Diasporic Errantry

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Abstract The paper engages with Edouard Glissant's idea of "errantry" in relation to his "Poetics of Relation" through the lens of the Filipino experience of diaspora—but one that is not just a matter of dispersion, but of repatriation. The idea is deployed in undertaking a diasporic critique that focuses on repatriation, both metaphorically and materially, as it is historically embedded in literary and cultural spheres, of the Philippine experience. To this end, discussed first is "rhetorical repatriation" as it is aesthetically worked into the textual mobility of figures and play of figurations in a compilation of prayers by Marcelo H. del Pilar published during the Reform Movement under the Spanish colonial regime (1565-1898). Discussed second is "material repatriation" today as embodied today in the act of naming people and objects which are associative of their function in relation to the diasporic identity of the Filipino overseas contract workers (OCWs), as in the case of the *balikbayan* and the *balikbayan* box. The analysis focuses on the dynamic processes of linguistic and stylistic engagement and transformative refunctioning across literary-critical practices. The goal is to explore the ways by which the experience of repatriation under globalization helps define Filipino diaspora, impelled as it is by errantry's tension in diasporic space, ripping apart yet carving identities, which are at once lived, challenged, and negotiated and renegotiated by OCWs as repatriates in that space of everyday between life and death.

Keywords Errantry; Edouard Glissant; diaspora; balikbayan box; Marcelo H. del Pilar; MIGRANTE International

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Introduction

Understood broadly, diaspora is the scattering of people from an established homeland; it is either forced, like refugees, or voluntary, like self-exiles. Filipinos are neither but with millions of Filipinos living and working abroad in the last 50 years, diaspora has been as much borne out of want as out of need to survive. Driven by a range of factors, mostly, by economic opportunities, Filipino diaspora has become a global phenomenon. Understandably, this diasporic will to survive has also had a significant impact on their lives, constituting their cultural identity.[1]

Figure 1. Global flight statistics. (Navigraph user-uploaded illustration, posted online)

1 Yoonet discusses the impact of the Filipino diaspora on cultural identity and ethics, emphasizing how living abroad shapes a unique fusion of Asian and Western values in the modern Filipino workforce. See Yoonet, Balikbayan: The Filipino Diaspora and Its Impact on the Cultural Identity and Work Ethic of Employees Today, www.yoonet.io/insights/balikbayan-the-filipino-diaspora-and-its-impact-on-the-cultural-identity-and-work-ethic-of-employees-today. 20 December. 2024.

Filipino emigration of the inhabitants of what is now known as the Philippine archipelago has a long history. In precolonial times, they traveled to nearby areas, mainland Asia, and Southeast Asia, to actively exchange goods and services with their neighbors in a network of trading partnerships across the islands.[1] During the Spanish colonialism, Filipinos immigrated farther away to Guam, Mexico, Spain, and elsewhere in Europe, as workers, professionals, and students, even as they continued to immigrate to the same neighboring islands, historically.[2]

Records show that the islands of what is now called Mindanao in Southern Philippines had particularly active migratory movements into and out of Indonesia. Farther away, during the American colonial period, Filipino students and workers began migrating to the US even in the early years of occupation so that by 1940, 98,000 Filipinos were already residing in the US. The number could have been bigger had it not been due to the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1935 which reclassified Filipinos as aliens to discourage Filipino immigration.[3]

Filipino Diasporic Dispersion

Diasporic dispersion is an unmistakable, indeed, obvious, feature of diaspora,

1 The first recorded Philippine migration dates back to 1417, when Sultan Paduka Batara led a mission to China to enhance trade relations. For details, see "Batara, Sultan Paduka," *GeoCities*, www.geocitiessites.com/sinupan/batara.htm. 27 December 2024. See also “607th Anniversary of Ancient Sulu King’s Visit to China Commemorated.” Philippine News Agency. https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1233582. September 17, 2024. 28 December 2024.

2 Under Spanish rule in the 18th century, Manila maintained trade relations with Acapulco, which started the migration of Filipino seafarers to Mexico. Following the migration to Mexico, Filipino seafarers started settlements in Louisiana while other Filipino migrants were working as fruit pickers in California. At the end of the 19th century, Filipino students, professionals, and exiles migrated to Europe.

3 Large-scale migrations between the Philippines and the United States occurred from 1906 to the 1940s, facilitated by the status of Filipinos as U.S. nationals under American colonization. However, the passage of the Tydings-McDuffie Act in 1934 restricted Filipino migration to only 50 individuals per year. This limitation was paradoxically offset by the U.S. Navy's recruitment of Filipino Americans, who were exempt from these restrictions, to support American military efforts. For more details, see "History of Philippine Migration," *Center for Migrant Advocacy*, www.centerformigrantadvocacy.com/philippine-migration/history-of-philippine-migration/.15 December 2024.

generally.[1] As Figure 1 shows, Filipinos are nearly everywhere on earth. It has been estimated that more than 15 million people reside in 160 countries outside the Philippines. Countries where Filipinos have significant populations are the United States, Canada, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Japan, Australia, Kuwait,Malaysia, Qatar, Singapore, France, Spain, United Kingdom, Hong Kong, Italy, Jordan, and Lebanon. By significant, what is meant is the degree of their ubiquity in these countries is palpable and their presence most felt in terms of impact on the socio-economic life of the host countries. But many Filipinos are also found in Argentina, Australia, Austria, The Bahamas, Bahrain, Belgium, Brazil, Brunei, Canada, China, Cuba, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Faroe Islands, Fiji, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Guam, Hong Kong, Iceland, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Sabah, Luxembourg, Macau, Malaysia, Maldives, Micronesia, Monaco, Morocco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, and many more. It is said that if you light up all the dots on a globe pointing to countries with Filipinos in them, the globe will light up brighter than a Christmas tree. Needless to say, the Filipinos who have ended up living diasporic lives repeatedly or for long periods, are no longer the same people as the ones who left the country for the first time.[2]

Indeed, the term from Edouard Glissant that comes to mind to describe such a migratory phenomenon across the globe is “errantry”—described broadly as the nomadic wandering of a people whose encounters and new experiences have shaped

1 Over a million Filipinos leave the country each year to live and work abroad. Diaspora is historically associated with the idea of dispersion, the scattering of people away from their homeland; hence, the idea of centrifugal force away from home. But diaspora is also about the centripetal force of returning home. In this paper, they are both parts of the diasporic narrative, inextricable from each other because the Filipino diaspora is undergirded by the two forces, rendered meaningful by the diasporic “balikbayan”—both situational and aspirational.

2 The translation of the term *errance,* as discussed in Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation,* highlights its nuanced meaning. While *errance* is commonly translated as "wandering," the term "errantry" is deemed more fitting for Glissant's context. This translation aligns with previous interpretations of Aimé Césaire’s works. For Glissant, *errance* is neither linear like the trajectory of an arrow nor circular and repetitive like the nomad's path. Instead, it embodies a sense of purposeful, sacred movement, as opposed to aimless roaming. See Glissant, Édouard. *Poetics of Relation*. Translated by Betsy Wing, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1997, p. 211.

their lives.[1] Evidently, such errantry has, in fact, become constitutive of the identity formation of the diasporic Filipino.

Apart from women domestic helpers who dot the globe, Filipino sailors are illustrative of the diasporic Filipinos' tangled routes on and between land and water. The Philippines is the largest supplier of seafarers in the world. They serve the top fleets from Greece, China, Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and the Philippines, including merchant fleets, oil tankers, general cargo, container ships, passenger chips, and liquefied natural gas tankers. Name the global space, the Filipino sailors are there in place. In fact, it is said that Filipinos are preferred on cruise ships in particular because they are able to adapt to different cultures and languages, love to explore new cultures and meet diverse people, and experience the world firsthand.[2] With such a culture underpinned by what may be called a "diasporic spirit," Filipino seafarers have been praised in the media for being ideal workers in international crews. Indeed, the Filipinos' experience in centuries of seafaring has served them well.[8]

Figure 2. Philippine travelers' global flight routes.
(Philippine Airlines Flight Route Map, posted online)

1 However, a study provides a contrasting perspective on the lives of Filipino seafarers, emphasizing the harsh realities of their experiences at sea. According to Thelma B. Magcuro, "Contrary to the common belief that seafarers live a privileged life, the truth is they are one of the most vulnerable groups of workers. They are exposed to the physical dangers of life at sea, unscrupulous ship masters, and a life of boring routine and constant loneliness. It is a life of severe peril and exertion." See Magcuro, Thelma B., "Filipino Seafarers: How Are They Faring? (A Situationer)," *Philippine Journal of Social Development*, vol. 2, 2010, p. 23, www.cswcd.upd.edu.ph/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/PJSD-Vol-2-2010_Magcuro.pdf.

2 "Clues of advanced ancient technology found in the Philippines and Island Southeast Asia," *Business Mirror*. If verified, this discovery attests to the long tradition of seafaring in the islands. https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/02/21/clues-of-advanced-ancient-technology-found-in-the-philippines-and-island-southeast-asia/

Visually heuristic of this kind of errantry is the image of plane routes over a world map, crisscrossing distances with markers from point to point glowing in sparks ("tilamsik"). As suggested by Figure 2, which traces the flights of Philippine Airlines, the country's flag carrier, if one imagines the plane routes in the image as Filipino overseas workers flying to and fro, going abroad for work, and coming back to the Philippines for family, literally, one sees dynamic, if also somewhat disorienting, movements happening simultaneously. Indeed, only a strong diasporic disposition could adapt to this kind of synchronic spacial multiplicity. Such multiple mobilities mark the shifts in space as well as transformations in identity in relation to others in mutual constitution, affecting the limits of their lives every day. In the maze of comings and goings across oceans, their diasporic imaginary has learned to envision a future of freedom.

A close look at the imagined world map shows that the "place" of home-and-not-home lies in the diasporic relation between spaces and across spaces, marking repatriative trajectories. For example, from their homeland (Place 1), the diasporic Filipinos go to Italy where they have initially found work as caregivers (Place 2) and stay there for a contract of two-three years. Then, they go home as *balikbayan* or repatriate (Place 3) until they learn of a vacancy in the UK as a nanny that pays better and so decides to live there for several years (Place 4), or depending on the employment contract, which is often short-term. Then, they return home as *balikbayan* again upon the end of that contract (Place 5). After a couple of months' vacation, they are back "in flight," having found a job as domestic helpers in the United Arab Emirates, or maybe Korea, drivers in Hong Kong (Place 6), *ad infinitum*.[1] A similar "itinerary" happens to millions of overseas contract workers, crossing over each other sometimes in really quick overlapping succession like a zigzag zipper mass.

As the image suggests, there are numerous dots indicating relational routes on the world map, wrapping all around the globe in sparks, through all their dispersions, dislocations, and displacements, the routes enmeshed in interlocking directions, rooted but not quite, akin to Deleuzian roots. Note the contingent trajectory of flows of errantry of the diasporic Filipino on the map, crisscrossing places across spaces in multiple and mixed trajectories in which the identity of one is contingent upon another across entangled departures, arrivals, transits, and transfers at layover points. On the map are indirect connections where departure

1 "Place" is generally understood to mean a located space where identity and sense of rootedness are shaped for an individual or a community, as opposed to space which is physical, yet abstract and open, implying mobility.

destination points are relative to any other intermediate points, contingent upon routes.

Associative of Edouard Glissant's errantry here is his principle of "poetics" of relation in which the rhizomatic network characterizing archipelagic thought involves a multiplicity of vantages from which, in effect, one recognizes one's own otherness.[1] Drawing from Glissant, this is what might be called the archipelagic orientation: the tangled routes enabling the recognition of one's islandness only upon one's awareness of an other—of the next island here and the next one there, and so on.

From this perspective, as in the case of Filipino seafarers, their sense of dwelling in ships is situated in principle both in place and in space—across the oceans and under the skies—at once fixed and located in place and but equally mobile, enduring, and ephemeral in space. As illustrated by the case of the Filipino domestic helpers, dwelling is that space between departure and arrival and between being rooted and uprooted—a home-not-home that offers both possibilities and limits, while nonetheless constituting the dynamic of identity formation in errantry. It is in the dialectic of this movement that produces the errantry's poetics.[2]

Diasporic Critique: Errantry in Dispersion, Dislocation, and Displacement

The complexity of Philippine diasporic culture as represented in literature and film, in particular, is marked by an attention to multiple movements and directions constituted by what I have referred to above to as "sparks" and "trajectories" in undertaking what may be called a "diasporic critique." It is a mode of analysis consisting of the examination of the social, cultural and economic forces and contradictions that are inscribed in literary and cultural texts that perpetuate

1 Glissant's Poetics of Relation is understood as the encounter of multiple vantage points in mutual recognition of each other without domination because "in Relation every subject is an object, and every object is a subject." *Poetics of Relation* by Edouard Glissant. Trans Betsy Wing. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997. p. xx.

2 In Glissant's use, an important dimension of the term "errantry" is the opposite of rootedness. He says, for example, "The Caribbean is a land of rootedness and of errantry." *Poetics of Relation* by Edouard Glissant. Trans Betsy Wing. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997. p. 211.

inequalities specifically in the world of Filipinos in diaspora.[1]

Following the mobile and relational language of Glissant's poetics in *Poetics of Relation*, errantry, in "diasporic critique" foregrounds the dynamics of dispersion, dislocation/displacement in all their combinations and contradictions. However, a "diasporic critique" is not just about logic, reasoning, and argumentation; it is as much philosophy as poetry, at once factual and figurative, skidding from one to the other in a poetics of mobility.

Illustrative of figurative dispersion, dislocation and displacement in literature and literary studies, is the errantry of "parody." *Dasalan at Tocsohan* (Prayers and Jokes) by Marcelo H. del Pilar, one of the leaders of the Propaganda Movement (roughly between 1880 and 1895) is a compilation of prayers in what are referred to as "parodies." It was published in 1888 when he was in Barcelona, the prayers-turned-jokes in the compilation were critical of the Spanish friars and the colonial government's abuses. Del Pilar was the founding editor of the Tagalog-Spanish newspaper *Diariong Tagalog* (1882) and co-publisher of *La Solidaridad* (1889), the newspaper of the Propaganda Movement published in Spain.

A collection of parodies which came out in loose pamphlets, *Dasalan at Tocsohan* was a series of formal dispersions, dislocations, and displacements across textual and discursive conventions, using the format of a Catholic prayer book to

1 In diasporic dispersion, the complex movements implied are centrifugal and centripetal. One movement manifesta in, for lack of a better term, the centrifugal splash of *kislap* (sparks) as figures thrown off the "map," leaving traces between points of departure and arrival. The other movement is the centripetal *tilapon* (trajectory) in the language of tropes of home-not home, using familiar motifs in old Tagalog films and radio soap operas, structuring their narratives, where the "story" itself lies not in the two points but in-between. *Kislap* and *tilapon* heuristically function as figurations of a migratory movement, representing the bursting into the global scene of formerly colonized people from the different parts of the globe now "colonizing" the homes of their former colonizers, cooking their food, washing their clothes, cleaning their houses, and taking care of their children, some of whom now speak with Filipino accent—"marginal' peoples—that accent that speaks of a dream of a possible brilliance of their future.

parody Spanish creeds and catechetical dogmas, that ridiculed the friars.[1]

Rhetoric of repatriation

Parody or "parodia" goes back to ancient Greek literature, referring to a narrative

1 *Dasalan at Tocsohan,* published in 1888*,* is said to be jointly authored by Marcelo H. del Pilar, Pedro Serrano Laktaw, and Rafael Enriquez. The Ten Comandments is a prayer parodied in the compilation in Tagalog. Following the Tagalog original is the English translation.
Parody of "Ang Sampung Utos ng Diyos" (The Ten Commandments**)**
1. I, the Lord, am your God. You shall not have any other gods besides me.
2. You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain.
3. Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day.
4. Honor your father and mother.
5. You shall not kill.
6. You shall not commit adultery.
7. You shall not steal.
8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
9. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's good.
The Greatest Commandment
You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul, with your whole mind.
You shall love your neighbor as yourself.
Ang Manga Utos Nang Fraile
Ang manga utos nang Fraile ay sampo:
Ang nauna: Sambahin mo ang Fraile na lalo sa lahat.
Ang icalaua: Huag cang mag papahamac manuba nang ngalang deretsos.
Ang icatlo: Manalanguin ca sa Fraile Domingo man at fiesta.
Ang icapat: Isangla mo ang catauan mo sa pagpapalibing sa ama't ina,
Ang icalima: Huag cang mamamatay cung uala pang salaping pang libing.
Ang icanim: Huag cang maquiapid sa kanyang asaua.
Ang icapito: Huag cang maquinacao.
Ang icaualo: Huag mo silang pagbibintangan, cahit ca masinungalingan.
Ang icasiyam: Huag mong ipag cait ang iyong asaua.
Ang icapulo: Huag mong itangui ang iyong ari.
Itong sampong utos nang Fraile'I dalaua ang quinaoouian.
Ang isa: Sambahin mo ang Fraile lalo sa lahat.
Ang icalaua: Ihayin mo naman sa caniya ang puri mo't cayamanan. Siya naua.
The Commandments of the Friar
The friar's commandments are ten:
The first: Adore the Fraile above all.
The second: Don't insult people in the name of straightness.
The third: Pray to Fraile Domingo at the fiesta.
The fourth: Pledge your property to bury your father and mother,
The fifth: Don't die without funeral money.
The sixth: Don't cheat on your wife.
The seventh: Don't steal along with him.
The eighth: Don't accuse them, you might be lied to.
The ninth: Don't cheat on your wife.
The tenth: Don't touch your genitals.
The ten commandments of the Friar, ultimately lead to two:
One: Worship the Fraile above all.
Second: Offer him your praise and riches. Amen.

poem imitating the style and prosody of epics which Filipino intellectuals, writers, and artists like del Pilar or Graciano Lopez Jaena, who studied in Spain, knew only too well. Today, parody is also associated with forms like pastiche, skit, and burlesque, and in its subtler iteration, it is akin to "irony." These styles or techniques, as conventionally understood, are all of Western origin, the aesthetic taste for which was mainly acquired from centuries of colonial education under Spain, and then of the United States.

At times verging on the satirical, del Pilar's "prayers" in the compilation imitate familiar Catholic prayers such as the "Hail Mary" or "Our Father" in a distinctly humorous way through the deployment of rhetorical word-play, linguistic displacement, and semantic substitution. In places, the lines seem like comic spoofs. But published in the late 19th century within the most oppressive last decades of the Spanish colonial era, these imitative "prayers" move one notch funnier, even more biting than satire, as the tone turns nearly burst into sarcasm.

To illustrate: In the prayer, "Hail Mary," the first line goes, "Hail Mary, Full of Grace…" In Tagalog, that line is correctly translated as, "Aba Ginoong Maria, Napupuno ka ng grasya…" In del Pilar's parody, however, "Napupuno" (full) becomes "nakapupuno" (able to fill). Two strategic linguistic, verbal, and rhetorical shifts are employed in this word play: first, a prefix is added ("naka"), changing the adjective into a verb ("napupuno" versus "nakapupuno"), implying a subject doing the stealing, which is not in the original, implying an object only; and second, when "grasya" (grace) is changed to "alkansya" (piggy bank), what results is the line's refiguration from the invocation of spiritual "grasya" to the evocation of materialistic "alkansya," transforming the text from the prescriptive singular meaning inscribed by the frailocracy to a dispersive, interpretive plenitude. The substitution ironically links together the two words through the rhyme pattern of their last two syllables but as it does also implicitly juxtaposes them with the inscription of opposite meanings. The substitution, displacement, and re-figuration alone have changed the tone of the line from mere parodic imitation to a biting critique. What this apparently quick verbal trick is able to accomplish is to introduce an anti-colonial practice that deftly reduces the value of something supposedly holy or spiritual to one that is monetary and materialistic. This literary practice and critical strategy deployed by del Pilar would prove to be useful later in postcolonial criticism.

Overall, the stylistic and tonal shifts in Pilar's parody were meant to produce mockery or insult, assuming that the readers are aware of the object (and subject) of imitation. Del Pilar's parody crosses the comedic line when it makes a strong

critical commentary that is embedded in the imitation itself. Moreover, the parody slides across conventions as it turns into a satire while still drawing from the original "prayer," in which the parody becomes the medium for a piercing criticism about larger issues which would no longer be narrowly religious and catechetical but tactically political and strategically emancipatory. Finally, what is satirical in del Pilar's parody turns sarcastic when verbal tone, generic techne, and reformist intention combine in a way that what is comedic is now meant to sting with utter and unmistakable contempt.

Del Pilar's "parody" is all of that, albeit its radical edge owes to its expansion of the foreign form through its local inflection. Its potency emerges from a textual push-and-pull or linguistic coming--and-going at that precise moment of recognition in which while the original—that pious, foreign colonial text—wrestles identity away from the colonized people, the imitative, comedic, decolonizing parodic voice of the "native" struggles to regain it.

The decolonizing textual process deploying parody is repatriative in the aesthetic movement of the parody and the anti-colonial attitude of the critique. At the repatriative moment of "striking back," the "prayers" is by turns satirical, sarcastic, and funny for which del Pilar's parodic criticism of the colonial order dominated by the friars would come down in the Philippine literary history as the most damning yet, alongside Rizal's novels.[1] This is the dynamic of contrapuntal forces in Glissant's errantry of hybridity or creolization rearing its emancipatory head of the literary kind during the Spanish colonial regime in the Philippines, as early as 1888.

In this Philippine example though, hybridity, has at least two sides: one faces the past (in the parody, this refers to the old text, the original, and the other faces the future (the imitation, in its new hybridized and refunctioned form) owing to the formal, textual encounter between the colonizer and the colonized. Imposed by one, refunctioned by the other, undermined is the authenticity of the friar's voice (standing in for "God" as well as the State) as implied by the original text through the insertion of the Other in the very act of parodying in the mode of activist

1 In Jose Rizal's novel, *Noli MeTangere* (1887), the main protagonist is named Crisostomo Ibarra, a Filipino-Spanish mestizo who returns to the country after studying in Europe for a few years in order to undertake reforms by building a school in his hometown. His second novel, El Filibusterismo (1891) is the sequel of the first whose main character, Crisostomo Ibarra, is now disguised as "Simoun." The purpose of his return is no longer to undertake reforms but to foment a revolution.

intervention.[1]

The power of the hybrid in del Pilar's "prayers" is evident in commandment number seven of the Ten Commandments, which says, "You shall not steal." In Tagalog translation, it is "Huwag kang magnakaw." But in del Pilar's parody, a simple, everyday prefix, "maki," is added so the line now goes, "Huwag kang makinakaw." The prefix "maki" means to join or take part in, as in "makisama" ((for example, to get along in order to become part of a gang) or "makihalubilo" (for example, to socialize with the members of a clique) like members of a band of thieves. The addition of the prefix "maki" to "nakaw" (steal), spins around the meaning to point to a thief who is so rapacious that he does the stealing solo so he could keep all the loot to himself.

By underscoring the dialectic tension between the original and the imitation, the parody transforms into a diasporic critique itself in which "the empire writes back," impelled by the imaginary's emancipatory desire for a better *Las Islas Filipinas*. As in the nature of parodies, *Dasalan and Tocsohan*'s power lies in the tension that develops in the movement between the reader's knowledge of the original text and its parody, the shuttling back and forth from word to word and back, line by line, producing a hybrid text – the "contact zone."[2]

What takes place is a kind of metaphorical repatriation where the text of the original looks similar yet different in places as it turns and returns, in the process,

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1 Attributed to Homi K. Bhabha, the term "hybridity" refers to the "Third Space of Enunciation" in which two or more cultures mix and interact in a mutual constitution, influencing each other to create an international culture made up of people with a shared identity in the in-between space. It is a controversial term because, among other reasons, it assumes a world of equality and is not dominated by a few powerful forces protecting their own vested interest. Hybridity's double-discourse is constituted between colonialism and the post-colonialism. As hybridity is deployed in the example of M.H. del Pilar's parody, hybridity is Janus-faced, with its colonial face representing the original and the parody representing resistance to domination, facing the post-colonial future. However, critics have warned against the use of the term hybridity in contemporary cultural discourse because of its historical association with racial categories of the past with racist implications.

2 Mary Louise Pratt considers parody as one of the arts of critique or one of "the literate arts of the contact zone. By this, parody becomes one of the social spaces where cultures meet, class and grapple with each other, of ten in contexts of asymmetrical relations of power." p. 37.

She draws from ethnographer's term, "transculturation," to refer to processes "whereby members of subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted by a dominant or metropolitan culture." p. 36.

Pratt, Mary Louise. "Arts of the Contact Zone." *Profession*, (1991) pp. 33-40 Published by: Modern Language Association: http://www.jstor.org/stable/25595469.

transforming a prayer into its spectre, its parody. In the parody—the very contact zone of the foreign and the native, the colonizer and the colonized—the set of commandments self-destructs even as the parody builds a new one, emerging from a palimpsest of meanings inscribed in the linguistic and rhetorical shifts.[1]

Glissant refers to the imaginary as "all the ways a culture has of perceiving and conceiving of the world" which might be read upon the layers of figures and figurations in the parodic play which might be instructive to a diasporic critique for the present context.[2] Today, the diasporic experience is potentially poetic in the sense described above but also political, at once driven and inspired by an image of the world so unlike the one that the diasporic Filipinos have left back "home" and the world they have encountered. Still, they long for a home that makes the idea of repatriation richly meaningful. Anticipatory of the "new" world waiting for them in the host country, yet equally wary of its failed promises, constituting the tension that both connects and separates relational subjects in errantry, a process of diasporic repatriation which is a function of the experience of dispersion, dislocation, and displacement—the embodiment of the Filipino OCWs, Overseas Contract Workers (Figure 3).

Figure 3. *Hong Kong OFW packs her* balikbayan *box right beside the shop that will deliver the item to her home in the Philippines. (*Sunday Beauty Queen*, Voyage Studios, Tuko Film Productions, Buchi Boy Films, 2016, screen capture)*

1 In the case of these prayers, parody constitutes a layer of the decolonizing palimpsest whose radical edge is enabled by yet another layer in translation in which the principle of equivalence between languages underpinning conventional tradition theory is rejected. This rejection is the springboard for the subversive parodic effect.

2 Glissant, Edouard. *Poetics of Relation.* Translated by Betsy Wing. Ann Arbor: The U of Michigan P, 1997, p. 18-19.

In Philippine history particularly in the case of del Pilar and his works, the Filipino's anti-racist, anti--obscurantist and reformist struggle for representation in the Spanish Cortes would meet its downfall with the execution of Jose Rizal; but shortly after, the revolutionary movement struggling for independence would rise through the sheer power of conviction of the Katipunan. Inspired by nationalism and the Enlightenment's promise, the triumphant revolution would be soon followed by a betrayal with the violent and treacherous American Occupation of the islands.[1]

Diasporic Critique: The Subject/Object in Repatriation

Figure 4. *LBC Estill Springs boxes. (Kristine's Filipino Goodies,* Facebook *page) Balikbayan*

Indeed, in the contemporary world, the most emblematic of errantry is the diasporic Filipino working class overseas, specifically, the *balikbayan* (repatriate) and their globally ubiquitous *balikbayan* boxes shown in Figure 4.

As suggested by the global map discussed above, overseas contract workers travel away from home in dynamic mobilities of centrifugal splash of sparks ("tilamsik") only to return home one day in the centripetal trajectory ("tilapon") of the *balikbayan*. The trajectory is a back-and-forth movement of the repatriate, the returning resident, or the "returnee" coming home, whether permanently or not. Diasporic repatriation of Filipinos is a narrative of errantry that unfolds as *kislap* and *tilapon* in time and space.

The main idea that "balikbayan" carries concerns Filipinos who come back

1 This refers to the Philippine Islands, as the Philippines was called "Las Islas Filipinas" in honor of King Philip II of Castile.

to visit family, celebrate holidays, or reconnect with their roots "back home." Underlying such returns is a sense of nostalgia and a desire to reconnect with one's home and heritage or, upon the end of the contract with a former employer, only to await a new one with another elsewhere in the globe. In this sense, it also means a hiatus, a temporal in-between in the dialectic of dwellings that gives diasporic space both a sense of philosophical abstraction and renders diasporic place an archipelagic concreteness.

Indeed, a prominent theme in Philippine literary tradition revolves around repatriation, *pagbabalik sa bayan* ("the return to nation") in which the main characters in literary texts are the repatriates, the *balikbayan*. The national hero, Jose Rizal, in his life and works, represented the Filipino repatriate. He lived and studied in Europe for years and so did the main characters of his famous novels, *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, Ibarra and Simoun respectively. Both suffered out of their desire to serve the country; one to undertake reform, and the other to wage a revolution. Indeed, many Tagalog films revolve around the loves and lives of the *balikbayan*.[1]

Predictably, the narrative of today's balikbayans are told by government institutions, overseas employment agencies, and the media, wrestling away the term's real meaning today from the balikbayans themselves. Filipino students are told in the classroom that the overseas contract workers are heroes because of their

1 Among the numerous films about the lives of Filipino overseas contract works films abroad and repatriates are: *Miss X* (1980), '*Merika* (1984); *Birds of Prey* (1988); *Minsan May Pangarap* (1995); *Barcelona* (2006); with *Bukas...May Pangarap* (1984) and *Homecoming* (2003) about returnees - all by *Gil Portes. Pinay, American Style* (1979) & *Waikiki* (1980), with *Otso* (2013) about a returnee - all by Elwood Perez, *The Secrets of Sarah Jane: Sana'y Mapatawad Mo* (1994); *Minsan, May Isang Ina* (1983) by Maryo J. de los Reyes, *The Flor Contemplacion Story* (1995), *The Sarah Balabagan Story* (1997), *Migrante* (2012), with *Isa Pang Bahaghari* (2020) and *Lockdown* (2021) about returnees, by Joel Lamangan, *Ang Bagong Bayani* (1995) by Tikoy Aguiluz, *Inagaw Mo ang Lahat sa Akin* (1995) has a returnee character; by Carlos Siguion-Reyna, *May Nagmamahal sa Iyo* (1996) by Marilou Diaz-Abaya, *Milan* (2004) and *Barcelona: A Love Untold* (2016) by Olivia M. Lamasan, *Caregiver* (2008) with *Signal Rock* (2018) featuring returnees by *Chito S. Roño, Sunday Beauty Queen* (2016) by Baby Ruth Villarama, *Kita Kita* (2017) by Sigrid Andrea Bernardo.

sacrifices for the country, evoking the memory of the national hero.[1] They are called "mga bayani ng bayan" (the country's heroes) in direct allusion to the national hero, Jose Rizal, appropriating his patriotic deeds and justifying the continued exploitation of Filipino labor abroad while corrupt state functionaries and employment agencies make money out of them.

Repatriation is a process that occurs when people—balikbayans—return to their home country after living, or working abroad. For example, when the contract of the overseas contract workers is up, they may decide to return home in the interim between contracts. Interestingly, in finance, the term repatriation refers to the conversion or exchange of foreign currency into someone's home currency; in this sense, human labor converts into a kind of "currency translation."

It is common knowledge that the remittances of the balikbayans add substantially to the country's income even as they also line the pockets of corrupt government officials and greedy private agencies alike, on top of bleeding the overseas contract workers dry from the processing of applications in the country to compliance with protocols upon their arrival in the host country abroad. Such global and local injustice and inequality are inscribed in the experience of Filipino diaspora. But such injustice is simply assumed, par for the course, where repatriation is both physical and psychical, in the phantasm of home away from home. Especially in the first years of exporting Filipino workers as government policy, many poor Filipinos from the rural areas were compelled to sell their carabaos and farms to be able to

1 An example of a student's essay about "Bayani ng Bayan" is copied below: "Overseas Filipino Workers are truly considered as the Bagong Bayani ng Bayan today because of their hard work, sacrifices, and working ethics that make them strong and stand still. Working abroad is such difficult work to do; you have to be away from your family and children, you are working for a foreign people, and you have to immediately adapt to the new environment because if not, you will find it very hard and cruel. They are not only working for some money reason, but they also represent the Philippines working in foreign countries. It signifies and describes the hardworking Filipinos around the world. They are considered economic heroes of the country because of their significant contribution to the growth of the Philippine economy. Continued growth in OFW remittances would support recovery in consumer spending, which accounts for nearly 70 percent of the economy, as well as supporting recovery of the country's GDP (gross domestic product)." www.coursehero.com/file/127081207/Overseas-Filipino-Workers-are-truly-considered-as-the-Bagong-Bayani-ng-Bayan-today-because-of-their/.

work abroad and return to their hometown eventually as *balikbayan*.[1]

Repatriation is a function of the experience of dispersion, dislocation, and displacement—the cultural logic of neoliberal globalization under which international labor mobility has increased while levels of exploitation and deregulation have accelerated. For the Filipino repatriate, home is as much an imagined space as a physical place, marked by repeated ambivalent departures and ambiguous arrivals, both meaningless without each other. Before leaving the country, they ask themselves: What for do I have to leave home? And when they return, they ask: What for do I have to stay home? The stakes are not only about a question of identity in relation to others but also one that is implicated in their battle for survival—between life and death.

In a Filipino balikbayan's mind, the issue is as much about just ensuring that there is a place for everyone at the table in a globalized world as it is about fighting to be sure that there is food on the table. It is not surprising that Filipino overseas contract workers often complain about receiving a measly pay for being treated like sub-humans abroad by their employers; so what might be surprising for some people is why they keep going back there knowing they would receive the same inhuman treatment anyway.

The drama of errantry warrants time, but it also takes place in space, a material and metaphorical one. The narrative of a number of Philippine literary and cultural texts, including films about Filipinos in diaspora, begins with a wish to go abroad that is equaled only by the wish to return as *balikbayan,* only to leave and return again, and again, from somewhere else. Like many OCWs from Indonesia, Vietnam, Bangladesh and so on, the Philippines' complex post-colonial archipelagic "repeating

1 Interestingly, repatriation also refers to the return of stolen or looted cultural materials to their countries of origin. The balikbayan program's history is summarized below: "In the 1970s former President Ferdinand Marco institutionalized a policy to encourage emigration to stimulate the economy. While these policies were aimed to be of a temporary nature, labor migration has been steadily increasing since. High unemployment and poor living standards combined with a government policy of emigration encouraged thousands of Filipinos to seek employment overseas. In 1972, former President Marcos imposed Martial Law leading to the exile of political opponents. The political, social and economic uncertainty under the martial law rule of President Marcos pushed opponents and middle class Filipinos to leave the country. Economic development in Asian neighbouring countries, the emergence of the Gulf region after the oil crisis, and the change in immigration policies of destination countries further stimulated migration. Even after the ousting of President Marcos, the Philippine government remained increasingly reliant on remittances. While the current administration refutes migration as a development strategy, it cannot deny its dependency on it." https://centerformigrantadvocacy.com/philippine-migration/history-of-philippine-migration/

islands" is home-not-home as depicted by Filipino films.[1]

In literary and filmic texts, the Filipino construction worker in the Middle East or the domestic helpers in Italy or the entertainer in Japan or the English teacher in Korea, always morph from the *balikbayan* (if they return alive) and a *balikbayan* box (if they return dead), at once unremarkably nondescript yet distinctly recognizable.

Balikbayan Box

Figure 5. *Artist's rendering of a typical* balikbayan *box. (Balikbayan Box Movement,* Facebook *page)*

1 The Philippine government's Balikbayan Program covers so many countries such as: Angloa, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Australia, Audtria, Bahamas, Bahrain, Barbados, Belize, Brazil, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Estonia, Fiji, Finland, France, Greece, Grenada, Guyana, Honduras, Hungary, Iseland, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Kuwait, Lietchtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Marshall Islands, Muritania, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, PalauPanama, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, Russia, Saudi Arabi, Senegal, Singapore, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Spain, Suriname, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, UK, US, Vatican, Venezuela, Vietnam, among others. https://centerformigrantadvocacy.com/philippine-migration/history-of-philippine-migration/ Many studies have shown how balikbayans play a central role in the economic development of the Philippines. One that focuses on the balikbayans from the US is "Migrant Returns: The Transnational Migration of Filipinos, Ambivalence, and the Production of Balikbayan Economy" by Eric John Pido. Dissertation, Ethnic Studies, Grad School, University of Berkeley, 2011.

Indeed, a *balikbayan* is nothing without a *balikbayan* box (literally "repatriate box") because *balikbayan* and the *balikbayan* box stand for and with each other like twin stars floating in the sky. In the Filipino imaginary, the *balikbayan,* is by definition, one who brings or sends home *balikbayan* boxes full of gifts. *Balikbayan* boxes are corrugated boxes full of a variety of items sent by overseas Filipinos (known as balikbayans) which are often shipped by freight forwarders or brought by Filipinos returning to the Philippines by air, as shown in Figure 5. Said to be a billion-dollar industry that alleviates the homesickness of Filipinos overseas, in the popular imagination, it has become a symbol of Filipinos working or living abroad whose income feeds family members, buys a house, helps extended family members, and sends their children to school. Having made it back home, they are said to have "made it abroad."

The *balikbayan* box is not just an object; rather, it's an object that is a subject, like a family member who comes home to warmly and cheerfully maintain the connections between home and not home. Balikbayans bring to their family and friends assorted gifts from abroad when they return, called the *pasalubong* (presents). Gift-giving is a deep-seated trait of Filipinos,, whether they are together or apart; as such, the *balikbayan* box is the figurative tie that binds dear lives that have been factually torn apart by globalization. As an article about the *balikbayan* box on the internet says, "This is the Filipino way. You can't go home without a box."[1]

Indeed, when one thinks of the global map with balikbayans flying all over the world, one also imagines images of "moving" boxes against immobile places. Drawing from Glissant, this box constitutes the world of the transnational Filipino repatriate, the embodiment of the sense of home that they have known in diaspora,

1 *Pasalubong* is a specific type of gift or present given in the practice of gift-giving that is embedded in the culture of reciprocity of Filipinos. The *balikbayan* box which is full of *pasalubong*, is said to symbolize love and care from relatives and loved ones living abroad, temporarily or permanently. They usually contain clothes, toys, and gadgets to give away—a gift-giving practice within the culture of reciprocity. Shyong, Frank. "Must Reads: These boxes are a billion-dollar industry of homesickness for Filipinos overseas." Los Angeles Times, 28 April, https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-balikbayan-boxes-20180428-htmlstory.html

mobile outside, yet immobile inside—the errantry, that is the Filipino diaspora.[1]

It is also the world from which they envision a future diasporically, the possibilities offered by the promise in the splash of sparks on the map—that explosion onto the contemporary scene of "marginal' peoples out of their impoverished country. Today, they have imaginary images of the hoped-for brilliance of prosperity in the future as they labor.

Finally, often, boxes of this kind are called in full—"balikbayan boxes"—by the recipients back home. But sometimes, they are just called "the box" by the balikbayans themselves (or alternatively, the "balikbayan") so coined by abbreviation like a nickname of a person in an odd sense of displacement and substitution, between object and the subject, the thing and the person, as if the words are interchangeable, as the commodified body of the *balikbayan* translates into the *balikbayan box* with its content carefully measured in cash.

Figure 6. *An entertainer's remains arrive at the airport for her family to pick up. (*Maricris Sioson: Japanyuki*, Regal Films, 1993, screen capture)*

1 The award-wining Tagalog short story, "Arrividerci," by Fanny A. Garcia is one of the first fictional texts by a canonical author in the Philippines to have tackled the tension in the lives of overseas contract workers, caught between the promise to the world's working class like Filipino women domestic helpers, which is at once given and withdrawn by globalization. Promised the freedom of the stars in the dream of diaspora, they awaken to tiny cubicles in which they are made to stay in the residence of their employers. At the core of its narrative aesthetic is a repetition of space-implying movements, both space-permitting and space-constricting ones. It is the space between home-and-not home in which the diasporic Filipino tries to endure the oppressive present and persist in dreaming of an emancipated future. As a scholar has remarked, "In this space, untruth becomes complicit with truth in an interlacing of localizing practices and migratory memories in this encounter between the European setting and Filipino narrative in the diaspora." In "Migratory Aesthetics in Diasporic Claustrophobia" by Maria Luisa Torres Reyes. *Mobility Humanities*.Vol. 1, No. 1, January 2022. p. 57.

Mostly, a box contains goodies of *pasalubong*. But sometimes, in fact and in fiction, what the "box" also alludes to is the coffin of an indescribable, dead body of the overseas contract worker returning home. In Tagalog films about balikbayans, this scene or sequence is always, for the local audiences, the most touching part in the narrative as it ends or begins with it.[1] Examples are shown in Figure 6 from a film about the deadly fate a Filipino OCW.

Figure 7. *A daughter breaks down when she realizes that she will no longer be able to welcome her mother home. (*The Taste of Money*, Above the Line Productions, 2012, screen capture)*

News about incidents of death of an overseas contract worker overseas, for reasons known or unknown, appear in Philippine newspapers. Indeed, a number of fiction and film texts today attest to this fact so poignantly and so powerfully for the unjaded because such narratives are familiar if all too repetitively sensationalized by the media.[24] Figure 7 shows the young daughter of a Filipina domestic worker helplessly in tears as the body of her dead mother arrives home from overseas. On the global map referred to above, the "tilamsik" or sparks that we see might as well be the body of a *balikbayan* flying all across the skies—alive but deadened, or dead. The "tilapon" or trajectory is unmistakable: diasporic Filipino leaves for abroad alive and well but returns home either dead or dying.

1 The short story "Arrividerci" by Fanny A. Garcia ends with the main character's dead body being sent back home by friends to the Philippines from Italy, where she worked as a domestic helper. *Dandaang Damit:16 na maiiling kuwento*. University of the Philippines Press, 2007. pp. 160-186. Similar scenes begin or end in films like *Maricris Sioson Story: Japayuki*, 1993, directed by Joey Romero, which is about a 17-year-old Filipino entertainer in Japan. The Korean film, *Taste of Money*, 2012, directed by Im Sang-soo, is about a Filipino maid of a rich family in Korea.

Conclusion

It is for this reason that non-government organizations have sprung up to protect, support, and assist Filipino contract workers. This phenomenon has been depicted in films, particularly in "The Flor Contemplacion Story" (1995), about a Filipino domestic helper in Singapore who was accused of murdering her fellow domestic helper and her employer's son. This incident exposed what the media described as the Philippines government's neglect, inaction, and inability to assist its own citizens who send remittances with their own blood to keep the economy afloat. Out of similar incidents emerged non-government organizations who work to support and assist Filipino overseas contract workers, especially Migrante International. Members and supporters of Migrante-Philippines were said to have even worked with the production of the popular film aboput an overseas contract worker, *Flor Contemplacion*, as consultants and as actors in the film.[1] Figure 8 is a rally organized by MIGRANTE.

Figure 8. August 28, 2015, observed as "Zero Remittance Day." (MIGRANTE Partylist, posted online)

1 With the inability of the government to fully protect the overseas contract workers, non-government organizations have been set up, including MIGRANTE. Migrante is a national formation of community-based organizations of returned migrants, families, and advocates worldwide.

Organizations like MIGRANTE understand that the diasporic errantry symbolized by the *balikbayan* and the *balikbayan* box is a kind of transactional exchange to keep the neoliberal globalization's wheels rolling. Its logic rides on the back of Filipino overseas contract workers' labor as payment for the country's bid for redemption and global capitalism's perpetuation. Figure 9 shows the logo of MIGRANTE-Philippines.

Figure 9. MIGRANTE, a Philippine-registered organization. (Philippine logo)

MIGRANTE works "for a harmonious working cooperation between and among migrant associations around the world as well as work in "solidarity with migrant organizations of other nationalities and peoples who are against the plunder of economies, destruction of the environment and wars of aggression

that cause widespread poverty and injustice."[1] Figure 10 shows the logo of MIGRANTE-International.

Figure 10. MIGRANTE as a founding member of the International Migrants' Alliance. (International logo)

The repatriation of both the *balikbayan* and the box—that box flying like a bird in

1 Migrante is part of a global alliance of grassroots migrant organizations of overseas Filipinos and their families in 24 countries. They uphold and advance the rights and welfare of overseas contract workers. MIGRANTE addresses campaigns for the institution of government policies and passing laws beneficial to the overseas Filipino contract workers and other related issues affecting the plight of Filipino overseas workers and their families, including climate change, environmental issues, legal assistance, livelihood support programs, and so on. Below is an official leaflet from MIGRANTE: "It was founded in December 1996 after the death of Filipina domestic worker Flor Contemplacion who was hanged in Singapre for allegedly murdering another Filipina domestic worker in 1995. The Flor Contemplacion case aroused wide indignation over the Philippine government's inaction and failure to save her life and brought to national and international awareness the life and death-situation of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs). Since then, Migrante International has become a defender of the rights and welfare of OFWs by raising public awareness on their plight and providing a critical analysis of the Philippine government's labor export policy program as the main factor responsible for the countless human rights abuses suffered by OFWs. Migrante International has handled and assisted thousands of welfare and rights cases, including the landmark and record-breaking case of Angelo Dela Cruz who was kidnapped and held hostage in war-torn Iraq in 2004. Migrante International's quick public information work was able to mobilize thousands of Filipinos into pressuring the government into action. The resounding support for Dela Cruz's case, both locally and internationally, caused the government to pull out Filipino troops in Iraq, and Dela Cruz was eventually rescued from captivity. Many other battles followed: cases of stranded, detained, and mysterious deaths, rape, and sex trafficking, wage cuts and maltreatment, anti-migrant policies and laws, evacuation in times of war, the plunder and corruption of OFW funds, and the continuing clamor for genuine public service and good governance for OFWs. Through them all, Migrante International has remained steadfast and has earned the trust and respect of OFW families and fellow advocates worldwide. After more than a decade since its establishment, Migrante International continues its consistent and unwavering record of service to OFWs. It now has over 200 member organizations in over 23 countries, making it the biggest organization of overseas Filipinos all over the world." https://migranteinternational.org/about/

the skies, away from home for the first time contains the *balikbayan*, alive, lively, and enlivened by the imaginary of a better life only to come flying back with wings clipped, dead, or dying. But this *pasalubong* contains either the goodies for Christmas or the dead body of the *balikbayan*. Between these is the diasporic Filipino working class whose errant, spent bodies either anticipate freedom in and through collective action or just feel consigned to lives of diasporic enslavement alongside other errant bodies, other histories, other places, and spaces. Indeed, as Glissant says, a poetics of relation is "nothing other than the search for a freedom within particular surroundings." In an archipelagic world, if the *balikbayan* box were to be an embodiment of that internationalist imaginary "elsewhere" of which Glissant speaks, then it might just turn out to be the balikbayan's *pasalubong* in a box. Inside is the *errantry* of the diasporic Filipino repatriate, caught between mobility and stasis under globalization.

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