markets beyond local audiences. Judging from the data (from 2008), it clearly showed the implications of targeting the diaspora as an audience, with 20% of ABS-CBN's revenue now coming from overseas online subscribers and about 4.4% of GMA's revenue from these subscribers. Apart from the expense of maintaining Internet servers in the United States, this setup is cost effective, as it consists mostly of rebroadcasting the local market's programs. While Hookway

⁸ This variety show premiered in 2005 and was accessible to the Filipino diaspora through ABS-CBN's The Filipino Channel (TFC) and ended when its host, Willie Revillame, transferred to TV5 in 2010.

(2009) attempted to describe the economic structure that enabled these local networks to tap Filipino migrants through online media, the discussion glosses over the cultural specifics and industry structure that preceded this setup and the ways by which these networks, including TV-5 (whose international arm is PGNL), have actively sought, through various local programs and other activities, the loyalty of the Filipino diaspora.

The Global Reach of Philippine Broadcast Networks

My in-depth interviews with representatives from each network and my review of each network's corporate information online has provided insight into the networks' rationales for going global and the strategies they adopted to cater to the Filipino diaspora in the age of tight competition among various forms of media.

Initially, ABS-CBN Global began as Eugenio Lopez Sr.'s dream to link Filipinos nationwide through mass media, but as Filipinos increasingly moved outside the country, he saw catering to an international Filipino audience as the obvious path for the network to take (L. Katigbak, personal communication, January 18, 2013). Its success following martial law led to experiments with international programming back in 1992, using the aforementioned *TV Patrol* to break into San Francisco, California, where the majority of the Filipino diaspora was located. When ABS-CBN launched The Filipino Channel (TFC)—the first of its several international channels—in 1994, satellite services were not yet available in the country, so tapes of the shows had to be sent by courier for playback (N. Legaspi, personal communication, January 22, 2013).

While the key people interviewed were not able to provide specific data on the total subscribers per region, they managed to give an overview of what the overseas Filipino market looks like. According to Legaspi, ABS-CBN Global has eight TFC signals or feeds: TFC 1 serves North America; TFC 2 serves the Middle East; TFC 3 serves Europe; TFC 4 serves Australia; TFC 5 serves Asia-Pacific; TFC 6 serves the East Coast of Canada; TFC 7 serves the West Coast of Canada; and TFC 8 serves North America, or the East Coast of the United States. ABS-CBN Global subscribers are estimated at 2.4 million, scattered across 40 countries. Katigbak added that only North America has its own studio facilities, because it has the largest audience share.



Figure 2. The corporate logo with tagline for ABS-CBN Global.

Source: <http://www.abs-cbnglobal.com/>

In July 2005, ABS-CBN Global signed an agreement with DirecTV, one of the leading direct-to-home system providers in the United States, granting DirecTV the exclusive right to distribute TFC programs on its platforms in return for licensing fees. According to Valisno (2012), 2011 figures showed ABS-CBN's international operations have steadily provided an additional revenue source for the company, with a yearly increase of almost 3%.

GMA-7 finally felt confident to expand to the global arena as part of its long-term plans after having managed to overcome the dominance of ABS-CBN in the ratings game. Domingo (personal communication, January 28, 2013) explained that GMA's business model abroad is different from TFC's. Initially, TFC had a difficult time pitching and selling the idea of showing Filipino programs to international distributors, because these distributors thought Filipino programs had no market in the United States, given that more immigrants during that time were Japanese, Chinese, and Indian. Domingo claimed that GMA was fortunate because TFC had already laid the groundwork and set up the audiences and convinced distributors that there was really a market for Filipino programs in the United States. This made GMA's entry to the international market faster and easier. A decade after TFC was launched, one of the biggest satellite carriers in the United States agreed to include GMA-produced shows in its lineup. A year later, it launched Pinoy TV as part of the roster of GMA Worldwide channels; now, 70% of GMA's market is in the United States, and the rest is in Canada and the Middle East.



Figure 3. The corporate logo for GMA Worldwide Incorporated.

Source: <http://gmaworldwide.tv/about.php>

GMA Worldwide distributes its programs in two ways: through subscription-based international channels (GMA Pinoy TV, GMA Life TV, and GMA News TV International) and through worldwide syndication sales to broadcasters in Asia, Africa, and Europe by GMA Worldwide (Philippines), Inc. With GMA's strength in the Philippines, the clamor for GMA-produced programs has also been strong from the Filipino diaspora—proof of this is the network's reported 8% yearly increase in subscription since 2011. In 2012, GMA Worldwide also signed a three-year deal with Fox International Channels for the international distribution of its local shows while launching Fox Filipino, which is currently available on local cable television, in March 2012 (Valisno, 2012).

Last, TV5 launched two international channels, Kapatid TV5 (a general entertainment channel) and Aksyon (Action) TV International (a news and public-affairs channel) under Pilipinas Global Network Limited in July 2011 as part of a plan to diversify and expand its reach from local to international. By immediately launching two channels for Filipinos abroad, TV5 positioned itself as an alternative to the

other networks. Remigio (personal communication, January 22, 2013) admitted that the greater challenge for a new player like TV5 is how to engage the same market to try out its programs.



Figure 4. The corporate logo for Pilipinas Global Network Limited.

Source: <http://kapatidtv.com>

PGNL's market includes Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and the United States. It was Remigio who admitted that the decision to start with these countries had to do with their external deals with foreign partners, which made market penetration easier and faster than it would have been without them. These foreign partners include DISH, which helped TV5 increase its presence in the United States; Orbit Showtime Network (OSN), which facilitated its entry to Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa; and AsiaSat, one of the leading regional satellite operators in Asia.

The decision of these networks to venture to these countries is supported by the data found in Figure 1, which shows the distribution of migrant Filipinos worldwide. It is not surprising that the United States, followed by countries in the Middle East (Saudi Arabia, UAE) also has the largest number of subscribers so that media infrastructure and content production have been directed there.

Both Domingo and Remigio admitted that TFC is already well established in the Filipino diaspora. Katigbak also made an important observation that the strength of TFC in the homes of Filipinos abroad lies in the strength of the influence of first-generation parents on their family. This point deserves deeper study, as it relates to the importance of kinship and other relational ties to the decision-making process and consumption patterns of the Filipino diaspora.

It is relevant to note that while ABS-CBN Global has the largest share of subscribers, it still does not reach a large concentration of the 11 million Filipinos abroad. The reasons may lie in access, economics, platforms of consumption, or spatial movements by some Filipinos. Further, communication infrastructure and the difficulty of penetrating foreign markets, especially for a developing economy like the Philippines, continue to hinder network expansion, thus their need to enter into contracts with foreign partners. For instance, while South Korea is now a popular destination for Filipino workers, Philippine broadcast networks have not yet made their presence felt there; it is only through the Internet that they have managed to tap some of these Filipinos, and still with a great degree of difficulty (Austria, 2014). Due to these limitations, all three networks have so far focused their attention on "friendlier" markets where there is a large concentration of Filipinos. In addition, the industries where Filipinos are employed

also affect expansion patterns, as can be seen in the rising number of sea-based Filipino workers, whose main characteristic is spatial mobility, making them difficult for networks to tap as a target market compared to land-based workers. Networks have started to address this challenge by making their content available online.

Who Is the Overseas Filipino Audience?

These broadcast companies are aware that the Filipino diaspora is not a homogenous market. A lot of planning and decision making comes into play when determining which shows will catch their attention since they have been exposed to different cultures and have developed certain interests and lifestyles.

Legaspi classifies the Filipino diaspora into "migrant-transient" and "first generation-second generation" dichotomies. The distinctions are important, as they have implications that go beyond content and programming decisions: They also deal with social status, life experience, and cultural tastes. However, the classification is not rigid; for example, migrants can be both first- and second-generation diaspora members.

Legaspi defines the migrant market as Filipinos who decided to permanently stay in their host countries (U.S., Canada, New Zealand, and Australia) as citizens, and he defines the transient market as the overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) who only stay in a particular country to work, usually for two years (typically situated in the Middle East, some parts of Europe, and Pacific Asia, including Japan). Migrant and transient markets have different backgrounds, which have led them to have different cultural tastes and consumption patterns. According to Legaspi, migrant Filipinos come from urban areas, are more affluent, have more flexibility in balancing their work and relaxation hours (which affects the way they consume media), and have already acquired intercultural sensibility. In contrast, transient Filipinos are mostly from rural areas, have very different cultural tastes when compared with migrants, and have mostly regimented work schedules.

The first generation-second generation dichotomy also affects programming preferences. As Legaspi explains, members of the first generation have a "lingering" familiarity with local programs, especially soap operas and variety shows; as such, it is easier for them to relate to, identify with, and enjoy these programs as compared to members of the second generation, who were not previously exposed to these programs and whose life experiences differ greatly from what they see in these shows. Domingo observes that in terms of television genre preferences, fantasy programs, which are very popular in the Philippines, are not popular in the United States, especially with second-generation immigrants, who have had more exposure to television shows with higher production values.

Further, Domingo pointed out that language is a concern because most of the content is produced in the Philippines and initially targeted to Filipinos living there, not for the English-speaking second-generation immigrants. While the networks studied here have attempted to create channels that appeal to younger Filipinos, as in the case of GMA Life TV (whose programs are mostly lifestyle-based), a

quick look at their program lineups reveals that the majority are still in Filipino or in a mix of Filipino and English, with all-English-language programs still in the minority.

As seen in the success of *TV Patrol*, broadcast networks played an influential role in breaking the monopoly of English as the preferred medium of communication in the public sphere and, in turn, in helping to propagate the use of Filipino, which helped to expand the creation of a nationalist discourse. However, when looked at from a capitalist perspective, the issue of language poses a concern for the plans of these broadcast networks to become transnational media corporations. Not only will it be hard for them to extend their reach to second-generation Filipino immigrants, but it will be doubly hard for them to penetrate other markets outside of those of Filipino audiences. While networks have tried to address this challenge by dubbing content materials, there are cultural nuances that get lost in translation.

Strategies in Programming Content for the Filipino Diaspora

Once the networks have identified their target audience, it becomes clearer for them to make programming decisions. While they are aware that not everything they produce will cut across audiences' varied interests and tastes, they at least make a conscious effort to create a universal type of content. Culled from the interviews are the following programming considerations for the Filipino diaspora: time, work schedule, lifestyle, and religious and cultural restrictions specific to host countries.

Time differences between countries affect programming decisions. For example, in the United States, networks have to take into consideration the time differences between the Eastern, Mountain, Central, and Pacific time zones and the time differences between these and their markets in Europe and the Middle East. This means that news, which typically airs at 7:00 in the evening in the Philippines and which, according to Domingo, is something that overseas Filipinos want to see at the same time it is being broadcasted in the Philippines, would have to be strategically programmed with the various time differences of each country being considered so that it remains up to date and relevant. Top-rated shows in the Philippines are also given prime spots.

Related to other concerns for time difference are programming decisions based on work schedules, especially for transient Filipinos with very limited time for leisure and relaxation. To illustrate, Domingo explained that GMA's programming in the Middle East is different from its programming in other regions because of audiences' different work schedules. For example, GMA reserves its special shows for Fridays because this is the time when most Filipinos are at home. Almost everyone interviewed noted that continuous research is being done on the trends in work shifts for Filipino nurses, caregivers, and construction workers in order to cater to their needs.

Lifestyle comes into play when deciding how to cater to audiences not only within the first generation-second generation and transient-migrant dichotomies but also within male-female, blue collar-white collar, and mature-young dichotomies. Legaspi noted that ABS-CBN Global had to create a channel called Bro to cater to the mostly male demographic in the Middle East. The segmentation of channels by these networks to cater to various demographics and interests touches on the nature of mass media to maximize economies of scale for profit. With their ready-made products, the only effort on the

part of the local networks is to classify the programs according to their desired target market and distribute them to various international channels. This setup is cost effective, and it also extends their market base and the "shelf life" of their media products.

Last, religious and cultural restrictions specific to host countries affect programming decisions. Legaspi explained that in the Middle East, where countries impose many religious restrictions, a number of animated shows with religious content and sexual scenes, no matter how implicit, cannot be aired. While transnational media corporations may have created an image of a globalized culture as they've disseminated products and services, restrictions like these have continuously affirmed the power of nation-states to police cross-border flow of information while also providing a space for people in developing countries to negotiate the effects of globalization in their respective localities and within the frameworks of their cultural sensibilities.

Part of the long-term plans of the Philippine networks studied here is to create market-specific content. Unfortunately, according to Legaspi, the communication infrastructure (putting up a studio and buying the necessary equipment) necessary to bring it to fruition is still too expensive and impractical from a business perspective. Due to these limitations, only news programs are produced specifically for the interests and needs of the overseas Filipino audience. ABS-CBN produces *Balitang America (News from America)*, *Balitang Canada (News from Canada)*, *Balitang Middle-East (News from Middle East)*, *Balitang Europe (News from Europe)* and programs like *Kabayan Tambayan* (loosely translated as "a place where Filipinos hang out"),⁹ and *Barangay USA*,¹⁰ among others. These programs cost less to produce than soap operas and other entertainment shows.

Further, according to Domingo, regional programs are popular with the diaspora since news and updates about their hometowns particularly appeal to them. This reflects San Juan's (2000) observation that members of the Filipino diaspora identify first with their home regions and then with the nation. Thus, GMA Worldwide airs regional news programs such as *Balitang Bisdak* (now rebranded as *24 Hours Central Visayas*), *Balitang Amianan* (rebranded as *24 Hours North Central Luzon*), and *Testigo* (also rebranded as *24 Hours Southern Mindanao*). It is interesting to note that changing the names of these programs from their vernacular origins is clearly meant to align these not just with the flagship news program of GMA-7, *24 Oras (24 Hours)*, but also with its corporate brand, thus integrating it further into the network's overall programming (and, ultimately, capitalist) framework. Changing the titles of these regional news programs to English may mean that it is now broadening its appeal to also target the greater Filipino diaspora.

GMA Worldwide also buys the rights to regional boxing matches for airing because the network sees a market for sports enthusiasts among overseas Filipinos. It also co-produces original programs with

⁹ A 10-minute entertainment show hosted by members of the Filipino diaspora who were chosen by audition. It has various segments involving the latest events or activities of overseas Filipinos and a showcase of talents.

¹⁰ A variety show similar in format to *Kabayan Tambayan* but with a longer airtime. This show has become so popular that its main host, Kapitan (Captain) Gelo, has a strong Filipino-diaspora fanbase and online presence.

other Filipino-Americans to be aired on GMA channels; *Pusong Pinoy sa America (A Filipino Heart in America)* is one of these.¹¹ For GMA, this partnership is much more cost effective and faster than creating content from scratch.

Legaspi, Domingo, and Remigio all agree that it is important to create other meaningful activities to hold audience interest and continue to develop loyalty to the networks. To this end, ABS-CBN has fully integrated overseas Filipinos into its programming framework. The *Kapamilya Caravan* brings Filipino celebrities abroad for concerts and other performances, hosts international screenings of Star Cinema movies, and hosts celebrations of special occasions such as Independence Day and *fiestas* (feasts) to maintain and strengthen the diaspora fan base. ABS-CBN also integrates Filipinos into the actual content of its broadcasts through the audition and selection process for franchised reality-based shows such as *Big Brother*, *Dream Academy*, and *The Voice*, with participants even finding success in the local entertainment industry.

GMA also conducts service-oriented projects such as call-center training and has instituted the Original Pilipino Music (OPM) Festival as ways of showing care and concern to its Filipino subscribers.

Philippine Broadcast Networks as Transnational Media Corporations

As the previous discussions have made clear, the rationale for the local networks' expansion lies in maximizing profit through economies of scale. This has led them to target the Filipino diaspora as another market for their media products. This process, however, is not as simple as it looks because network executives must take into consideration the differences between migrant and transient and the first- and second-generation Filipino immigrants whose engagement with their products depends on several factors, including host time zone, work schedule, lifestyle, language, and religious and cultural restrictions.

In contemporary times, where transnational media corporations from developed economies are already entrenched in the global flow of production and distribution of media texts and with the Internet restructuring these flows, where in this exchange can we locate the Philippine broadcast networks, and what are the implications of their expanding the content that is being delivered to the Filipino diaspora?

This is where I turn to political economy, as it can provide us with a necessary starting point for the discussion of the power of mass media companies as institutions with transnational connections and with ideological, economic, and political implications.

Broadcast networks see the expansion and diversification of their companies to foreign markets as something natural and borne out of some altruistic and benevolent goal of the networks to connect Filipinos worldwide. The fact that these media companies think it is normal for them to expand their

¹¹ This public service program is hosted by a lawyer, Lou Tancinco, and a well-known Filipino celebrity, Eric Quizon, and deals with topics being faced by overseas Filipinos such as family separation, fraud, and deportation. It also features success stories of Filipino immigrants.

businesses has brought to the fore one of the main points of political economy: Economic (and political) capital and power are concentrated in the hands of the few, which has implications on the way information is framed, delivered, and accessed. This thinking legitimizes the duopolistic control of ABS-CBN and GMA-7 in the Philippines and internationally. This concentration also tends to privilege and prioritize the interests of TNMCs to the detriment of national media. In the case of the Philippines, the dominance of ABS-CBN and GMA means that small and alternative forms of media cannot compete locally, much less globally, effectively silencing competing voices. This is where new media may provide a challenge by providing audiences access to other content and by providing smaller media producers an alternative platform, but this area remains contentious because local broadcast companies also have ties with major Internet providers. (This is an area with a lot of potential for future research.)

From a macro perspective, the Philippines' status as a developing economy puts its networks at a disadvantage as they compete with more established transnational media corporations that have the financial resources, political clout, and the necessary infrastructure to expand their bases of operations. Philippine broadcast networks have to enter into agreements with foreign partners, which help them expand their physical infrastructure but also put them under the influence of more established Western media corporations. This means that the reach and power they are supposed to exert on a global scale is tempered by the nuances of business and by political and cultural accommodations. When seen from this perspective, Philippine broadcast networks are still disempowered institutions that, in a way, also reflect issues of inequality between developed and developing nations.

Media entities' need to maximize profits affects the way they frame and deliver content. For example, there is a large discrepancy between the numbers of programs that are meant specifically for and produced by the diaspora, and the programs produced in the Philippines, which are still mostly local in orientation in terms of subject matter and the use of language. With their base of operations in the Philippines, these networks may see the production of programs for, about, and by the Filipino diaspora as costly—as something that will greatly reduce profit margins. If this is the case, these broadcast networks render their international stations as just another platform for their content, or mere extensions of their home markets.

However, it is also important to point out that in recent years there has been a noticeable increase in the number of soap operas and movies with OFWs or migrants as characters;¹² of public affairs programs¹³ that deal with the brighter side of diaspora, including the success of Filipinos abroad; and of soap operas using foreign countries as locations¹⁴ (this also coincides with the per-country distribution of Filipinos). These efforts may be part of the networks' approach to assimilate the stories of the Filipino diaspora, apart from their participation in reality and franchise shows, into their content and to integrate

¹² For example, soap operas and drama anthologies such as *Kung Ako'y Iiwan Mo (If You Will Leave Me)* (2012), *Maalaala Mo Kaya (Will You Remember?)*, both from ABS-CBN.

¹³ Public affairs programs include *OFW Diaries* and *Boarding Pass* from GMA.

¹⁴ ABS-CBN produced the soap operas *Princess and I* (2012–2013), shot in Bhutan; *A Beautiful Affair* (2012), shot in Austria and Japan; and *Kailangan Ko'y Ikaw (I Need You)* (2013), shot in Hong Kong.

the diaspora into the landscape of media representations and to demonstrate the scope and reach of these networks.

Last, following Herman and McChesney's (1997) argument that media outputs in today's society are commodified and designed to serve market ends, not citizenship needs, the increased command of information flow and political influence gives mass media the ability to set the media-political agenda. The Filipino diaspora is located within the workings of capital by virtue of its members' labor, and by incorporating them into the production of media content, these networks send a signal to Filipinos living and working abroad that the networks exists to tell their stories, to cater to them, while at the same time serving Filipino viewers residing in the Philippines. Both strategies have successfully allowed these networks to attain economies of scale.

Conclusion: Future Areas of Research

Apart from what I have mentioned about the relatively unexplored area for research on new media in terms of ownership structure and its power to control access to relevant media content coming from small media players, political economy can still guide future research directions in this field, especially in terms of the diversification process of local networks and their relationship with established TNMCs vis-à-vis the country's legal framework on media ownership. For example, while Rupert Murdoch's Star TV had a difficult time expanding in the Philippines in the early 1990s (Santos, 2000), there are now indications that this law has been circumvented through distribution and licensing deals. While Star TV has not been able to penetrate the Philippine market, Fox Television has found a partner in GMA-7. Turner Broadcasting System's CNN also partnered with Solar News Corporation and has now rebranded RPN-9 to become CNN Philippines. In relation to these developments, what are the implications of the Salim group's having a controlling share in TV5 (via MediaQuest) and *BusinessWorld* (a local broadsheet), as Tiglao (2014) asserted?

Further, while a political economy framework is useful for analyzing the structure of media industries and their relationships to broader questions of power in society, it is also limited in terms of its analysis of the role of the agent (the Filipino diaspora in this case) and in the creation and generation of meaning between media text and its recipients. Therefore, it is also important for researchers to explore the following areas: the reception and the creation of meanings generated by these programs from the perspective of the transient and migrant and first- and second-generation Filipinos and how they differ in their reception; the use of postcolonial theories in analyzing the role of media companies in creating a discourse on Filipino citizenship and nationalism; the role of second-generation Filipinos who have been exposed to various cultures and given access to technology in the production of content, which can also be seen in two ways: in their integration into the overall programming of these networks or in their capacity as independent producers of media texts using other platforms of distribution (the Internet and mobile phones, for example) in order to present alternative stories.

This article has offered a broad institutional perspective into how Philippine broadcast companies have expanded their market and programmed their content for the Filipino diaspora, and in doing so, it has highlighted the importance of studying media as economic and political institutions. It has also pointed

out the need for scholars to focus our attention on the role of media companies from developing countries in the global exchange of products and services. As this article has shown, Philippine broadcast media may well be part of the system that will continue to propagate and harp about the success of capitalism and the need for corporate integration in a globalized world, but, echoing Tiglao's (2014) sentiment, the downside to this is that it may ensure the end of whatever independence, no matter how illusory it might seem, that Philippine mass media purports to have.

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