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**The Dialogical Processes of Vernacular Mediation:
New Media and the Karay-a Ethnic Group of the Philippines**

A thesis submitted to the University of Adelaide in fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Media

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Abstract

This thesis examines the extent to which vernacular mediation, or the ongoing, sociohistorically situated, and discursive communicative acts through new media technologies, enables the cultural participation and emancipation of marginal groups. It investigates how the ethnolinguistic group Karay-a appropriated the Internet and digital music and video production technologies to reinvent their stereotyped identities, develop collectivity, and work towards the goal of bringing socioeconomic emancipation to their homeland of Antique in Western Philippines. By following a cultural studies approach to examine three cases of vernacular mediation, this thesis aims to explore how the dialogical interaction of new media technologies, audience or individual agency, institutional logics, and asymmetries in power enable and shape a specific emancipatory aim without foreclosing their future potentials.

Through an analysis of the musical subgenre Original Kinaray-a Music (OKM), the online community kinaray-a.com, and the digital short film *Handum* produced by the marginal group, this thesis argues that vernacular mediation practices have the potential to facilitate cultural participation by enabling expressions and meanings to be reshaped and shared. The sharing of meanings adds to the social and cultural capitals of marginal individuals and enables them to forge social ties. These ties can lead to collective mobilization. However, the extent to which these actions challenge prevailing power structures and bring social emancipation depends too on the amount of capitals they possess vis a vis those who hold power in their milieu, the involvement of the majority, and the ability to innovate and adapt to their present needs.

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Declaration of Original Authorship

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Chapter 1: Vernacular Mediation as an Uneven Process

1.1 Overview of Research

The certainties of a techno-logic, the certainties of cumulative development in, for example, speed or miniaturization, do not produce their equivalent in the realms of experience.

- Roger Silverstone, 1999, p. 20

Thirteen years ago, Roger Silverstone argued for the need to examine the power and centrality of media technologies and processes in shaping everyday life. In his book *Why Study the Media?* Silverstone affirmed that the media have become an ubiquitous yet integral part of modern, everyday activities and experiences. By allowing the widespread circulation of meanings, media technologies enable us to make sense of the complexities and paradoxes that we experience in this modern age.

While Silverstone acknowledged the enabling capabilities of the media, he argued against a deterministic reading of their affordances. Media technologies and practices, according to Silverstone, are never isolated from the uneven relations of the individuals that engage with them. They are molded by the social and historical contexts and structures in which are they embedded. In addition, while media technologies change at a rapid pace, these developments do not fundamentally lead to better experiences, cultural participation, or democracy. The media, in other words, may usher in social changes but by themselves do not have an *a priori* emancipatory value.

Silverstone is not alone or was the first in arguing for the centrality of the media in everyday life. What drew me to his conceptualization of the importance of new

media is its emphasis on the *unevenness* of their attendant processes and impacts. When one comes from a country wherein the media have a long history of facilitating sociopolitical upheavals and yet fail to offer a space for democratic deliberation – one that can gradually build the foundations even for that idealized public sphere (Habermas, 1989) – questions on the unequal impacts of the media technologies and processes emerge at the forefront of analysis. These questions likewise emerge when the ordinary citizenry readily adopt and appropriate new media in their everyday lives, and yet a majority of them cannot fully participate as cultural citizens. The Philippines has long been dubbed as the SMS or ‘text capital of the world’ (Rafael, 2003) and right now has more Facebook members than the entire population of Australia (Socialbakers, 2012). Participation in the wider national cultural production, however, is often limited to only eight out of its more than 100 ethnolinguistic groups. The economy of the country is still dependent on the remittances that its 1.4 Million marginalized overseas migrant workers send back home (Philippine Overseas Employment Agency, 2010).

It is the uneven processes and unequal impacts of the ubiquitous media, or what Silverstone (1999, 2002) referred to as mediation, that I aim to interrogate in my research. In particular, I will analyze the practices in what I term as vernacular mediation – or the ongoing, sociohistorically situated, and discursive communicative acts of marginal groups that are enabled by new media technologies – by examining how the Philippine ethnolinguistic group Karay-a appropriated the Internet and digital music and film production technologies to create their own cultural spaces. In these spaces, the members of the ethnic group have been able to articulate a position for themselves within the discourses that affect their subjectivities and work closer towards their aspirations of bringing upliftment to

their homeland. Like the majority of ethnic groups in the country, the Karay-a has had limited participation in national cultural production and in the mainstream media, resulting in the reification of their poor, rural class identity and further marginalization of their language Kinaray-a. Through their use of new music, Internet, and digital film production technologies, they created a musical subgenre, built an online community, and collaboratively produced a short film. These vernacular new media enabled the ethnic group to gain a collective voice, reinvent their ethnic identity, mobilize to help their province, and reflexively interrogate the root cause of its poverty. Across these three Karay-a new media the desire for a progressive homeland reverberates, which is also the collective aspiration of all Filipinos.

The focal point of analysis of my thesis, however, is not only the enabling capabilities of new media or the creative collaborative content that gives voice to marginal individuals. By now there is nothing radical anymore in stating that digital communication technologies allow ordinary individuals and even those who live at the margins to create spaces in which to challenge authoritative views or collaboratively create their media. All over the world, ethnic, diasporic, indigenous, women, grassroots communities, and subculture groups creatively and collaboratively use the Internet and digital audiovisual production technologies to reinvent their identities, recreate cultural expressions, and question dominant representations and regimes (Cleaver, 1998; Forte, 2006; Landzelius, 2006; Parker & Song, 2006; Rostamin-Povey, 2007; Neizen, 2009). In the Philippines, the revolution that toppled Joseph Estrada in 2001 shows the mobilizing capabilities of the Internet and mobile texting (Coronel, 2002). The main focus of my thesis rather is how the interaction of new media technologies, audience or individual agency,

symbolic meanings, and asymmetries in power enable and shape a specific emancipatory aim.

1.2 Context of Research

The idea that media are ubiquitous part of everyday life is now almost a cliché in new media scholarship. Around the globe, cheaper, interactive, multimodal, and hyper-immediate communication technologies have created more avenues for creative cultural expressions, collaborative content creation, formation and maintenance of personal relationships, and collective mobilization. Yet despite these rapid developments, academic discourse on the subject has not gone much further than the same polemic debate over the utopian versus dystopian claims, production versus consumption processes, and individual agency versus media effects. This is due to the proliferation of concepts that privilege only one aspect of the communicative act, ignore the importance of sociohistorical contexts, or emphasize the engagement with new media as autonomous and closed events.

One evident change brought by the ubiquity of new media technologies is the easier production of content across different communication channels. Indeed, it is not as exclusive anymore to media conglomerates or those with large financial capitals. As Alex Bruns (2008) argued, the term 'produsage' better captures the nature of the processes by which we now create and extend knowledge. On Web 2.0 environments, we are no longer passive consumers but are a hybrid of producers, users, editors, and consumers. Because we collaborate in reworking the content that we all 'prognose,' we form a networked community that makes Web 2.0 sites more valuable. With the use of blogs and Wikipedia as case examples, Bruns further emphasized that Web 2.0 environments enable the open-ended and continuous

redevelopment of media texts and the dissolution of the traditional authority and commercial hold of media institutions.

A similar emphasis on the ease of production can be gleaned from Henry Jenkins (2008) who argued that we are now living in a convergence culture wherein we can freely combine old and new media conventions and work collaboratively even with mainstream media companies. Through interactive media such as blogs, wikis, online gaming sites, and reality television shows like *Survivor*, ordinary individuals and grassroots groups have now been empowered to produce their own creative expressions, contribute to mainstream culture, and even talk back to dominant media institutions. Jenkins stated that all these open up possibilities for democracy and enable us to become active citizens. While Jenkins acknowledged the presence of unequal power relations in convergence culture, he emphasized the potentials rather than the constraints. He takes on a “critical utopian” (2008, p. 258) stance and stated that the impacts of convergence culture are unpredictable that they cannot be reduced to the agency of individuals or politico-economic structures. This is because convergence culture is “both a top-down corporate driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process” (p. 18) that opens up possibilities of interaction between consumer and media corporations “to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands” (p. 3).

Mark Deuze (2006) amplified the impacts of content production by using the concept of convergence culture to explicate ethnic media practices. He argued that the proliferation of ethnic, minority, or diasporic media in Western societies is due more to the global trend of convergence culture than to the sociohistorical contexts surrounding the subjectivities of these groups. He stated that ethnic groups are increasingly challenging mainstream mass media because of the “worldwide

emergence of all kinds of community, alternative, oppositional, participatory, and collaborative media practices” (p. 266), which is a major characteristic of convergence culture. Such theorizing on ethnic media practices, however, cannot account for why in some instances these marginal groups draw from mainstream mass media to assert and reify a stereotyped identity and in some instances create their own media to challenge such representations. Deuze instead argued that ethnic media practices can be conceptualized as both “corrosion” and “cohesion” processes (p. 269) that are the direct “expression of a wider social trend particular to the cultural, political, economical, and technological convergence of ‘being’ in the world today” (p. 274).

In a more recent article Deuze (2011) proposed that because of the ubiquity of new media, our ontology as human beings has become dependent on communication technologies. He contended that there is no boundary anymore between man and machine because the way we experience our reality, and how we work, play, learn, and interact are now all facilitated by new media. Like Bruns, Deuze emphasized that new media technologies challenge hegemonic institutions because they allow ordinary individuals to constantly recreate knowledge, dominant truths, and their realities:

Society governed by media life is one where reality is, like many if not most websites, permanently under construction – but not only by unseen yet all-powerful guardians in the panoptic fortresses of governments and corporations that seek to construct a relatively cohesive and thus controllable reality, but also by all of us (p. 145).

Robert Glenn Howard (2005a, 2005b, 2008) made a similar point through his concepts of vernacular rhetoric, web, and individual. He based his argument on his analysis of single acts of new media engagement by ordinary people who

appropriate content from official websites of commercial, religious, and political organizations to create their own counter rhetoric. For Howard, the interactivity and accessibility of the Internet allow us to challenge dominant discourses. He stated that the Internet immensely enables more individuals to deploy their own “multiple agencies” (2008, p. 499) by allowing them to appropriate, hybridize, and enunciate against a dominant discourse. These concepts of web-enabled vernaculars open up “new venues for *transformative* public discourse” (p. 491, emphasis mine).

Producers, convergence culture, media life, and Howard’s web-enabled vernaculars highlight the potentials of new media to enable cultural participation and democracy. But by privileging only one aspect of the communicative act, these cultural populist concepts present an idealized view of new media processes. Producers give saliency on production by highlighting how ordinary individuals have become agents that freely create, revise, and distribute Web 2.0 content. Convergence culture makes the same emphasis on production by equating content appropriation to democratic participation. On the other hand, media life gives prominence to the role of technology in shaping not only particular actions of the individual but his or her entire consciousness and subjectivity. The same focus on technology is explicit in Howard’s web-enabled vernaculars, which posits that the individual who uses new media has now an unlimited agency to challenge dominant discourses. Media practices, however, are constituted of multiple cycles of production, circulation, reception, and reproduction (Hall, 1997). Each of these processes interacts fluidly and not one can dictate the outcome of the other or the entire communicative act (Silverstone, 2005).

In addition, these concepts ignore the impact of sociohistorical conditions in shaping new media practices. While emphasizing the affordances of new media, they ignore that like any other technology, have a social and historical nature. As such, their use, meaning, and value do only not vary among individuals and groups but also change through time. As Raymond Williams (1980) reminded us three decades ago:

First... the means of communication have a specific productive history, which is always more or less directly related to the general productive historical phases of productive and technical activity... second... the historically changing means of communication have historically variable relations to the general complex of productive forces and to the general social relationships which are produced by them and which the general productive forces both produce and reproduce (p. 50).

Producers, cultural convergence, media life, and vernacular rhetoric all depict new media technologies as rapidly changing and dynamic yet their role across societies is presented as isolated occurrences with the same empowering result. Further, they also discount the role of mainstream media, the state, and other social institutions. Their common claim of dissolving the dominance of mainstream media fail to acknowledge how these institutions adapt new media technologies to maintain their commercial viability (Hesmondalgh, 2007). Such technologically determinist claims also fail to acknowledge that there are cases of collaborative creation that are dependent on mainstream media and the state for their continued existence. In other words, dissolving these institutions would effectively destroy these collaborative cultural creations. Thus, we need to situate new media practices in their specific sociohistorical context not only help us understand how radical the changes these technologies brought forth but also their specific role and the other factors that shape them. This would also enable us to address what Jenkins pointed

out about the unpredictable impacts of new media practices. While he was correct in stating that these impacts are variable because they cannot be determined *a priori*, they are not unexplainable especially if we look at their embeddedness in their sociohistorical contexts.

Lastly, produsage, cultural convergence, media life, and Howard's web-enabled vernaculars all view the communicative act as an isolated and closed event by emphasizing single acts of collaboration or participation. Prior communicative acts, whether through new or traditional media, collaborative or individual, are neglected. Individuals and non-mainstream groups are also often presented as only gaining a 'voice' or ability to collaborate or participate after the new media was developed or introduced to them, and often their ability to simultaneously engage with different media over time is ignored in the analysis. Such neglect of past communicative projects paradoxically devalues the very act of content creation because the present collaborative work is conceptualized as isolated and finalized units of analysis. The voice of the ordinary individual or marginal group and their collaborative project that the 'novel' media were able to give rise to fade into obscurity once their co-created texts are produced or distributed, with no capability to influence future engagements. Such an approach does not allow us to trace the real participatory power of new media. For if – as these concepts emphasize – the significance of ubiquitous new media in contemporary life is to open up spaces for cultural participation and democracy, then looking at single and isolated moments of engaging with these technologies presents a narrow view of the complex and dynamic processes involved. Further, since new media are indeed ubiquitous and pervasive in everyday life even of marginal groups, then individuals do not

discontinue engaging with them. Thus, the challenge for media analysts is to track and elucidate that continuity.

In highlighting produsage, cultural convergence, media life, and Howard's web-enabled vernaculars, I do not claim that dystopic views on new media are better conceptual tools for they present the same technological determinism that downplays human practice and experience (Hamilton & Heflin, 2011). For instance, Christian Fuchs' (2010) "informational capitalism" (p. 180) or the process of the "total commodification of human creativity" (p. 192) due to the interactive features of Web 2.0 technologies present an exclusively materialist perspective that devalues all types of new media practices. Fuchs used a Marxist lens to explain how the traditional concept of the working class had changed and to critique the democratic potentials of produsage. He argued that the information society created a new category of laborers who are exploited to turn a social resource like knowledge into an economic asset. If in industrial capitalism the proletariat is composed by wage laborers, in informational capitalism it is the unpaid "producers engaged in the production of user-generated content" (p. 192). Fuchs considered this content as a commons resource that constitutes today's body of knowledge, but it is exploited by Microsoft, Google, and Facebook to accumulate capital. He stated that the common strategies of these new media corporations are to give producers free access to services and platforms, allow them to create content, and accumulate a larger number of creators who are then sold "as a commodity to third-party advertisers" (p. 191). Further, because "[c]hildren, pupils, and students who do not have a regular paid employment" (p. 192) constitute most new media users in almost all countries, they become the foremost victims of informational capitalism. For Fuchs, new media like the Internet are "one of the primary spaces for the exploitation of

child labor” (p 192). This blanket judgment, however, intentionally neglects individual agency and reduces all new media processes and practices to political economy.

Taking a similar critical stance, Mark Andrejevic (2005, 2007, 2011) explicated how “ubiquitous computing” (2005, p. 101) and interactivity serve the commercial logic of new media conglomerates also echo some of the arguments made by the Frankfurt School on the “commercial exploitation” (2011, p. 83) of audiences. For Andrejevic, new media like interactive television, search engines, and social networking sites function as efficient surveillance tools of companies that mine the personal data of their users to serve marketing purposes. He is highly skeptical of the participation afforded by new media technologies because these are designed to “facilitate the rationalization of both consumption and production” (2005, p. 109) that only exploits the ordinary users.

Citing Banks and Humphreys’ (2008) argument on the mutually beneficial relationship between users and new media companies, Andrejevic (2011) acknowledged that ordinary individuals indeed derive satisfaction and communion through these ubiquitous new media, but argues that the “digitally mediated social lives” (p. 83) are only afforded by these technologies precisely because companies can derive value from them. He stated that social networking sites are entirely collaborative productions, but users will always be “subject to detailed forms of data-gathering and ongoing controlled experiments of target marketing designed to more effectively influence their behavior without their knowledge” (p. 96). Andrejevic’s recommendation to always situate the analysis of ubiquitous, participatory media within the larger economic structures takes a critical stance that highlights the role of dominant institutions. But if there is anything that the

previous political economic studies of the media have taught us, continuing Fuchs' and Andrejevic's approaches would always yield a linear and predetermined reading of the impact of new media technologies as mere tools of powerful social institutions.

In focusing on only one aspect of the communicative act through new media, dislocating it from its context, and emphasizing it as an autonomous and closed event, all these concepts continue the polemic accounts of earlier scholarship on the Internet.¹ There is thus a need for a framework that situates the processes of mediated production, representation, circulation, and reception at specific sociohistorical junctures and accounts for the continuities and disruptions of the communicative act. Such a framework entails integrating in the analysis the affordances of new media technologies, individual agency, asymmetries in power, and the logics that shape content instead of privileging only one of these aspects. This way, we can explicate the varying and uneven impacts of new media practices for different groups and avoid what continuing what Woolgar (2002) had called the "sweeping grandiloquence" (p. 6) over technological developments.

My research drew upon Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism to suggest the concept of vernacular mediation as an approach to the analysis of new media practices of marginal groups. Bakhtin's emphasis on the inseparability of a speech or communicative act from its sociohistorical milieu; its evaluative and active nature; and its still unfinished form that involves heterogeneous voices from the past and

¹Examples of early utopist views on the Internet would include Kevin Kelly's (1996) electronic hive, which posited that the Internet will enable us all to coalesce into a self-governing intelligence and Thomas Stewart's (1996) electronic commerce which claimed that the new medium has brought forth an unprecedented social revolution. On the other hand, early dystopist views include Robins and Webster's (1988) concept of cybernetic capitalism, which stated that the Internet is a surveillance tool of commercial institutions. A decade later, their views were extended by Dan Schiller (1999) with his concept of digital capitalism where he described the Internet as nothing less than the central production and control apparatus of an increasingly supranational market system.

present enables us to understand the dynamics of individual agency, sociohistorical contexts, and structures in the analysis of new media practices. For Bakhtin, every communicative act or utterance carries the intentions and judgments of its speaker and always creates responses. As such, his participants in the communication process are not only active but are also responsible for the implications of their utterances. Being situated within a specific context, a participant is both enabled and constrained by his or her social standing and always constructs utterances in response to and by drawing from those preceding it. In this sense, there is no such thing as 'new voices' or 'Biblical' utterances no matter how innovative a medium is or how 'novel' the approach in engaging with it is touted to be. Further, communicative acts for Bakhtin (1986) do not fade into obscurity but will shape and be reworked in the future:

Utterances are not indifferent to one another, and are not self-sufficient; they are always aware of and mutually reflect one another. Each utterance is filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which it is related by the communality of the sphere of speech communication (p. 91).

The interconnectedness or intertextuality (Todorov, 1984) of and possibility of revision in Bakhtin's dialogism enable us to account for the uneven processes of new media practices particularly when the aims are cultural participation and emancipation. In this thesis I use the term emancipation to refer to freedom from socioeconomic inequality. It is the break from the constraints of limited socioeconomic resources which, like political emancipation, is a crucial component of the overall and ongoing quest for human emancipation that Marx (1844/1994) envisaged. Aside from Bakhtin, I will also draw upon the field of sociology and use the notion of social capital to inform the analysis of the relations and resources that both enable the production and constrain the sustainability of these vernacular new

media. For sociologists, social capital is only one among the many forms of capitals an individual can deploy as a result of his or her membership and position within groups and social networks. For individuals lacking economic capital, social capital provides a valuable resource in creating cultural products and in maintaining their position within their field or wider social environment.

1.3 Thesis Structure

This thesis is an examination of the dialogical relationships of new media technologies, individual agency, institutional logics, and asymmetries in power. It aims to analyze the sociohistorical shaping of new media practices and its potentials and limits in achieving the aims of cultural participation and socioeconomic emancipation of a particular marginal group. Through the analysis of musical subgenre Original Kinaray-a Music (OKM), the online community kinaray-a.com, and the digital short film *Handum* produced by the Philippine ethnic group Karay-a, this thesis aims to address the main question:

How does vernacular mediation enable cultural participation and socioeconomic emancipation, and to what extent?

Specifically, it aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the historical, social, and cultural conditions that give rise to and influence vernacular mediation?
2. In what ways do vernacular mediation enable cultural participation and collective mobilization?
3. How do different vernacular mediation practices recursively shape one another?

My research will address these questions by conceptualizing OKM, kinaray-a.com, and *Handum* as practices of vernacular mediation and present these as case

studies. While they cannot be characterized as Web 2.0 technologies, I chose the online community, music, and digital film because they are the first new media that facilitated the collective expression of the cultural identity of the Karay-a. My analysis will not treat these as discrete units, but instead explore the dialogical relationships among these new media.

Chapter 2 will present vernacular mediation or the dialogical transformation of symbolic meanings through media technologies as a framework for analyzing new media practices. I will draw upon Silverstone's (1999, 2002, 2005) concept of mediation; Bakhtin's (1981, 1984, 1986, 1999a, 1990b) dialogism; and Ono and Sloop's (1995) concept of the vernacular. I will also draw from previous studies on mediation and ethnic media, particularly on how these are used to reinvent cultural identity and construct collectivity. For the Karay-a, identity is still a salient issue and is also one of the resources that they use to work towards achieving their collective goal of bringing progress to their homeland. With their active use of new media, they reconstructed their stereotyped *buki* or hillbilly and domestic worker identities and developed collectivity in the process.

Chapter 3 presents the first case study of this thesis and analyzes the generative factors that give rise to vernacular mediation. In this chapter, I trace the emergence of Original Kinaray-a Music (OKM) by conceptualizing it as a hybrid and socially situated utterance that was enabled by the convergence of institutional arbitration, a collective desire for an empowered identity, and new media technologies. I will first describe OKM as a musical subgenre by locating it within the nexus of the global and Philippine popular musicscape before discussing how its composers discursively deployed ethno-symbols and narratives that reconstructed the image of their homeland. I will argue that through these symbols and narratives, the songs

elicited “responsive reactions and dialogic reverberations” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 94) and performed the crucial task of evoking affect for the homeland particularly for diasporic Karay-as.

Chapter 4 evaluates the potential of vernacular mediation to facilitate collective mobilization by analyzing the dialogical processes in the online community kinaray-a.com. I aim to demonstrate how the reciprocal sharing of self-narratives about longing for their homeland, difficulties of migrant life, and the importance of their language allowed the members of the online community to reinvent their rural class identity. In the process, they developed social ties that equipped them to mobilize to help their homeland and less fortunate *kasimanwa* or fellow citizens. But more than providing a venue for cultural expression and reinvention of identities, kinaray-a.com enabled members to form a collective awareness of poverty as the root cause of their marginality. Developing this collective awareness is one of the crucial steps towards for their aim of bringing emancipation to their homeland. The extent to which such aims are achieved is dependent, however, on their capitals, the strength of their social network, and the capacities of the medium that mediate these goals.

Chapter 5 analyzes how institutional logics, social structures, and prevailing discourses shape mediation practices. It will present an analysis of *Handum*, a collaborative short film wherein the collective voice that arose from OKM and kinaray-a.com now converge into a reflexive questioning of poverty. As an independent film that mediates images and narratives of poverty, *Handum* is articulated to the global and national discourses of ‘poverty porn,’ or the aestheticization of the living conditions, misery, violence, and struggles of the poor. Given the current pessimistic discourse on the value and impacts of the mediation of poverty, I will argue that there is a need to identify and acknowledge when

poverty porn exists. But rather than making *a priori* judgments, I will emphasize that each case must be contextualized by suggesting a methodological framework for its analysis in films. I will also argue that despite the enabling capacities of new media, marginal groups and their emancipatory aims can be constrained by the prevailing class structures in their social milieu.

Chapter 6 presents the conclusion of this thesis and discusses how analyzing engagements with the new media as a chain of utterances allows us to see the socially situated possibilities and limits of rapidly changing and increasingly ubiquitous new media. The chapter will also discuss the limitations of the findings of this thesis and identify future research directions.

1.4 Research Methodology

This thesis applied a cultural studies approach in analyzing the research questions. As an analytical approach, cultural studies interrogate the discursive formation of meanings and their significance on culture, power, and politics (Alasuutari, 1995; Gray, 2002; Barker, 2003). Its perspective on culture as a multifaceted and dynamic notion that is irreducible to economy or individual agency (Alasuutari, 1995), and attention to the role of language, symbols, and identities in shaping the subjectivities of social groups (Barker, 2003) are highly relevant in examining the potentials and limits of new media practices in enabling participation and emancipation. Further, its bias towards a non-normative and grounded theory approach in gaining insights to complex cultural processes strengthens the Bakhtinian framework of this thesis.

The multiplicity of sociocultural factors and practices surrounding OKM, kinaray-a.com, and *Handum* presented several difficulties in applying a single methodological framework. While the practices of collaborative creation and

dissemination and central themes of poverty and emancipation of the homeland tie them together, the conventions, participants, intents, social milieu, and subsequent utterances that were generated by each of these vernacular media vary. Indeed, it would yield little value to force fit a single methodology for these different media. To enable an in-depth look, each case study drew from other research approaches and traditions to complement the general methodological framework of the thesis.

For the overall framework for the textual analysis of this thesis, I drew from David Altheide's (1987) ethnographic approach in content analysis to identify the common themes across OKM, kinaray-a.com, and *Handum*. Altheide's approach emphasizes the importance of the grounded theory methodology in identifying meanings across multiple texts – he analyzed 112 days and 26 hours of newscasts from different television networks – and the theoretical relationships among them. The reflexive and constant discovery and comparison of emerging meanings espoused by Altheide enables the illumination of the thematic similarities and differences across the three new media. For the participant observation, I drew from George Marcus' (1995) multi-sited approach in ethnography which he defined as moving “out from single sites and local situations of conventional ethnographic research designs to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities” (p. 69). Although the rural homeland that is being symbolically reconstructed in the new media analyzed by this thesis is rooted in a specific geographical location, the individuals that collaboratively create, disseminate, consume, and recreate these media are based in different locales and, like any other person and text, are always on the move. OKM artists and the website creator and core group members of kinaray-a.com are mostly based in the province of Antique

but the addressees of the songs and the online community are dispersed globally. The director of *Handum* is based in the country's capital of Metro Manila, and the film was disseminated mostly outside their home province. As such, tracing the emergence and flows of these media required moving through the different sites in which they are embedded. These sites include the cyberspace for kinaray-a.com and OKM, Quezon City for *Handum*, and Antique's capital San Jose de Buenavista for all the three media.

As mentioned before, the multiplicity of sociocultural factors and practices surrounding OKM, kinaray-a.com, and *Handum* required methodological flexibility. To address this, I drew from other research approaches to complement the general textual analysis and multi-sited participant observation methods of this thesis. For the analysis of OKM, I drew on Simon Frith's (1998) notion of voice in popular music to identify the speech intents in 57 songs. For kinaray-a.com, I drew from Jennifer Brinkerhoff's (2009) approach of analyzing digital diasporas to investigate how the dialogical sharing of self-narratives of longing for their rural homeland, difficulties of migrant life, poverty, and the importance of their language enabled the formation of bonding ties among members of the online community. For *Handum*, I drew on Amartya Sen's (1976, 2005, 2008) concept of poverty as a relative deprivation and Luc Boltanski's (1999) politics of pity to analyze the aesthetics and ethics of mediating poverty and how these shape and constrain emancipatory aims.

I first conceived the idea for this thesis as an analysis of the online representations and self-representations of Philippine indigenous groups in which I erroneously identified the Karay-a as an indigenous group by using the official list of the Philippine government and World Bank. Among the 'indigenous groups' with

online presence at that time, I noted that it was the Karay-a that harnessed new media technologies actively to create music and videos aside from their online community. Following the protocols for ethical research, I emailed a letter of invitation for research participation to Manuel Magbanua, Jr, who is a core group member of the online community and the director of *Handum*, after six months of lurking in the website and identifying the main themes from its English pages. He accepted the invitation with appreciation, but pointed out that their ethnic group was not indigenous and in their province, it is the Ati which is considered the legitimate indigenous group. Not to delve anymore on the politics surrounding the state discourse on defining who is indigenous or not, I decided to focus on the Karay-a ethnic group and found a more active engagement with new media technologies than I first assumed. I conducted my fieldwork from October 2010 to March 2011, spending the first two months in Quezon City, Metro Manila to interview Magbanua and participate in the filmmaking workshop his production company Filipino Pictures was conducting as well as to gather secondary data from local universities. From 19th of December, 2010 until 25th of February, I went to Antique to look for translators, interview resource persons, participate in the 4th anniversary celebration of kinaray-a.com, and attend two community performances of OKM artists.

Translation is said to bring epistemic violence to the original text no matter how faithful the protocol is to the official lexicon or even if the translator belongs to the same ethnolinguistic group. I am also aware and acknowledge my position as an outsider to the community I studied. Compounding this difficulty is that up to the time of fieldwork, there is no published source of Kinaray-a grammar or an updated dictionary (see Jeffres, 1973 for a similar account). The reason for this, as I would

find out later on, is that Kinaray-a is still undergoing the process of “language emancipation” (Huss & Lindgren, 2011, p. 2). Two translators were hired for this thesis. To identify the themes and common physical and technical features in kinaray-a.com, I conducted an ethnographic content analysis of the website following the snapshot technique (McMillan, 2000; Weare & Lin, 2000) and analyzed primary, secondary, tertiary, and quaternary pages sampled on 18-21 January 2011. Due to the large volume of data in kinaray-a.com (4 Gigabytes) and for pragmatic purposes, I identified the forum and literature pages with the most number of hits, selected the top 10%, and had these translated by Stephen Checa, who was the content writer of kinaray-a.com during the time of fieldwork. Fifty-seven OKM songs² were selected for analysis and were translated to English by the chair of the cultural non-profit *Paranubliun Antique* Francisco Ejida, who was recommended and selected in consultation with the OKM artists included in the study. Except for 10 songs whose composers were unavailable during the time of fieldwork, the translated compositions were discussed, revised with, and finally approved by their respective composers. With these, I acknowledge that there can never be a perfect translation but this does not foreclose the significance of meanings that arise out of the translated texts.

Aside from content analysis and participant observation, I also spent a total of six months conducting what is described as ‘guerilla online ethnography’ (Yang, 2003). The online ethnography in kinaray-a.com presented unique challenges during the period of data collection as the website went off the Internet several times due to malware attacks. Further, only 13 of its 12,209 members are present periodically in the chat room. To supplement this, I posted on the website a link to an online survey

² Copies of the OKM translations are available by request to the researcher.

which generated a total of 82 respondents with an 83% response rate. I also conducted interviews with the website administrator and members of Kinaray-a.com present during the time of fieldwork in Antique. To present the results of this survey, respondents were coded by assigning each one a number. For the posts in kinaray-a.com cited in this thesis, all the names and identifying references to a location were changed to protect anonymity. All the interviews in this study were conducted following the procedures for ethical human research by explaining the nature of the study, its aims, and expected outcomes, and asking for the consent of the interviewees who were identified through snowball technique.

1.5 The Setting: The Rural Homeland of Antique

I chose to focus my study on the Philippines not only because it is where I came from but also because the country has had a long history of commercial liberal media system that allows the free flow of communication technologies and cultural texts. It is a place where, as Appadurai (1996) explicated, global images continuously flow and inspire imaginings and movement of people. At the local front, colonial and state cultural policies have left imprints on the collective identities of its more than 110 ethnolinguistic groups who are constantly negotiating for spaces in which they can participate culturally and politically. Within these ethnolinguistic groups are deterritorialized diasporic members who maintain connection to their homelands and with one another through various new media (Tyner & Kuhlke, 2000; Ignacio, 2005; McKay, 2006; Longboan, 2011). Focusing on the Philippines would thus enable the analysis of the dynamics among different media practices; sociohistorical and political structures; and global, national, and local cultural flows.

To provide a brief background, the Republic of the Philippines is a developing country in Southeast Asia. It has an estimated population of 92.34 million (National Statistics Office, 2012) and has a low-income economy (International Telecommunications Union, 2009). Geographically, the country can be divided into three main islands: Luzon, or Northern Philippines, Visayas or Central Philippines, and Mindanao or Southern Philippines (Figure 1). Each main island is politically divided into several regions that are further divided into provinces. A province is composed of municipalities and cities that are subdivided into villages called *Barangay*, the smallest administrative division in the country. The country has 17 regions, 81 provinces, 1,495 municipalities, 136 cities, and 42,002 *Barangay* (National Statistical Coordination Board, 2011). Of the three main island groups, Luzon has the highest number of higher income class cities and is also where the country's financial, commercial, and industrial centre Metro Manila is located.

Although it is a small country, the Philippines exhibits a high degree of sub-regionalism both geographically and culturally (Wernsstedt & Earle, 1967). For a Filipino, homeland is first the "regions, localities, and communities of languages and traditions" prior to the nation-state (San Juan, 2009, p. 216). These sub-regionalisms are evident through the differences in language, economy, religion, arts, and other cultural practices. Like any other country with multiple ethnicities, the Philippines have its major ethnolinguistic groups. These are the Tagalog, Ilocano, Pangasinense, Kapampangan, Bikol, Cebuano, Hiligaynon, and Waray. Of



Figure 1: Map of the Philippines and Antique Province. Antique is located in Panay Island which is under the administrative region of Western Visayas. It is composed of 18 municipalities and 590 *barangays*. At its south is Iloilo Province, where most of the region’s commercial and media institutions are based. (Map source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ph_locator_map_antique.png).

these, Tagalog is the culturally dominant group with their mother tongue forming the structural basis of the national language Filipino (McFarland, 2004; Gonzalez, 2006).

The Philippines had been a colony of Spain for three centuries, United States for 48 years, and Japan for three years. The colonization of the country has profoundly shaped not only its culture and political system, but also its media. At present, the Philippine mainstream mediascape is predominantly privately owned and controlled by a few elite families whose conglomerations include the largest corporations in the country. It follows the American liberal media system and is thus profit-oriented. The latest comprehensive Functional Literacy, Education, and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS) report released by the Philippine Information Agency (2005) indicate that media infrastructure is concentrated in Metro Manila and in urban provincial cities. Print activity is concentrated in the capital, where 13% of all the country's newspapers, magazines, and comics are produced. While 13% may appear considerably small, the nine dailies, 19 tabloids, 40 magazines, and 16 comics produced in the metropolis are the most widely circulated in the country. Further, although most of the country's radio stations are located in the provinces, the major broadcasting networks that own or partly own these stations are based in Metro Manila. Fieldwork observations also show that most time slots of provincial radio stations is dominated by Manila-produced programs that are relayed during primetime hours. In addition, local program formats are heavily patterned after those that are produced in the national capital. The languages used in AM stations are mostly Tagalog and the main regional tongue while English dominates in FM stations (Enriquez, 2008).

Television infrastructure is also concentrated in Metro Manila. The FLEMMS report cited that there are a total of 100 television stations in the country. Most of these, however, are relay stations of major television networks. These networks are ABS-CBN, GMA 7, NBN, ABC, RPN, QTV, IBC, SBN, DWAC, UBN, RJ, and NBC. Of these, ABS-CBN and GMA 7 are the biggest and are often embroiled in a battle for the highest ratings (Rimban, 1999a; 1999b). The main language used in television stations is Tagalog particularly in programs aired during primetime hours (Maslog, 2007). While the main regional languages are also used, Tagalog and English are dominant.

Philippine media scholars have characterized the present mainstream media of the country as tabloid because of the prevalent practice of sensationalism (Rimban, 1999b; Torre, 1999; Coronel, 2001, 2002; del Mundo, 2003; Maslog, 2007). While entertainment-oriented and sensationalized content have always been present, the drive for profit pushes these orientations into more extreme levels particularly during periods of competition. After the period of Martial Law under Ferdinand Marcos, media companies proliferated and subsequently competed for audiences and advertisers by targeting the largest audience segment identified by media research companies (Rimban, 1999b). In the Philippines, audience segments are classified according to income class: the upper AB class whose monthly income is \$666³ and above; the upper middle C1 class whose monthly income is \$333-\$666; the middle C2 class whose monthly income is \$177-\$333; and the lower DE class whose monthly income is below \$177. The largest segment belongs to the DE class, constituting 58% of the total media audience in the country (Philippine Information

³ The conversion rate used in this thesis was Aus\$1 = P45.

Agency, 2005). While the DE class is indeed the lowest income group, they are the prized market for advertisers due to their size.

Media conglomerates and advertisers, however, presume that those belonging to this group will only comprehend and appreciate simplified stories and sensationalized themes because of their low socioeconomic status. As such, the tendency is always to produce and prioritize graphic and overdramatized media programs (Rimban, 1999b). Mainstream news programs therefore are delivered in an infotainment format, with extensive coverage given to stories such as murders, robberies, rapes, and celebrity marriages and subsequent infidelities (Rimban, 1999b; del Mundo, 2003). Variety and game shows feature scantily clad dancers, and live audiences are enticed to act out awkward if not humiliating feats. The recent public outcry against a reality television show in which a 6-year-old boy was shown performing a lurid dance number indicates the current level of sensationalism in the mainstream media (Malig, 2011).

With these, few opportunities exist for marginal groups to have their cultural expressions disseminated in the mainstream media. Provincial audiences are often ignored because content that had been proven to attract more revenue is prioritized (Rimban, 1999a). Network executives are not much interested in what provincial audiences want because advertisers concentrate in Metro Manila. Thus, they plan their programming around themes and issues in the nation's capital (Rimban, 1999b). What all these indicate for this thesis is that vernacular groups like the Karay-a have limited opportunities for participation in the mainstream media. While proximity to media infrastructure and language are important factors, the main barrier is the deeply entrenched prioritization of revenue that drives the strong preference for sensationalized content.

1.5.1 Antique and its socioeconomic and linguistic contexts

Antique, the homeland of the Karay-a and the geographical focal point of analysis of this thesis, is located in the island of Visayas in central Philippines (Figure 1). It belongs to administrative region of Western Visayas and is a rural province. Except for its capital San Jose de Buenavista, all of Antique's municipalities depend on subsistence rice farming or fishing (National Statistics Office Antique, 2007). Rice farmers and fishermen are among the poorest in the country, with 47% and 51% percent of their total population living in poverty, respectively (National Statistical Coordination Board, 2009). Because of this and the few number of business and government offices that can provide employment, most Karay-a look for livelihood outside the province or are employed as Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). These migrant workers are called within the province as *layas na Antiqueño kag Antiqueña* or diasporic Antiqueños and Antiqueñas.

There has been no comprehensive study conducted on the impact of migrant labor to the socioeconomic structure of Antique but, following Michael Pinches (1996), they can be considered as the new middle class⁴ of the province. Fieldwork observations and interviews have revealed that migrant labor enables Antique's diaspora to earn the needed financial capital to give themselves and their relatives better education, afford the latest electronic gadgets, build bigger houses, and establish small scale family-run businesses. As one respondent stated,

⁴According to Pinches (1996), global capital movement, entrepreneurial ideology, and ethos of meritocracy gave rise to a new middle class in the Philippines. This class is composed of Filipinos returning from North America and Europe, OFWs, individuals with business background, and former salaried professionals. Having enough capital and disposable income, this class construct and maintain their identities through consumption, *e.g.*, building grand houses, buying the latest cars, and wearing designer brands. Because they rose through their hard work and educational and professional merits, members of this class pose as a challenge to the country's old elite who "has come to stand for the opposing qualities of birthright, privilege, indolence, and economic backwardness" (p. 296).

Most of the people here who get to have a good life here have been or have children or relatives abroad. Their earnings are different... really different. They can have their child go to a good school, they can build a beautiful house. See the tall concrete houses in the middle of the rice fields? Those are owned by those who went away (T. Siesa, personal communication, January 4, 2011).

Migrant labor has also enabled Antique's diaspora to participate in the province's cultural and sociopolitical arenas. For instance, non-profit Antique Circle USA has sponsored scholarships; donated books, hospital materials, and relief goods during natural calamities; and worked in partnership with the provincial government in the conduct of fiestas and other public events (ACUSA, n.d.). These types of engagements, facilitated by the longing for the homeland and increase in economic and social capital, can be found among several diasporic groups. For diasporic Karay-as, however, the desire for an empowered ethnic identity has further contributed to their aim of uplifting their homeland. This is because they have been collectively labeled as poor domestic maids and *sacadas* or farm hands due their history of working as laborers the sugarcane plantations of other Western Visayas provinces since the Spanish colonial era (de los Santos, 2003). One indicator of this stigma is the connotation surrounding the female pronoun *Inday*. The word is a term of endearment in Antique whereby it connotes respect or affection. Outside their region and in Metro Manila in particular, *Inday* is synonymous with domestic help. Almost all of the mainstream media portrayals (comics, television series, radio drama, and film) of domestic help in the Philippines come in a subservient, unkempt, heavily accented, dull, or clumsy character named *Inday*. Such negative representation has also been embedded in the public imaginary wherein cleaning one's home is often called 'being *Inday*' for the day.

The domestic maid and *sacada* identities have thus been ascribed to those born in the province and have brought cultural stigma to the group, negatively impacting their use of their vernacular (Deriada, 1994). As sociolinguist Joshua Fishman (1989, 1996) has argued, language is more than likely to be the symbol of ethnic identity rather than food, dress, shelter, land tenure, artifacts, work, or patterns of worship. This is because language is central to the way in which ethnicity is experienced as a particular mode of being, doing, and knowing. Like ethnicity, language is inherited and is equated with the identity of the ancestry of the individual. It is also a requirement and a mode of expression of belonging to an ethnic collectivity. All these make language the most tangible and potent symbol of ethnic identity and as such will always be defended from marginality. However, in the case of the Kinaray-a language, the *sacada* and domestic maid identities of the Karay-a have attached stigma over its use. To avoid being identified as coming from Antique and labeled as *buki* or hillbilly, most of them code-switch to Hiligaynon – the predominant language in the neighboring cosmopolitan Iloilo City – or Tagalog when they go out of the province. The stigma affixed to their language prevented them from using it as a “demonstration of membership” to their ethnic group (Fishman, 1989, p. 29). Within the province, this contributed to the dearth of publications in Kinaray-a although there were Antiqueño English and Hiligaynon writers who were recognized outside the province since the 1950s (de los Santos, 2003). Most of the print media in Antique also used English, Tagalog, or Hiligaynon (Jeffres, 1976; de los Santos, 2003). This would change, however, in the 1990s when Kinaray-a would start to undergo what Huss and Lindgren (2011) call “language emancipation” (p. 2) or the process of “improving the position of an underprivileged language through political efforts and language planning” (p. 2).

As it is often the case in multilingual societies, certain languages are given privilege over others, which in turn result in linguistic hierarchies. Underprivileged languages, or those that are seldom used outside the public domain of a particular ethnolinguistic group, are almost always “negatively labeled, so that it is perceived as being inferior to the dominating language: uglier, less pure, less civilized, vulgar” (Huss & Lindgren, p. 2). To facilitate its emancipation, an “ideologically motivated and well-educated group” (p. 5) who may not necessarily be members of the ethnolinguistic group is needed to lead its revitalization through “status planning, corpus planning, and acquisition planning” (p. 6). But before this would take place, the stigma attached to the language would have to be overcome (Huss & Lindgren, 2011). In the case of Kinaray-a, it was the national government that paved the way for its ongoing emancipation.

Following the first People Power Revolution that toppled Ferdinand Marcos in 1986, nationalistic sentiments prompted the state to initiate another cycle of symbolic reconstruction of the Filipino identity. Part of this effort was the redefinition and promotion of Filipino as the national language. Whereas the past language engineering projects led by the state focused on promoting Tagalog, this time allowances were made for the inclusion and promotion of regional tongues. To encourage their use, the state’s Cultural Center of the Philippines was tasked to conduct regional writing workshops and publish the resulting works through the literary journal *Ani* (Harvest). This enabled the publication and widespread dissemination of Kinaray-a poems, short stories, and essays (de los Santos, 2003).

The publication of Kinaray-a literature in a national journal and the recognition garnered by writers Alex de los Santos, Maria Milagros Geremia-Lachica, John Iremit Teodoro, Genevieve Asenjo, and Glen Mas encouraged the revitalization of the

language amongst literary writers. More authors were then formally trained through the workshops initiated by the national government and the local cultural non-profit organization *Paranubliun Antique*. Literary anthologies and books were also published and disseminated in the province. In addition, Kinaray-a was defined as a language. Prior to 1988 when the first training of Kinaray-a writers was conducted, there was no consensus if the exact name of the language was Hiniraya or Kinaray-a. It was only after the issues of *Ani* were published when the writers agreed to use the name Kinaray-a. In 2003, the publication of de los Santos' book *The Rise of Kinaray-a* gave further support to the use of the name. Similarly, it was only after the publication of the anthologies that Antiqueños and Antiqueñas would more frequently call their ethnic group more as Karay-a. The souvenir programs of the provincial *fiesta Binirayan* festival from 1974 to 2000 made no mention of Karay-a when describing the people of the province. Instead a gendered suffix is added to the name of the province (Antiqueño for male, Antiqueña for female) when describing their ethnolinguistic group. As such, Kinaray-a and Karay-a⁵ are the results of the recent and ongoing reconstruction of their marginal cultural identities.

A significant result of the language emancipation among literary writers was that it helped encourage the production of Kinaray-a songs. Compared to the literary publications, however, these songs were disseminated more widely in the province through radio, Internet, and public performances during *fiestas* and other public events. As the Chapter 3 will illustrate, the songs collectively known as Original Kinaray-a Music (OKM) further promoted the language as a symbol of ethnic belonging and a “valuable heritage” (Huss & Lindgren, 2011, p. 7). More

⁵This thesis will thus henceforth use Karay-a and Antiqueño or Antiqueña interchangeably.

importantly, Kinaray-a as a language was instrumental in the collective symbolic reconstruction of Antique as a homeland.

1.5.2 Antique and its historical context

The history of Antique has been fraught with identity politics and has had its share of questions of authenticity. The narrative of the province's origins and the festival that sustains it are what Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) referred to as invented tradition. It is based on the *Maragtas*⁶, a disputed account of the pre-Hispanic origins of the Filipino nation. In summary, the *Maragtas* narrates the peopling of the Philippines and is based on the manuscripts authored by Spanish Augustinian priest Tomas Santaren in 1858 and that of Iloilo official Pedro Monteclaro in 1907 (Landa Jocano, 1968). Both manuscripts state that in the early 13th century there lived in Borneo the chief Sultan or Datu⁷ Makatunaw who seized the properties and abused the wives of the other Datus under his rule. To escape the cruel and lustful Makatunaw, ten Bornean Datus, together with their families and slaves, sailed secretly from Borneo in their *binidays*⁸ and finally landed in the island of Panay, which the present-day Antique is part of (Santaren, 1956; Monteclaro, 1943; 1957).

Upon landing in Panay, the Bornean Datus learnt that Negritos⁹ or Atis lived on the island under the leadership of the Ati Datu Marikudo and his wife Maniwantiwan. The Datus asked Marikudo if they could buy the whole of Panay upon having found the place ideal for settlement. When the Atis consented, the

⁶ For a shortened summary on how the *Maragtas* transitioned from a widely accepted factual account of Philippine history to discredited myth in academic discourse, see Landa Jocano, 1968 and Scott, 1968.

⁷ Chieftains

⁸ Small sailboat

⁹ A term used by Spanish colonizers to identify the members of the Aeta, Ati, and Dumagat ethnolinguistic groups because of their dark skin and small physical structure. The term is still used in the country despite its derogatory connotations.

Bornean Datus purchased the island with a gold *salakot* or hat, washbasin, and necklace. After the closing of the deal, all the Atis took their belongings and retreated to the interior mountains and rivers while the Bornean Datus under the leadership of Datu Sumakwel settled in the present-day Hamtic. From the descendants of the Datus and the settlements they founded originated the ethnolinguistic groups of central and northern Philippines (Santaren, 1956; Monteclaro, 1943,1957).

The *Maragtas* is now a discredited myth in academic scholarship mainly due to its connection to the migration wave theory¹⁰. For the Karay-a, however, it is the correct account of their origins and of the Filipino nation. It has been celebrated annually in the province since 1974 through the weeklong *Binirayan* festival. *Binirayan* serves as Antique's main *fiesta* and was initiated by its well-respected and former governor Evelio 'Beloy' B. Javier who used it as a symbolic means to encourage collective mobilization and rework the *sacada* and domestic maid identities of Antiqueños and Antiqueñas. The festival opens with the re-enactment of the landing of the ten Datus in their *binidays* in the municipality of Hamtic followed by a parade and beauty pageant in San Jose de Buenavista.

The *Maragtas* through the *Binirayan* was well suited to Javier's aim of developing collectivity because the account provides various symbolic elements that can be used to rework the identity of his constituents. Firstly, it identifies Antique as the cradle of the pre-Western civilization of the Philippines. Secondly, the central character of the *Maragtas* had qualities that could be used to help envisage a

¹⁰ A type of postulate on race and racial hierarchy, migration wave theory posits that people belonging to particular races moved into new territories in discrete waves of migration. Each new wave of race are deemed to be more civilized and advanced and inevitably either push the earlier arrivals into the interior (Aguilar, 2005), or assimilate them into the more superior culture of those who have just arrived. In the Philippine context, migration wave theory was given further salience when the Americans took the control of the country from Spain in 1898.

progressive community. In both Santaren's and Monteclaro's texts, Sumakwel was depicted as the wisest of all the Datus, industrious, and a good leader of his people. Through his hard work, Sumakwel was able to form a developed community and government.

Since the first *Binirayan*, the *Maragtas* has become a main element of Antique's culture and identity. It is a feature of the cultural landscape of the province, whereby various technologies of material representation such as the shrine of the landing site in the municipality of Hamtic, the *salakot*-shaped dome of the stage of the town plaza in San Jose de Buenavista, and the maroon Malay-style arch that marks the boundary between Iloilo and Antique serve as reminders of more noble heritage and of a once-progressive community. It is also a constant source of motifs for paintings, local literature, and OKM songs. The *Maragtas* and *Binirayan* thus provide the ethno-symbolic resources needed for an empowered cultural identity.

1.5.3 Antique and its political context

The recent political history and the nature of governance in Antique mirror the dynamics of national politics in the Philippines. It is what Benedict Anderson (1998) has described as *cacique democracy*¹¹. There is a dominance of the elite, rotation of officials through various positions, and persistence of political dynasties (Coronel, Chua, Rimban & Cruz, 2004; Dressel, 2011). The practice of capitalizing on family affinity to get elected is common, as what had occurred in the case of current president Benigno Aquino III, whose mother Corazon Aquino was also elected as president after the assassination of her husband Ninoy Aquino during the Marcos dictatorship. Similarly, former president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo ran for office

¹¹ A type of governance wherein a network of landed oligarchs control political power and nurture the administration of the elites in the provinces so as not to disrupt the leadership in Manila.

bearing surname of her father Diosdado Macapagal who also served as the country's the president from 1971 to 1973 while incumbent senator Jose Ejercito Estrada is the son of former Philippine president Joseph Estrada. This situation is more prevalent in provinces whereby local political dynasties have more influence over the rural populace. Such political conditions exacerbate poverty and underdevelopment and are contributing factors to labor migration.

In Antique, a single family currently holds the highest two positions in the province's public office, with Exequiel 'Boy' Javier as the governor and his son Paolo Javier as the congressman. Boy Javier is the character referred to and is the main subject of the political critique in the film *Handum* analyzed in this thesis. The rise of Boy Javier to position was enabled by the death of his older brother Evelio or 'Beloy' who is up to now is widely respected as a hero in Antique and regarded by all of my research participants as the best public official their province had. Beloy Javier was the governor of Antique from 1972-1980 and during his term implemented numerous poverty alleviation programs and cultural activities such as the *Binirayan* festival. A staunch opponent of Martial Law and the Marcos regime, he was assassinated in 1986 by a militia group when he ran for the position of congressman against a candidate loyal to the dictatorship.

Following the death of his brother, Boy Javier ran for office and served as the congressman of the province from 1987 to 1998 and from 2001 to 2010. From 1998 to 2001, he served as the governor of Antique (Provincial Government of Antique, n.d.). Like most politicians in the province, Boy identifies himself with his brother during election campaigns and this had helped him maintain several positions for 25 years. During the time of fieldwork, local election in the Philippines had just concluded and Javier and his son had been elected to office following what has been

described by most of my respondents as intense rivalry against the camp of the former governor Salvacion Perez since the later took office in 2001. While my most of my respondents have their own preferred leader, the common complains were the neglect of Antique due to the incessant politicking between the two political factions and the disparity between the politicians' length of service and the socioeconomic progress achieved in the province. Given the concentration of power in the hands of one family, the lack of challenge from an alternative and progressive candidate, and the absence of a strong public demand for reform, it would take a strong social upheaval to change the political structure of the province.

1.5.4 Antique and its mediascape

The mediascape in Antique is highly influenced by the national mainstream media due mainly to the lack of advertising opportunities that would enable independent operation. As of the date of fieldwork, there were eight radio stations, two cable television companies, and one English-language newspaper based in the province. Most of these are based in San Jose de Buenavista. Aside from these local media, Manila-based newspapers and national and international magazine titles arrive late in the morning everyday from Iloilo City. The only cinema in the province, Fatima Theatre, closed down sometime in 2007 due to declining patronage. Presently, the nearest cinemas are in Iloilo City although films can be viewed from television stations or from the legal and bootleg CDs and DVDs sold in stores (J. Saylo, personal communication, January 27, 2011).

During the time of fieldwork, Internet access in homes, offices, and public places is provided by the Philippine Long Distance Telephone Company, Globe Telecom, and local cable television companies. The average monthly home subscription fee is

P1,000 (\$22) while in Internet cafés and shops it is P12.5 (\$0.27) per hour. Mobile Internet subscription is more costly at P25 (\$0.55) per hour and access is slow and prone to frequent disconnection. As such, access through Internet shops is preferred.

Radio is the medium used most because Internet access is limited in downtown areas and clear television reception is only available to those who have cable subscription. All of the radio stations operate under the franchise of national broadcasting networks. DYKA, the largest radio institution in the province, is a 5-kilowatt AM station operated under the franchise of the Catholic Media Network. It was established in 1972 as part of the evangelization and social ministry of the church (E. Febrero, personal communication, January 18, 2011). DYKA is considered by my informants as the community radio in Antique due to its full local programming and length of operation. News, commentary, and feature programs are aired in Kinaray-a. In addition, it is the only radio station that devotes a one-hour program to OKM songs. Prior to the availability of cable television, DYKA's afternoon and evening dramas that drew from local myths and folktales provided the main source of entertainment in the province. DYKA's FM station, on the other hand, was only established in 2010 and airs mostly English or Tagalog pop music.

When it comes to the promotion of local culture, however, it can be argued that the Catholic Church in Antique takes an ambivalent position. On one hand its radio station DYKA mainly uses the Kinaray-a language, airs OKM songs, and produces afternoon programs that draw from local folklore and myths. Being the radio station with the widest reach in the province, DYKA thus helps in promoting Karay-a culture. The church, however, do not give much emphasis on the language in most of its liturgical services. The Kinaray-a language is not used in liturgical prayers and

up to now there is no Bible in the vernacular despite the Church's centuries of presence in the province. In fact, it was an Evangelist group which invested resources to have the first Kinaray-a Bible drafted in 2006. Not surprisingly, the Catholic Church has also discredited the indigenous religion since its establishment in the province.

The divide between what the Catholic Church does in its liturgy and radio station can be explained by the fact that DYKA is an enterprise. It is an important part of the Church's mandate to continue its evangelization and social position. However, airing purely religious programming will not bring in the income needed to maintain operation, particularly when it stopped receiving funding from the Church (E. Febrero, personal communication, January 18, 2011), which is also receiving lesser donations. DYKA thus needs to implement localized programming to attract advertising and airing OKM songs is one way to ensure this. As such the focus on local culture stems not so much from the aim to promote it, but to ensure that the radio station survives.

As with DYKA, the other radio stations operate under the franchise of a national broadcasting network. In contrast to DYKA, however, all of them operate mainly as relay stations of Manila-based programs. For instance, the 0.5-Kilowatt DYRS *Radyo Natin Antique* is on air 18 hours daily. However, only six hours and 15 minutes of these are devoted to locally produced programs, while the rest and mostly prime time hours are dedicated to 'must carry' programs or those managed by its parent company Manila Broadcasting Network. This is the arrangement despite the fact that it is the local station that pays for the operating and other maintenance costs (T. Siesa, personal communication, January 4, 2011). The same is also the case with Hot FM Bugasong, another 0.5-kilowatt station based in the north of San Jose de

Buenavista which airs must carry programs (J.A. Bartolo, personal communication, January 16, 2011).

All commercial radio stations generate revenues through advertising. In the Philippines, however, 'blocktiming' is major source of income since radio was introduced to the country (Enriquez, 2008). In Antique, all radio stations including the Catholic DYKA sell 30-minute blocks of airtime for an average of P3,000 (\$67) to anyone who can pay the fee. Most of the time, it is local politicians who buy these air times to maintain publicity with their constituents. According to DYRS manager Teody Siesa (personal communication, 4 January 2011), selling of block times enables local radio stations to have a stable source of income because there are limited advertising opportunities in Antique. He explained that owners of local businesses in Antique have a "reverse mentality" because they would only advertise when they have extra income rather than incorporating advertising cost in their budget from the start to generate more revenue. A local official, in contrast, would often pay for a minimum of 30 minutes per week for one month, thus already ensuring the station P12,000 (\$267) income without the radio staff having to go around looking for advertisers and competing with other local media. During election campaign period, block times are often sold out to local and national candidates manager (T. Siesa, personal communication, 4 January 2011)

The selling of air times is also practiced by the two cable TV companies in Antique. The Philippine National Telecommunications Commission requires cable television operators to allocate one channel wherein local news and programs can be aired. Buenavista Cable TV and Barbaza Multipurpose Cooperative Cable TV both air only one weekly episode of news and feature programs in their community channels. To fill up the airtime, the companies both broadcast advertisements and

block time programs. These programs, however, do not attract as much attention as radio because of the availability of the other 80 international and Manila-based channels. Interviews with representatives from both cable television companies indicated that the top five channels requested by subscribers are national television stations ABS-CBN and GMA-7 and international channels HBO, CNN, and Disney.

Western Visayas Newsbreak, the sole newspaper in Antique, engages in a similar practice of selling advertising space to local politicians. The tabloid-sized newspaper is owned by Iloilo City businessman Rey Alcade and prints mostly English articles on local politics, legal ordinances, and advertisements. Of all the local media in San Jose de Buenavista, it is Western Visayas Newsbreak that is not struggling to find advertisers. Since the law mandates that all provincial and municipal ordinances and notices be published in local newspapers, Western Visayas Newsbreak generates a substantial revenue because it has no competitors (R. Alcade, personal communication, February 15, 2011).

The practice of selling block times has implications for the kind of information the Antique public receives from its local media. Content in these programs is dictated by local politicians paying for the fee. This practice is more acute than what Herman and Chomsky (1988) suggested with the sourcing filter of their propaganda model because media institutions explicitly sell block times that allow local politicians almost free reign over their programs. In this sense, although there are local media in the province, most of them do not give any more space for marginal voices than the national mainstream media do. Cultural and political expression is limited to those who can afford the fees set by the local media. With the development and diffusion of more affordable and interactive new media technologies, however, opportunities for participation and collaborative production

have been created. By harnessing the Internet and digital music and video production technologies, ordinary Antiqueños and Antiqueñas have created their own spaces for cultural production and civic participation. It is their engagement with these new media technologies that I aim to investigate in this thesis.

1.6 Conclusion

New media have rapidly evolved and become more ubiquitous since Roger Silverstone made his argument 13 years ago. Indeed, cheaper and more interactive communication technologies have made it possible for almost everyone around the world to collaborate and create their own spaces for cultural production. For cultural populist scholars, these spaces do not only provide more opportunities for personal expression but also open up avenues for democratic participation. For marginal groups particularly in developing countries, these would mean more possibilities for socioeconomic emancipation.

But the inequalities that earlier scholarship has predicted to be resolved by new media still persist and restrain us from making celebratory pronouncements. New media may have become an ubiquitous and pervasive part of our everyday lives, but whether this translates to emancipation or exploitation is still an open question that cannot be answered *a priori*. What the rapid developments in new media certainly present, however, are opportunities for us to answer that question, and that is the main task of this thesis. By analyzing the dialogical relationships of rapidly changing communication technologies, individual agency, and social structures, it will elucidate the potentials and limits of new media for marginal ethnic groups. In doing so, this thesis aims to help towards the effort of moving forward the ongoing polemic debate regarding the impact of new media in the contemporary life of marginal groups.

Chapter 2: Vernacular Mediation as a Dialogical Process

Despite all the criticism that Nicholas Negroponte (1996) received for painting an overly optimistic view of communication technologies, he was right in predicting that there would be an exponential growth in their application. The Internet and digital audiovisual production technologies are now available even in rural communities while the use of file sharing and social networking sites like You Tube, Flickr, Facebook, and Twitter has become a global norm. The rapid spread of digital communication technologies, however, is still ongoing. Figures from the International Telecommunications Union (2011) shows that from 2006 to 2011, Internet users in the developed world increased at an average of 766 Million annually and even more in developing countries at 951 Million per year. In lay discourse, predictions highlight that the most important development with communication technologies in the coming years would be its increasing ubiquity. Technology columnist Carolyn Duffy Marsan (2010) for instance, made the widespread availability of the Internet as her topmost forecast:

1. More people will use the Internet.

Today's Internet has 1.7 billion users, according to Internet World Stats. This compares with a world population of 6.7 billion people. There's no doubt more people will have Internet access by 2020. Indeed, the National Science Foundation predicts that the Internet will have nearly 5 billion users by then.

2. The Internet will be more geographically dispersed.

Most of the Internet's growth over the next 10 years will come from developing countries. The regions with the lowest penetration rates are Africa (6.8%), Asia (19.4%), and the Middle East (28.3%), according to Internet World Stats.

In contrast, North America has a penetration rate of 74.2% (para. 2&3).

For certain, the rate and expanse of spread will not be uniform around the world but predictions like these are not considered as radical as before. Within the academe, even the discussions on digital divide has acknowledged the increasing ubiquity of new media so much so that scholars now use the more relative term 'digital inequality' to highlight the differences in the uptake of the technology (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman & Robinson 2001; Van Dijk, 2006; Wei, 2012). Rather than the absence or lack of digital technologies, the main questions right now focus on the reasons why some people are more likely to use one new medium over the other (DiMaggio et, al., 2001) or how people differ in their simultaneous or multimodal use of different new media at a single time (Wei, 2012).

Within cultural studies, new media's rapid developments and increasing availability have again highlighted weaknesses of each of the major theoretical traditions in communication research and contributed to the shift from purely materialist, functionalist, or technology-centric analysis to approaches that emphasize the processes within specific cultural and sociohistorical contexts. As such, scholars are highlighting the need for concepts that examine the role, power, impact, and implications of today's media without reducing these as functions of political economy, individual agency, technology, or culture. There is also a renewed call to link the processes of production, circulation, reception, and reproduction in every analysis. Two of the approaches that are mostly cited at present are mediation

and mediatization¹² (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Schulz, 2004; Couldry, 2008; Hjarvard, 2008; Strömbäck, 2008; Livingstone, 2009; Siapera, 2010; Madianou, 2011; Lievrouw, 2011). The ideas of mediatization and mediation can be traced back to the early days of mass media when linear and functionalist theories such as uses and gratifications, diffusion of innovations (Rogers, 2003), and cultivation theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976) were formulated. Audience centered approaches like Ang's (1985) and Liebes and Katz's (1993) have highlighted individual engagement with the symbols and meanings emanating from the media while medium theory made further salient by McLuhan (1964) has emphasized the role of technology in changing individual perceptions as well as societies. Because these theoretical

¹²Mediation and mediatization are two overlapping concepts that can both be conceived as social phenomena and analytical approaches. Mediatization has been defined as the process in which the aims, rules, activities, meanings, identities, or relevance of social institutions, conditions, and groups become dependent on media frameworks. It changes the "modes of interaction" (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 114) within and among social and cultural institutions by instilling particular frameworks. For Altheide and Snow (1979) this framework or 'media logic' includes the format or "how the material is organized, the style in which it is presented, the focus or emphasis on particular characteristics of behavior, and the grammar of media communication" (p. 10). Other scholars include audience access and control (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999), the media organization's imperatives (Hjarvard, 2008), and the technological characteristics of a particular medium (Finneman, 2011). The main argument in mediatization scholarship is that a medium is not a passive channel through which information can pass through unaltered. It is often controlled by organizations with their own logics that in turn shape the content. Because of their continued use, these logics become dominant frameworks. As a result, the media become more entrenched as an independent institution and its roles as a link among other social institutions, as a source of interpretative frame, and as an arena for discussion are further strengthened (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 125-126). Politics for instance has developed a language that resembles those of advertising, public relations, and show business (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999) through the continuous deployment of "mediagenic symbols and mechanisms" (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 115) by political actors. The result is that what becomes newsworthy and what is defined as salient in the public sphere and election campaigns are "communication skills, the style of addressing the public, the 'look,' the image, [and] even the special effects" (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999, p. 251). While mediation and mediatization are often conceptualized as contradictory (see Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Couldry, 2008; Hjarvard, 2008; and Strömbäck, 2008), I will argue that they are co-constitutive. Individuals and social groups practice mediation when they create a continuous cycle of symbolic meaning production and circulation. Social institutions carry out mediatization whereby the media's frameworks for the production, circulation, and reception are normalized. Mediation discursively feeds mediatization through its repetition and subsequent legitimization of these frameworks. On the other hand, mediatization shapes mediation in the same manner that genres and norms shape cultural expressions.

traditions highlight only one aspect, they fail to elucidate the complexity of the entire communication process. It is out of the critique of these traditions that mediation and mediatization were formulated (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Martin-Barbero, 2006; Hjarvard, 2008; Siapera, 2010; Lievrouw, 2011). This thesis will focus on the concept of mediation.

2.1 Locating Mediation as a Concept

Mediation is often conceptualized as an act of intercession and reconciliation of separate entities. Hegel (1977), for instance, defined it as a process of “reflection into self” (p. 11) wherein an individual bridges and integrates the universal and the particular to define his or her identity. As a cognitive process, mediation is integral in Hegel’s dialectics for it is what facilitates the synthesis of two opposing ideas, namely the thesis and antithesis. For Hegel, thought is a process of mediation as it enables separate ideas to be articulated into an organic whole, allowing the individual to develop a new and more progressive consciousness. Similarly, Marx and Engels’ (1972) concept of mediation features the integration of two separate entities, namely the cultural and material domains of a society. Marxist mediation, however, stresses class conflict and disputes Hegel’s conceptualization of individual consciousness as autonomous. For Marx, individual and mass consciousness is shaped by sociohistorical structures and is a means for the bourgeoisie to ensure their dominance over the proletariat. In a capitalist society, labor and capital serve as mediating factors as these enable symbolic (cultural) and monetary (material) values to be integrated into a product, which is ultimately alienated from the worker

who made it and thereby perpetuating inequality between the two social classes (Marx & Engels, 1972).

Hegelian and Marxist mediations differ in terms of their impacts – with the former highlighting the empowering effect on the autonomous individual and the latter emphasizing the exploitative consequences of entrenched sociohistorical structures – they both demonstrate that the process can occur at personal, interpersonal, or societal levels. Similarly, Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky's (1978) notion of cultural mediation illustrates how mediation can occur simultaneously at all these levels. According to Vygotsky, an individual cannot fully develop consciousness or cognition without the use culturally constructed semiotic tools such as language, art, or any other signs that carries symbolic meaning. These tools enable the individual to interact with his or her social environment, constantly make sense of the world, and develop new ways of understanding and solving problems. As these tools are culturally developed, they are highly contextual and dynamic: individuals collaboratively rework them according to present needs and pass them on from one generation to the next. Cultural mediation is thus a process whereby individuals attain psychological development by communicating through culturally specific semiotic tools. It occurs at the personal, interpersonal, and societal levels because although psychological development is achieved through internalization, the individual relies on other persons to acquire knowledge and teach him or her to harness the available semiotic tools that are essentially products of social practices over time.

Like Vygotsky, Marshal McLuhan (1964) highlighted the saliency of the tools or medium that facilitates human cognition. McLuhan, however, focused on mass media and presented these as the key driver not only of the communication process but human experience as well. He posited that the use of communication technologies affects the organization of the human interaction and the structure of culture because they function as extension of our limbs and senses. Each medium is characterized by the unique ways it engages our senses and thereby resulting in different forms of thinking and communicating. Such effects can be gleaned through the rise of different periods in human history: oral, writing and printing, and electronic. McLuhan's conceptualizations are highly salient as they enable us to see that media are not neutral technological tools that just transmit meanings passively: they can shape the outcome of human cognition and communication. He has been criticized, however, for his technological determinism that devalues human agency, social structures, and the meanings that arise from media practices. For some media scholars, the meaning derived from the act of mediation is what is central to the process.

John Thompson (1995), for instance, stated that it us out of our basic need to share meanings that mediation¹³ arises. He explained that the modern era could be characterized by the pervasiveness of symbolic forms and individuals who are constantly engaged in constructing, sharing, and interpreting meanings. Through the mass media, these symbolic forms move "far beyond the shared locales of everyday life (p. 3)" to transcend the boundaries of space and time. For Thompson,

¹³Thompson used the term mediazation instead of mediation to explain the same process of meaning construction through different media.

communication is a form of social action and the media facilitate this by transmitting symbolic meanings that alter our sense of our past, place, and belonging. He argued that our idea of our past and the many ways in which it still affects us are increasingly dependent on our constantly expanding “mediated historicity” (p. 35) or accumulation of symbolic forms. In the same way, our sense of place and the world rely on the symbols and narratives that circulate through the media. These ‘mediated historicity’ and ‘mediated worldliness’ in turn alter our sense of belonging and create ‘mediated sociality.’ Thompson explained that

as our sense of the past becomes increasingly dependent on mediated symbolic forms, and as our sense of the world and our place within it becomes increasingly nourished by media products, so too our sense of the groups and communities with which we share a common path through time and space; a common origin and a common fate is altered: we feel ourselves to belong to groups and communities which are constituted in part through the media (p. 35).

For Thompson, it is precisely these mediated socialities that create new ways of action, interaction, and relationships that otherwise would not be possible with face-to-face communication. Thus, by facilitating the sharing and reshaping of meanings, mediation enables enhanced experience and socialization.

Latin American communication scholar Jesus Martin-Barbero (1993) made the same emphasis on the saliency of meaning that arise from mediation but further highlighted the ways in which these restructured culture. Echoing Raymond Williams (1977) critique of Marxist mediation, Martin-Barbero (1993) emphasized the importance of everyday practices and popular culture. For him, popular culture should not be regarded as ideological tools designed to dupe the masses as this

would ignore the heterogeneity of meanings of a media text and the dynamicity of culture itself:

If one persists in thinking of the phenomenon of mass society as something purely external to the popular – as something that devours popular culture parasitically like a vampire, then this is possible only from one of two positions: that there are guardians of pure and authentic culture, whose paradigm is rural life, and for whom all change is the distortion of the original purity of an established form. The second position is that of a social domination incapable of considering the production of the popular classes except in terms of a reaction to what is induced by the dominant classes. Both positions ignore history, its opacity and ambiguity, and they ignore, too, the struggle to construct meaning (pp. 228-229).

Martin-Barbero mainly critiqued Marxist and political economic analyses of media practices because these were the popular approaches in Latin American communication studies at that time. However, he emphasized that “the dominance of a commercial logic is *only a part* of a much more complex process that has other influences” (p. 233, emphasis mine). As such, highlighting individual agency or the affordances of communication technologies would result in the same narrow analysis. Instead of focusing on any one of these aspects, he suggested analyzing mediation, which he described as “the articulations between communication practices and social movements and the articulation of different tempos of development to the plurality of cultural matrices” (p. 187). Such analysis requires situating the role of media in reconstituting cultural, political, and social life within a specific sociohistorical context.

Thompson and Martin-Barbero focused their discussion on traditional mass media but with the rise of digital technologies, the ways in which meanings are

constructed and interpreted have been altered. Bolter and Grusin (2000) stated that computer representations create the “logic of transparent immediacy” (p. 21), or the sense of a close, instantaneous, and non-mediated perception of a text. This enables the content to appear “natural rather than arbitrary” (p. 21) and makes our experience of the meanings that were mediated more vivid. Through new media technologies, symbols and narratives that were circulated before take a novel form. This process of “remediation” (p. 35) highlights the continuous nature of mediation whereby each act of meaning construction depends on and constantly reshapes previously mediated texts. It also emphasizes that digital technologies do not present a total break from traditional media. As Bolter and Grusin argued, the media “need each other in order to function as a media at all” (p. 35).

Highlighting the participatory potentials of digital technologies, Leah Lievrouw (2011) extended Bolter and Grusin’s remediation to propose her own concept of mediation as a framework for alternative media. Taking a cultural populist approach, Lievrouw highlighted how new media can enable alternative and activist groups to subvert the dominance of mainstream culture and media institutions:

Websites, mobile phones, digital photography, video, and audio, blogs, wikis, file sharing systems, social media and open source software all permit social groups with diverse interests to build and sustain communities, gain visibility, and voice, present alternative or marginal views, produce and share their own do-it-yourself (DIY) information sources, and resist, talk back, or otherwise confront dominant media culture, politics, and power (pp. 1-2).

Lievrouw defined new media as the “combination of material artifacts, people’s practices, and social and organizational arrangements involved in the process of

human communication” (p. 15). She differentiated these from traditional media by highlighting their four distinctive characteristics: they are hybrid or recombinant in that they continuously combine older media systems and innovations; have a networked system that is composed of constantly reorganizing and ephemeral point-to-point webs of technologies, organizations, and individuals; ubiquitous in that they are or if not yet, will be present everywhere and every time; and interactive which allows these to support participation (pp. 7-15). Highlighting the potentials of these characteristics and utilizing Chris Atton’s (2001) concept of alternative media, she defined alternative/activist new media as those that

employ or modify the communication artifacts, practices, and social arrangements of new information technologies to challenge or alter dominant, expected, or accepted ways of doing society, culture, culture, and politics (p. 19).

Lievrouw further explicated alternative/activist media by categorizing it into five main genres: culture jamming, alternative computing, participatory journalism, mediated mobilization, and commons knowledge. These genres have different purposes and methods in engaging with new media but they share these characteristics: smaller scale, heterotopic or oppositional stance, interventionist aim, and perishability. Alternative/activist new media operate in a smaller scale and often act as counter sites for expression, affiliation, and creativity. They are also interventionist in that they seek to interrupt and alter existing conditions. Lastly, alternative/activist new media are perishable as they are often “short lived responses to rapidly changing cultural contexts and meanings” (p. 69). To analyze

alternative/activist new media, Lievrouw proposed her own concept of mediation as a theoretical framework and defined it as the

ongoing, mutually shaping relationship between people's uses of communication technology (reconfiguration) and their communicative action (remediation) that produces social and technological change (p. 231).

In this framework, technologies are continuously reconfigured through reinvention, rebuilding, adaptation, reorganization, hacking, or redesign. Lievrouw's main argument was that individuals and groups change new media technologies to adapt to their needs and purposes. The mutually shaping relationship between technology reconfiguration and remediation is governed by the centripetal or centrifugal dynamics that can result in either cultural homogeneity or heterogeneity.

While Lievrouw's mediation takes into account the ubiquity and emancipatory potentials of new media, it features the same limitations as the utopist concepts discussed in the previous chapter. It privileges the ease of production and emphasizes the engagement with new media as autonomous and closed events, with her particular insistence on 'perishability' even celebrating their ephemeral characteristic. Martin-Barbero's (2006) updated argument on mediation can provide an insightful caution against celebrating *a priori* the potentials of new media by repeating the importance of a contextualized analysis. He stated that the Western rhetoric over the ubiquity and potentials of new media in everyday life is problematic in his part of the globe where "basic needs in education and health have not yet been met; countries where increasing inequality fragments society and

weakens the means and mechanisms of communication” (p. 280). He also argued that we avoid media-centric analysis and stated that

mistaking communication for technologies or media is as distorting as thinking that media are mere external accessories to (the truth of) communication. This would be the same as neglecting the historical materiality of discourse mediations where communication takes place (p. 289).

There is thus a need for a concept of mediation that takes into account the contextualized dynamics among individual agency, sociohistorical structures, symbolized meanings, and the technological affordances of the medium. Roger Silverstone’s (1999, 2002, 2005) concept of mediation enables such analysis by highlighting its non-determinateness and linking the role of media to everyday life. He defined mediation as the

process in which institutionalized media of communication (the press, broadcast, and television, and increasingly the World Wide Web) are involved in the general circulation of symbols in social life (2002, p. 762).

Silverstone based his conceptualization on the realization that media technologies have become ubiquitous and central “in their capacity to provide the symbolic resources and tools for making sense of the complexities of the everyday” (p. 762). He avoided, however, the romanticized notion of ‘everyday life’ by arguing that it is rife with complexity and difficulty and that we all constantly strive to make sense and meaning out of these. For him, everyday life is the arena where the media are bound to operate most significantly.

Silverstone argued that mediation is not a passive act because the particular meanings it constructs carry profound impacts. These meanings have the ability to

shape the relationships and actions of individuals who inherently have unequal “symbolic resources” (Couldry, 2000, p. 20) for constructing social reality. Because of this, although mediation can carry the possibilities for cultural participation and democracy as Lievrouw argued, it does not automatically lead to these. As Couldry (2000) stated, “there is a real difference in terms of ability to make yourself heard and have your account of social reality *accepted*” (p. 20, emphasis mine).

While meaning is central to his concept of mediation, Silverstone also acknowledged the role of communication technologies and urged for it to be included in analysis. However, he cautioned against a deterministic reading of the role of media, emphasizing that developments in technology do not readily equate to positive changes in social relationships. According to him,

new media are constructed on the foundations of the old. They do not emerge fully fledged or perfectly formed. Nor it is ever clear how they will be institutionalized or used, or even less, what consequences they will have on social, economic, or political life (p. 20).

Silverstone also emphasized the need to include social, economic, and cultural factors as these will ground the “subtleties, power, and consequences of technological change” (p. 27). Couldry (2008) reiterated this view by arguing that the analysis of mediation should highlight the “flows of production, circulation, reception, and recirculation” (p. 380) because the interpretations emanating from these processes feed back “into production or outwards into general social and cultural life” (p. 380).

Silverstone’s mediation includes the analysis of its ethical implications – an aspect that is absent in the other notions discussed above. He argued that while

mediation can accommodate creative engagement and exchange of meanings between ordinary individuals and mainstream media institutions, it can also entrench indifference and social inequalities. The meanings and representations circulated through the media create “proper distance” (2002, p. 770) or the illusion of proximity that prevents us from engaging with other individuals who need our help the most. By constantly circulating a preferred meaning of reality or of the “distant other” (p. 762), mediations thus “enable a collusive illusion that the appearance of the other in crisis on the screen is sufficient enough for us to believe that we are fully engaged with him or her in that crisis” (p. 777). The modes by which proper distance form are by either exoticizing the unfamiliar other to a “point beyond strangeness, beyond reach and beyond humanity” or making him or her “so close as to be indistinguishable from ourselves” (2005, par 67) so that we become indifferent. In this sense, Silverstone argued against viewing mediation as a passive act that carries no consequences. He added that while mediation may open up alternative forms of expression for marginal groups, it requires recognition that it is a fundamentally uneven social process.

This view on the unevenness or non-determinateness of mediation is shared by other scholars like Nick Couldry (2008) who argued that it does not “assume any stable unit of causality” and as such analysts must allow not only for “non-linearity” but also for “discontinuity and asymmetry” (p. 381). Focusing on ethnic media practices, Eugenia Siapera (2010) stated that the mediation of ethnicity will always highlight the issue of power asymmetry. Yet it is also equally important to note that cultural minorities are not the perpetual “passive victims of racist representations”

(p. 75) but also possess agency to challenge these dominant meanings. Mirca Madianou's (2011) study of television exposure showed that mediation "can exert subtle forms of social control" (p. 14) by generating negative emotions such as shame particularly if the subject was an ordinary individual who will always have lesser symbolic resources than mainstream media institutions. These studies illustrate how the results and implications of different mediations depend on the actors, technology, and sociohistorical contexts involved.

To sum up the above scholarship, mediation is the ongoing communicative process of reconciling separate ideas or meanings. It puts premium on symbolic meanings and occurs when individuals and groups construct and exchange expressions through different media such as language, clothing, food, festivals, music, film, or website. Mediation therefore is not the mere act of producing content, rather, it is a process of the continuous transformation and circulation of meanings that involves overlapping and ongoing processes of production, circulation, reception, and reproduction. But because these meanings circulate beyond milieu of the individual or group who hold have varying symbolic resources, it is an uneven process that can impact other individuals and societies.

To situate the mediation practices and processes of the Karay-a ethnic group in its specific sociohistorical context but avoid adding to the same utopian-dystopian polemic over the ubiquity and centrality of new media, I will draw upon Silverstone's notion of mediation and Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogic interaction. I will conceptualize the ethnic group's music, online community, and short film as active, subjective, and interrelated communicative acts among

sociohistorically situated actors. Thus for this thesis, mediation is a dialogical communicative act.

2.2 Mediation as a Dialogical Process

My research draws mainly from Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogic interaction to inform the analysis of mediation as an ongoing, interrelated, and intentional communicative acts among speaking subjects who are situated within a specific sociohistorical context. Before discussing the dialogical nature of mediation, I will first present a short biography of Bakhtin and his concepts of dialogism and utterance.

Compared to other philosophers and cultural theorists, Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin lived a humble and obscure life, with his works largely unrecognized until a decade before his death. Born in 1895 to a middle class family with an aristocratic lineage, Bakhtin would live through a revolution; food shortages, exile, and dislocations; and a debilitating disease that required leg amputation (Todorov, 1984; Clark & Holquist, 1984; Morson & Emerson, 1990; Holquist, 2002). Bakhtin for most of his life was employed as a teacher and did not keep a systematic archive and record of his work, with some of his drafts even used as cigarette paper and other completed works published under the name of his friends (Todorov, 1984; Holquist, 2002). But he was a prolific writer, expounding on subjects such as philology, epistemology, and aesthetics and ethics and consistently pursued a theme that ties being, meanings, and communicative relationships: dialogism.

Holquist (1981; 2002) traced the influences of Bakhtin's childhood, academic training, and fellow intellectuals in his conceptualization of the active and hybrid nature of dialogism. According to Holquist (2002), from early childhood Bakhtin was already exposed to the heterogeneity of cultures. His German governess taught him French and her language as well as exposed him to Greek literature. In 1914, he pursued philology at St. Petersburg University and specialized in Latin and Greek. When the Bolshevik revolution ended, the Russian capital was plagued by food and fuel shortages and Bakhtin, like many of his contemporaries, went to the countryside. He found employment as an elementary school teacher in Nevel, which was home to various ethnolinguistic groups. It was in this town that he would start to write many of his essays and join a group of intellectuals called the Nevel Circle to discuss a wide range of topics in philosophy, science, and arts (Holquist, 2002). Among these were Matvie Isaevich Kagan and Valerian Nikolavich Voloshinov (Todorov, 1984). The former who studied under Hermann Cohen would imbue neo-Kantian perspectives on Bakhtin's concept of the self, while the latter would bear the authorship of *Marxism and the Philosophy of the Language*. The book is among Bakhtin's works whose authorship is disputed, and even among Bakhtinian scholars there is a debate whether he co-authored the book or not. Holquist (2002) maintains that Bakhtin solely wrote the book while Todorov (1984) argues for co-authorship with Voloshinov, and, for other works, with Pavel Nikolaevich Medvedev. For this thesis, I will cite the authorship of *Marxism and the Philosophy of the Language* as Bakhtin/Voloshinov.

In 1924, Bakhtin moved back to Leningrad after transferring from the town of Vitebsk where he wrote more of his essays and continued discussions with his fellow intellectuals (Clark & Holquist, 1984; Holquist, 2002). Five years later he was arrested for being linked to an underground church and was sentenced to hard labor in the Solovetsky Islands, but because of his severe osteomyelitis and the help of Kagan, he was exiled to Kazakhstan instead. Bakhtin and his wife Elena Aleksandrovna stayed in Kazakhstan until 1936 where he was able to finish *Discourse in the Novel*. After this exile, he and Elena moved to the city of Saransk where he wrote his controversial dissertation on Rabelais' work and spent most of his life working as a teacher (Holquist, 2002).

Bakhtin lived a quiet life for most of his stay in Saransk and it was only in the 1960s that he would gain more recognition and his works published. According to Holquist (2002), a group of young scholars who admired his book on Dostoevsky and the dissertation on Rabelais set to the task of "rescuing Bakhtin from the obscurity into which he had fallen" (p. 10). In 1963, the revised *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* was published and followed by *Rabelais and His World* in 1965. The publication of these books brought recognition to Bakhtin and enabled him to move to Moscow where he published more essays along with his earlier works. Bakhtin died at the age of 80 in 1975 (Holquist, 2002).

In his works, Bakhtin often used language and novels as the focal point of analysis but their relevance extends beyond linguistics and literary criticism. From his early essays on art, and aesthetics, and ethics to his last treatises on literary genres and texts, Bakhtin was consistently expounding not only about novels or languages but

more on meaning and how it emerges through our socially situated interaction with an 'other' who, at the same time, also occupies a particular position in his or her own social milieu. As such, Bakhtin's philosophical treatment of language and the novel is in essence an explication of meaning-making and how this process recreates culture (Hirschkop, 1986; Bostad, Faber & Hedge, 2005). Language and literature stand as the semiotic tools that mediate meaning among individuals who are socially situated. With this, any symbolic text can be a part of the dialogical process.

Bakhtin, with his style of writing, did not provide an explicit definition of dialogism and each time he approached the concept, it would be accompanied by a set of constructs with overlapping characteristics or repeated key points within and across his works. In his earlier essays *Art and Answerability; Author and Hero and Aesthetic Activity*; and *The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art* first published in the 1920s, dialogism is first explicated through generic forms of art. The concepts discussed in these essays would then later evolve: artistic expressions will transform into the linguistic utterances, hero will also become the semantic element or the theme, form into genre, and structure into the social milieu of the communicative act. Yet the change in concepts and the lack of specific definition are not conceptual weaknesses but Bakhtin already applying two of dialogism's key principles: non-determinateness and dynamicity. One can right away glean Bakhtin's anti-normative stance in his consistent critique of rigid formalism and structuralism in linguistics and art criticism. Having a pre-defined, essentialized, and finalized or static meaning is monologic, which is precisely the opposite of dialogism.

Dialogism has been interpreted as a literary principle (Todorov, 1984), epistemology (Holquist, 2002); cognitive process (Markova, 2003); and a process of human action, communication, and cognition (Linell, 2006, 2007). The concept has a broad heuristic application that can be used elucidating questions of individual subjectivity and agency, social relationships, and wider culture as a whole. As Todorov (1984) pointed out, dialogism

sketch[es] out a new interpretation of culture: culture consists in the discourses retained by collective memory (the commonplaces and stereotypes just as much as the exceptional words), discourses in relation to which every uttering subject must situate himself or herself (p. x).

One of the main issues that Bakhtin raised against the formalists and structuralists of his time was their choice of their unit of analysis. He pointed out that both fields fail to capture the living interconnectedness within and among art forms and languages by analyzing either individual expressions or particular elements and rules. In privileging “expressive aesthetics” (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 65) or “purely individual acts [as] the expression of an individual consciousness,” formalists yield to “individualistic subjectivism” (Bakhtin/Volosinov, 1973, p. 81) and fail to acknowledge the constituting role of culture and what Anthony Giddens (1984) referred to as the duality of structure. On the other hand, by emphasizing the internal dynamics of normative rules that govern the word, sentence, or syntax and privileging the present (synchronic) over the historic (diachronic), Ferdinand de Saussure and other structuralists commit “abstract objectionism” (Bakhtin/Volosinov, 1973, p. 65) and reify speaking individuals as passive and incapable of understanding and giving a response. For Bakhtin, in order to fully

understand language, the unit of analysis should not be the word, sentence, or syntactical rules because these are devoid of the social relations that formed them and cannot explain the constitutive processes involved. Further, focusing on these elements will only prescribe the pre-defined, normative, and static rules of the *langue* and disregard the role of the speaking subject. But neither should the analysis focus on the speaking subject's communicative act that is divorced from its social context:

The actual reality of language-speech is not the abstract system of linguistic forms, not the isolated monologic utterance, and not the psychophysiological act of its implementation, but the social event of verbal interaction implemented in an utterance or utterances (p. 94, emphasis in original).

In dialogism, the unit of analysis is the communicative act or utterance, which can either be a short interjection or a novel, poem, song, film, or other more complex semiotic units. For Bakhtin, an utterance is a "*social phenomenon*" (p. 82, emphasis in original) all throughout because of its embeddedness within its sociohistorical context. This context or the "*immediate social situation and the broader social milieu*" (p. 86, emphasis in original) serves more than just a backdrop surrounding the analytical question. In dialogism, the context sets in motion and sustains interaction between individuals and their communicative practices. Sociohistorical contexts "*wholly determine – and determine from within... the structure of an utterance*" (Bakhtin/Volosinov, 1973, p. 86, emphasis in original). In the long run, this context is shaped by the "practices, identities, or effects" it facilitates (Daryl Slack, 1996, p. 126).

In privileging the sociohistorical contexts, Bakhtin did not diminish the role of individual agency, social structures, or hierarchical power relations and acknowledged their existence. But instead of focusing on any one of these aspects, he highlighted the dynamics among them and urged to analyze the how they all interact to shape and reshape an utterance. Bakhtin argued that the speaking subject who enunciates the utterance is – from the start – a socially shaped being who directs his or her enunciation to another socially shaped individual. All speakers and addressees possess constrained agency and occupy at any time a specific position within their social milieu. Within that milieu, asymmetries in knowledge and participation as well as boundaries among social group exist (Linell, 2007). Thus, the speaker does not possess complete autonomy over his or her utterance:

no creative, cultural act has anything to do with completely random and unordered matter that is completely indifferent to value... Rather, it always has to do with something already and somehow ordered, in relation to which it must responsibly assume its own valuational position (Bakhtin, 1990, pp. 274-275).

In dialogism, an utterance requires and always has an addressee, an ‘other’ who may not be physically present or within the immediate time frame:

in the absence of a real addressee, an addressee is presupposed in the person, so to speak, of a normal representative of the social group to which the speaker belongs... There can be no such thing as an abstract addressee, a man unto himself, so to speak. Without such a person, we would indeed have no language in common, literally and figuratively (1986, p. 95).

The presence of the addressee from the very start makes the utterance already a social interaction (Todorov, 1984). The role of the addressee, however, is no less important than the role of the speaker in a dialogic utterance. In fact, Bakhtin accords greater saliency to role of “the others” (p. 94) in dialogism. For him, the addressees make utterances possible because the speaker is only able to construct his or her speech act by taking into account the latter.

Bakhtin’s audience thus has a more salient role in shaping the communicative act than the prosumers or collaborative creators in new media scholarship. This is because the utterance only partly belongs to the speaker and is a “two-sided act” from the start because its style and content will depend “equally by *whose* word it is and for whom it is meant” (p. 86, emphasis in original). Bakhtin also argued that the speaker is a previous addressee who creates his or her utterance as a response to preceding ones, and through it, expects a response from the intended addressees. An utterance thus is never a pioneering enunciation and the speaker is not the “mythical Adam, who approached a virginal and as yet a verbally unqualified world with the first word” (1981, p. 279) and articulates a subject for the first time. It is instead

a chain in the link of speech communication, and it cannot be broken off from the preceding links that determine it both from within and from without, giving rise within it to the unmediated responsive reactions and dialogic reverberations (1986, p. 94)

This ongoing chain of socially situated utterances, or dialogical discourse, is possible because each communicative act has the element of “addressivity” or “the quality of turning to someone” (p. 99) embedded into it. Addressivity is constructed into an utterance by including language, conventions, themes, and styles that are

familiar to or from the past communicative acts of the addressee (Morson & Emerson, 1980). In doing so, the speaker also directs the utterance as a response to the past communicative acts about the subject. As such, even if the utterance does not evoke the ideal response at the present, there is still the possibility of future responses that will enable the dialogue to continue. Bakhtin (1986) also highlighted the role of another addressee, the “superaddressee” who will be able to give an “ideally true responsive understanding” (p. 126). This addressee may still come from the future, but the speaker anticipates for him or her to achieve the intent of the utterance. The superaddressee, in other words, is a figurative ideal but has a crucial role (even if in the imaginary of the speaker) for ensuring the continuity of discourses especially those with emancipatory aims.

Because “communicative acts are sequentially ordered” (Linell, 2006, p. 33), utterances must undergo a temporary closure in order to evoke responses and enable the dialogue to continue. Bakhtin emphasized that no single utterance can have the final statement but must allow responses to take place – as with an actor stepping back to clear the stage for the other characters. This closure is temporary because the utterance will be reworked and become a part of succeeding utterances. Bakhtin enumerated three aspects of the utterance that allows its temporary closure: semantic exhaustiveness of the theme, the speaker’s plan or speech intent, and the typical compositional forms of finalization or genre. Semantic exhaustiveness occurs when speaker has said all that she or he wanted to say about the theme or subject, thus delineating the boundary of an utterance and allowing the “alternation of speakers” (Todorov, 1984, p. 53). It is closely tied to the purpose or

the speech intent, which shapes the utterance by determining its theme, genre, and boundaries.

The genre of the utterance also shapes its temporary closure. Bakhtin defined genres as “relatively stable thematic, compositional, and stylistic type of utterance” (p. 64) determined by the speech intent of the speaker, his or her expressive intonation or evaluative attitude, and the conventions that have become normalized. A Bakhtinian genre can be considered as a marker of the sociohistorical context because it carries the intents of the speaker and the symbolic elements in his or her milieu. For Bakhtin, the genre is salient because it enables the addressees to understand the meaning and breadth of the utterance as well as create their own in response.

It is important to note that in dialogism the meaning does not belong *a priori* to the speaker, addressee, or utterance but only emerges during their interaction. Once the addressee recognizes the meaning text and the concluding *dixi* of the speaker, a new utterance is constituted in response and the process of dialogic interaction continues (Bakhtin, 1986). Because the utterance is formed through the speech intent of the speaker, it will always carry a judgment, ideology, or evaluation. These would be manifested in the expressive intonation of the words and elements that constitute the utterance and may take the form of praise, approval, rapture, reproof, or even abuse. Thus, an utterance is never neutral and can carry essentialisms.

Bakhtin extensively discussed the novel of all the literary genres and art forms because of its highly dialogic nature manifested through the simultaneous presence

of multiple or polyphonic voices and social *heteroglossia*. But it should be noted here that Bakhtin is not prescribing novel as an ideal genre per se but the process of dialogism as represented in the novel (Holquist, 2002). The novelness and ‘carnavalesque’ in Fyodor Dostoevsky’s and François Rabelais’ written works are also characteristics of communicative acts like personal narratives, songs, and films. For Bakhtin, monologic acts are those that carry an authoritative voice and an unchanging theme and structure that limit responses. As a literary genre, novels enable dialogism to enter the text by allowing the multiple utterances of its author, characters, and the reader to interact, shape, and continue the discourse.

Bakhtin’s dialogism has been applied mostly in the analysis of representations in interpersonal communication (Lo, 1999; Pietikäinen & Dufva, 2006; O’Reilly, 2007), traditional mass media (Shohat & Stam, 1985; Stam, 1997, 2005; Brown, Stevens & Maclaran, 1999; Mercer, 2003; Druick, 2009; Flanagan, 2009), and new media (Mitra, 2001; Bostad, 2005). Pietikäinen and Dufva (2006) combined the concepts of polyphony and *heteroglossia* with Norman Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis to explain the multi-voiced nature of ethnic identities. Their study illustrate that members of ethnic groups do not hold a single, homogenous identity but draw from different discourses to construct multiple subjectivities. These materialize as “voices that draw on particular experiences along the life history of the individual” (p. 213). As such, an individual is not solely a member of his ethnic group but can also be simultaneously a professional and a family relative.

In another application of dialogism in interpersonal communication, Kathleen O’Reilly (2007) drew on Bakhtin’s concept of time-space relation or chronotope to

analyze how a water project in Northern India created spaces for women to enunciate their voices and enable participation in the development of their community. Bakhtin (1981) defined chronotope as the “intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (p. 82) and is a salient concept in tracing the constitution of the meaning and the individuals involved in the communicative act. It is an element of an utterance that shapes its genre and thus allows it to be articulated within a discourse and reality (Holquist, 2002). O’Reilly’s work illustrated how Bakhtin’s chronotopes work in everyday life. Although voices within a dialogue have asymmetrical power relationships, a single subversive utterance can lead to the recreation of chronotopes and thus give space for marginal community members from which to enunciate their position. Such subversion, however, may be limited to the specific chronotope it created. Outside the confines of their meeting and training venues, the women participants in the development project that O’ Reilly was a part of were silenced and were not allowed to participate.

Bakhtin’s dialogism was also used in scholarship on traditional mass and new media use. In his analysis of an online bulletin board of diasporic South Indians, Ananda Mitra (2001) illustrated how the ubiquitous Internet functions as a dialogical space wherein marginal groups can challenge mainstream representations and enunciate a heteroglossic and hypermediated voice. Drawing from Bakhtin’s notion of socially-situated utterance, Mitra argued that the hyperconnected web enables the marginalized to have a “new-found digital voice to utter the call for acknowledgement” (p. 31) and start a dialogue. Although Mitra warned that there is

a tendency that these will be ignored or drowned out in the multiplicity of voices on the web, he was optimistic on the affordances of the Internet. He stated that, “dominance is no longer tied to the ownership of the means of message production and distribution” (p. 43) and the main point for marginal groups is not to fail to utilize these dialogical spaces.

Similarly, Finn Bostad (2005) drew from Bakhtin to theorize that new media construct environments wherein individuals can be co-present and engage in “meaningful and socially participative dialogues” (Bakhtin, 1990b, p. 169). Anchoring his discussion on Bakhtin’s notion of the chronotope, Bostad explained that the Internet, audiovisual production technologies, and phones create environments that allow co-presence among spatially and temporally dispersed individuals. In identifying online chronotopes as same place – same time; same place – other time; same time-other place; and other place – other time, Bostad echoed the points made by Internet scholars on synchronous and asynchronous communication and online public spheres. His emphasis on the structures of dialogism, however, showed the types of inequalities that can emanate from the exchange of utterances.

Within film studies, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994) used Bakhtin’s dialogism to highlight the subversive stance of Third and Fourth World cinemas and how these could be applied to create a more nuanced analysis of the postcolonial subject. They applied the notions of polyphony and *heteroglossia* to critique approaches that created a moralistic binary between negative-stereotypes and positive-images analysis of the raced subject. For them, the raced and gendered subjects mediated

through films are discursive constructs and analysis of them should allow polyphonic voices to be heard so as not to reify identities into unitary essences. In an earlier work, Shohat and Stam (1985) showed the limits of Metz's structuralist approach and suggested the use of a Bakhtinian framework in analyzing the linguistic elements of a film. As a form of language, a film can be considered as a dialogic utterance and a site where multiple voices struggle and enter into a dialogue with the spectator.

Stam also drew from Bakhtin to explain the hybrid aesthetics and subversive nature of Latin American and Third World Cinema. He used Bakhtin's notion of the carnival to elucidate the genre's "hybrid bricolage aesthetics" which strategically redeems the "low, the despised, the imperfect, and the 'trashy' as part of a social overturning" (Stam, 1997, par. 7). He likewise cited Bakhtin to celebrate the alternative aesthetics of Latin American films whereby images of garbage and slums are used to critique poverty. For Stam, these images are polyphonic symbols that reveal the society from the vantage point of the repressed poor and signal their return. Garbage in these films becomes

a truth-teller. As the lower stratum of the *socius*, the symbolic 'bottom' of the body politic, garbage signals the return of the repressed; it is the place where used condoms, bloody tampons, infected needles and unwanted babies are left, the ultimate resting place of all that society both produces and represses, secretes, and makes secret (par 20).

Aside from Shohat and Stam, Martin Flanagan (2009) argued for the value of using a Bakhtinian framework in reading Hollywood films and elucidating the discursive relationships that can result from film viewing. With the use of dialogism

as an analytical framework, he critiqued the limits of classic film theories by pointing out the weaknesses of the semiotic, psychoanalytic, and neoformalist approaches of Christian Metz, Laura Mulvey, and David Bordwell, respectively. These paradigms, according to Flanagan, conceptualize the spectator as someone who is either a “petrified victim of a one-way flow of ideology” (p. 186) or a person who can interpret the film narrative but fails to connect it in wider culture. He added that Hollywood is often viewed as enunciating a hegemonic and monologic voice that renders its audience as passive agents in its filmic discourse. He argued, however, that Hollywood films are as heteroglossic and open-ended as any cinematic tradition precisely because its spectators – the ‘other’ in the filmic utterance – are capable of engaging dialogically with what they are viewing. To be able to capture the nuances of the dialogic spectator, Flanagan suggested using Bakhtin’s chronotope and polyphony in the analysis of Hollywood films. The concepts enable the analyst to see the myths and ideologies within a film by showing how cinematic space and time function within the narrative. Flanagan also illustrated how polyphony allows one to conceptualize the dialogic spectator by exposing the gap between the interpretations of the director and the unfinalized identities and narratives of film characters.

Making a similar argument, Kobena Mercer (2003) drew from Bakhtin to argue for the need for multiple approaches in the analysis of Black independent films in Britain. The prevalent use of radical themes and deployment of realism has prompted known personalities like Salmon Rushdie to critique the aesthetics of self-representation in the genre. For Mercer, Rushdie’s “monologic system of evaluative

criteria” (p. 256) silences the polyphonic voices that make up the still unfolding and hybrid identity of the Black nation at a time when there is a pressing need to renew the critical function of independent cinema. He then illustrated the carnivalizing tendencies of the genre whereby the appropriation of Third Cinema approaches and the juxtaposition of visual elements from past struggles enable the countering of hegemonic representations of the Black nation. Mercer posited the notion of critical dialogism whereby the multiple evaluative dialogues “*within* particular communities and *between* the various constituencies” (p. 257, emphasis in original) that make up their collective allow the countering of discourses of domination by the mainstream media and authoritative critics like Rushdie.

Although these studies illustrate that how Bakhtin’s concepts can help illuminate cultural practices and art forms other than the novel, they focus their analysis on a single utterance. Further, they also neglect one salient aspect of dialogism: its ethical implications. Too often, what is highlighted is the democratic potential of the heteroglossic, polyphonic, or carnivalesque utterance. In his early essays, Bakhtin argued for the ethical liability of the speaker and addressee for their utterances. Since these communicative acts are intent-filled, evaluative, and conjure verbal or performed responses, they bring profound impacts and consequences to everyday life of – at the very least – the subjects of their utterances. In his essays on art and aesthetics wherein he discussed artistic expressions as utterances, Bakhtin emphasized the saliency of life and art in culture and the need to unite them within the cognitive and moral purview of each individual. He argued that art is often elevated and thus becomes isolated so much so that the ordinary person sees no

connection between it and his or her everyday life. As such, art becomes “too self-confident, audaciously self-confident, and too high-flown, for it is in no way bound to answer for life” (Bakhtin, 1990a, p. 1). The need to unite art and life, however, goes beyond the question of co-constitution. For Bakhtin, it is an issue of ethics and liability of both the individual artist and audience member:

The poet must remember that it is his poetry which bears the guilt for the vulgar prose of life, whereas the man of everyday life ought to know that the fruitlessness of art is due to his willingness to be unexact and to the unseriousness of the concerns in his life. The individual must become answerable through and through: all of his constituent moments must not only fit next to each other in the temporal sequence of his life, but must also interpenetrate each other in the unity of guilt and answerability (p. 1).

In attributing answerability to the artist, author, or speaker, Bakhtin pointed to the “impoverishing theories” (1990b, p. 87) of formalist, structuralist, and other analytical approaches that privilege the creator of an artistic utterance as an independent genius or auteur. For him, the artist, artwork, or spectator in isolation cannot represent the totality or wholeness of the artistic utterance. Further, elevating art from life and invoking the genius of the inspired artist are mere masks to absolve oneself from blame and guilt over the impacts and consequences of utterance:

Inspiration that ignores and is itself ignored by life is not inspiration but a state of possession. The true sense... of all the old arguments about the interrelationship of art and life... is nothing more than the mutual striving of both art and life to make their own tasks easier to create without answering for life, and easier to live without any consideration for art (Bakhtin, 1990 p. 2).

Bakhtin defined the wholeness, completeness, consummation, or self-sufficiency of the artistic utterance as aesthetics (Holquist, 2002). In contrast to other concepts of aesthetics that focuses on beauty and subjective judgment, Bakhtin's notion emphasizes the mutual constitutive and interdependent relationship and responsibility among the creator, subject, and spectator or addressee. Art as an utterance can only start to form an aesthetic value or a complete definition and self-sufficiency if the artist (who is also an addressee) continues to maintain his or her own individuality, returns to his or her specific position within his or her social milieu, and extends the meanings he or she just experienced (Bakhtin, 1990b). To extend the meaning of an utterance means more than just decoding it in a negotiated or oppositional manner (Hall, 1989) or incorporating intertextual references to a response utterance. It entails that the artist and addressee (intended or otherwise) should act upon the meaning in a constructive, ethical, and sympathetic manner that do not compromise his or her individuality. Such "sympathetic co-experiencing" requires one to be "conscious of the consciousness" (p. 81) of the individuals enunciating through the art but in a manner that allows him or her to maintain his or her being. Bakhtin privileged sympathy from empathy by arguing that the latter does not create new meaning but instead simply reinstates what has been enunciated:

Empathizing into life is simply another experiencing or a *repetition* of that life without its having been enriched by any values transgredient to it, *i.e.*, an experiencing of another life in the same categories (p. 80, emphasis in original).

In pointing to the saliency of transgredient values, Bakhtin emphasized the role of others in the utterance, an argument he sustained in his later works on language and the novel. Transgredient values are those “elements of consciousness that are external to it but nonetheless absolutely necessary for its completion, for its achievement of totalization” (Todorov, 1984, p. 91). For Bakhtin, no single individual can have a whole view and be able to completely represent a subject – including himself or herself. This is why the individual needs to engage dialogically with others to be able to consummate or have a self-sufficient purview of a subject. Only when one incorporates his or her views and values with those of others can he or she start to form a total being or aesthetic value. But doing so does not entail the dissolution of one’s values or being. Every person has a unique position and salient role in the constructive constitution of others, which is why Bakhtin viewed sympathy as more salient than empathy. The former, according to Bakhtin,

is not a merging of the two of us into a single being and is not a numerical duplication of my life, but constitutes an essential enrichment of the event of my life, because my life is experienced by him in a new form, in a new ethical category – as the life of another, a different human being (p. 88).

An artistic utterance can thus carry salient transgredient elements but in order for it to gain aesthetic value, the reading, listening, or viewing individual has to go back to his or her lived life and act to constructively contribute towards the consummation or finalization of the subject in question. As such, the ethical

responsibility of ascribing an aesthetic value and uniting art and life rests both on the artist and the spectators. In other words, it rests on everyone. Bakhtin acknowledged though that his stance on the unity of art and life is an ideal that is to be strived for. He thus suggests the quality of unfinalizability, or the “constrained holism” (Linell, 2007, p. 616) of an utterance, and the need to continue the dialogue within and between art and life until a subject attains its full aesthetic value.

To summarize Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism, utterances are for him the correct unit of analysis if the active nature and interconnectedness of communicative acts are to be analyzed. The highly contextual, ongoing, hybrid, and dynamic nature of the utterance and its ethical implications permit the movement beyond the structure-agency divide of formalism and structuralism. Moreover, by emphasizing addressivity, unfinalizability, and open-endedness, it allows the evaluation of discourses that shapes meanings, identities, and culture over time without foreclosing the possibility of revision.

2.3 Vernacular Mediation as a Framework

If we look into the academic discourse surrounding the ubiquity and pervasiveness of new media, we can see that there are parallels with how Bakhtin conceptualized language as a living, active, and interconnected utterance. Utopic/optimistic pronouncements on the increasing centrality of new media in our daily lives are very much what he referred to as the individualistic subjectivism that privileges isolated and non-contextualized communicative acts whose meanings are solely determined by the enunciating person. On the other hand,

dystopic/pessimistic views over the ubiquity of new media can be compared to abstract objectionism whereby normative structures and rules dictate a predetermined meaning and outcome of an utterance. Views that espouse a balance of both individual agency and social structures, however, focus on isolated acts of mediation and thus fail to see its value and constituting role in the future mediations, thereby paradoxically devaluing it in the long run. To avoid repeating the same polemic debate regarding the impact of new media in contemporary life, this thesis proposes that we analyze mediation as a dialogical process with each engagement – whether for plain use, collaborative co-creation, networking, or political mobilization – conceptualized as an active, interconnected, and socially situated utterance.

Bakhtin's concept of dialogism is well positioned to explain the dynamics of mediation and its uneven nature. The construction of meaning through a medium is an active utterance that helps shape the relationships and actions of its creator, audience, and subjects. As with utterances, the creation, significance, and impacts of mediation depend on and shapes its sociohistorical contexts. Mediation does not occur in isolation because the meanings it carries are always hybrid products of past and present utterances and are composed of symbols, narratives, and elements from various cultures. Further, mediation practices follow genres and sociocultural norms, and contain judgments and ideologies that have ethical implications. In addition, they are uneven processes because they are enacted by persons who occupy particular positions within a social hierarchy and possess unequal symbolic

resources. Lastly, they are continuous processes because they help shape future meanings and communicative acts.

One limitation of Bakhtin's dialogism, however, is that while he acknowledged the presence of asymmetrical power relations, he did not expound on it or its implications, leading some scholars to read the concept as too consensual and unable to elucidate unequal power relations in media practices (Kraidy, 2005; Couldry, 2008). While this is attributed by Bakhtinian scholars such as Holquist, Clark, Morson, and Emerson to Bakhtin's refusal in giving a normative framework – i.e., that the results of dialogism cannot be reduced to class or any one set of social relations – not everyone can freely and enunciate an utterance. Harnessing the new media needed to construct an utterance needs economic capital as well as specific literacies. Further, the nature of resources one possesses will also shape the outcome of the utterance. In other words, one reason why mediation is an uneven process is because of the unequal resources available to a speaking subject, a point and Couldry (2000, 2008, 2010) repeatedly made. It is also for this reason why Silverstone (1999, 2005), Couldry (2008), and Siapera (2010) characterized mediation as a dialectical instead of a dialogical process.

The concept of social capital can be used to address this limitation. Social capital at its most basic level can be understood as types of relationships that can function as a non-economic resource. It is only one form of resource an individual can deploy as a result of his or her membership and position within groups and social networks. For individuals lacking economic capital, social capital provides a valuable resource in creating cultural products and in maintaining their position within their social

milieu. In the field of sociology, social capital has been conceptualized as a type of collective institution, shared norms, values, or accumulated personal competencies (Axelrod, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Crawford, 1995; Uphoff, 1999; Bourdieu, 1977, 1993; Putnam, 2000; Preece, 2002). Tracing the different definitions of the concept is outside the aim of this thesis, but two types of social capital emerged as salient during the analysis: Pierre Bourdieu's (1977, 1986, 1993) cultural capital and Robert Putnam's (2000) bonding ties.

Bourdieu's critical conceptualization of social capital emphasizes inequality and competition. He argued that there are four forms of capital: economic, social, cultural, and symbolic and all these can function as a resource for the individual. He defined economic capital as the material and monetary wealth and resources while social capital as the

aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition, or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of a collectively-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word (1977, p. 249).

In this sense, social capital refers to the actual or potential resources that an individual can access as a result of their membership and inclusion within groups and social networks. Symbolic capital, on the other hand, refers to individual authority and prestige, and ownership of the other forms of capital is legitimized by the possession of symbolic capital. For instance, receiving particular types of songwriting or film festival awards can ascribe social status and prestige upon a composer or filmmaker. Cultural capital consists of three forms: embodied,

objectified, and institutionalized. Embodied cultural capital represents an individual's knowledge and skills, and objectified cultural capital refers to goods and objects, which can be obtained through economic capital, and used through embodied cultural capital. Institutionalized refers to educational qualifications, which legitimize employment and allow an economic value to be placed on embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977).

In contrast to Bourdieu's conflict based conceptualization, Robert Putnam (2000) suggested a more communitarian notion of social capital which he defined as relationships or the "networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them (p. 18). He further explained the nature of social capital by classifying it into bonding or bridging ties. Bonding social capital is defined as the strong ties among people who have similar backgrounds and is suggested to promote the development of strong in-group identities. In contrast, bridging ties refer to weaker connections between diverse individuals who may be dissimilar in relation to their social and cultural circumstances, ethnic background, and levels of access to economic resources (Putnam, 2000).

The types of social capital of an individual are not unitary or static. A person can deploy the different types of social capital to be competitive or cooperative depending on the situation (Wellman & Wortley 1990; Uphoff, 1999; Kramer, 2006). In this thesis, Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital is evident in the analysis on OKM and *Handum* while in the online community kinaray-a.com, Putnam's bonding ties functioned as a resource that enabled small acts of collective mobilization. There are new media scholars who have conceptualized other types of social ties created

through online interaction (see Blanchard, 1998; Wellman, Quan-Haase, Boase, Chen, Hampton, Diaz & Myata, 2003; Parker & Song, 2006; Williams, 2006), but Putnam's bonding ties is ideally positioned to elucidate the type of social capital among marginal groups with emancipatory aims.

To elucidate the impacts of new media in the everyday life of marginal groups, I propose the concept of vernacular mediation as an analytical framework. By using the term vernacular to refer to the speaking subjects in this thesis, I emphasize not only the non-mainstream language of the Karay-a but also their social position. I will draw from Ono and Sloop's (1995) conceptualization of the term and define the vernacular as a marginal group that is not isolated but interacts with the hegemonic structures and mainstream culture to creatively construct hybrid expressions. Ono and Sloop located the vernacular within the same milieu occupied by the mainstream but described the former as those who have been systematically ignored or oppressed. In this sense, the vernacular may harness the same media that the mainstream culture is also using. Based on their concept, vernacular discourses provide an arena for the expression of subjectivities and are hybrid because they are composed of cultural expressions and subjectivities from various sources. The vernacular thus draws from the mainstream and engages with dominant ideologies in multiple and non-predetermined ways.

The importance of Ono and Sloop's conceptualization of vernacular discourse as culturally hybrid is that avoids burdening marginal groups with the baggage of being necessarily and exclusively anti-mainstream. The identities and subjectivities in vernacular discourses are valid cultural expressions even when they do not

counteract mainstream discourses and institutions. Further, Ono and Sloop's concept of hybridization is not a passive act resulting in an imitation that is static, but a constantly motivated and ever changing embodied practice of borrowing to create solutions for local problems and conditions. In this way, a vernacular discourse reconstructs other discourses to create cultural expressions that enable adaptation to specific circumstances.

I define vernacular mediation as the dialogical transformation of symbolic meanings through media technologies and propose it as a framework for analyzing the impacts of new media in the everyday life of marginal groups. I describe vernacular mediation as inherently dialogical instead of dialectical because its impacts do not always lead to the synthesis of different viewpoints or the overcoming of inequalities that emanates from asymmetrical power relations. A key feature of dialectics, whether Hegelian or Marxist, is the eventual integration of separate ideas or struggles into a unitary perspective or society. Differences are subsumed, albeit in a logical manner, and the unified axiom becomes the authoritative whole. While an 'other' is taken into account in dialectics, it is used as a mere tool to enable the development of a monologic synthesis (MacGregor, 1984; Linell, 2007). There is thus a predetermined outcome of the communication process and often this is controlled by the dominating constituent, whether it is capital, technology, or the autonomous individual.

This is not to say that political economy, individual agency, or technology has no bearing at all on the communicative act. This would be the same as stating that dialectics and monologising practices do not take place. These do happen, but are

not the only possible outcomes of a communicative act (Linell, 2006). Individuals do have the ability to create and share meanings through their own utterance, and the amount of economic and social capitals they possess and the technology they use will facilitate this. Analysis must indeed acknowledge when this occur, but my argument here is that their role should not be determined *a priori*, which is what would happen if we view the process as dialectical. Further, since meaning takes on diverse forms any time during the cycle of production, circulation, reception, and reproduction, then dialogism is the framework that is better equipped to account for non-linearities, disruptions, and varying impacts of vernacular mediation without foreclosing its future potentials.

As a dialogic utterance, vernacular mediation is a chain of sociohistorically situated communicative acts that involves overlapping cycles of production, circulation, reception, and reproduction. It is not a random enunciation made possible by the sole agency of an individual or by rapidly changing new media technologies. As an act of engaging within a social milieu, vernacular mediation is intent-filled and carries evaluative intonations of the speaking subject who holds varying social capitals. As such, it not ideologically neutral and carries uneven impacts as well as ethical implications.

Aside from being contextual, dynamic, and intent-filled, vernacular mediation is geared toward invoking utterances and actions from its addressees. The addressee is as salient as the speaker because it is the former who will continue the dialogue and help achieve the intent coded in the act of mediation. It incorporates addressivity through the deployment of symbols, narratives, and genres that are

culturally salient. Further, vernacular mediation cannot be separated from its preceding utterances. It is in part a response to and extends the previous utterances that were not able to achieve the intent of the speaking subject. It discursively draws meanings and content from past utterances but refashions and negotiates these during the dialogue. More importantly, unlike Lievrouw's mediation, it does not perish but will continue to inform and shape future utterances. Vernacular mediation is both enabled and constrained by the medium it uses. As such, the spread of its meanings and the achievement of its purposes are influenced by the technological capabilities of the medium.

2.4 Conclusion

There has been an increasing call for the contextualized analysis of the role of new media technologies as these become more ubiquitous. To analyze the impacts of these technologies in the everyday life of marginal groups, I have proposed the concept vernacular mediation as an analytical framework. It takes into account the contextualized dynamics among individual agency, sociohistorical structures, symbolized meanings, and the technological affordances of a medium. It views new media practices as a chain of continuous communicative acts whereby meanings are shared and reshaped during the overlapping processes of production, circulation, reception, and reproduction.

The dialogical approach espoused by vernacular mediation is well positioned to analyze the continuity of engagement across different media, and is more reflective of the ways people use these technologies nowadays. Marginal groups, like most

people, engage with multiple media at any given time. Looking at the continuity of these practices allow us to elucidate how these will enable or constrain future engagements particularly if we are looking for avenues which cultural participation and socioeconomic emancipation can be facilitated.

The next chapter of this thesis will analyze the historical, social, and cultural conditions that give rise to and influence vernacular mediation. By presenting an analysis of Original Kinaray-a Music (OKM), the chapter will illustrate that the new media practices of marginal groups are not isolated acts made possible only by the affordances of new media technologies or by the agency and creativity of individuals. It will also show the active nature of vernacular mediation practices by discussing how OKM songs served as preceding utterances for the other new media analyzed in this thesis.

Chapter 3: The Discursive Emergence of Vernacular Mediation: The Case of Original Kinaray-a Music

Antique the province where the mountains meet the sea
Land of birth of the first *barangay*
In your youth the blood of Sumakwel flows
The dream is a life of peace, honor, and freedom

Oh Antique, Antiqueño
Wake up, rise, and run, work for change
Work with diligence, honorable people
Together towards progress, Antiqueño

- Dante Beriong, Antique, Antiqueño, 2006

For a musical subgenre that emerged in the mid-1990s; features American country and Calypso beats; and uses keyboard, electric guitar, and banjo as accompaniments, the name Original Kinaray-a Music (OKM) can be a full misnomer. Yet in spite of all its cultural hybridity, OKM is valued as an intrinsic expression of a particular Philippine ethnic group and its traditions, mores, and aspirations. Composers of the subgenre, collectively known as OKM artists in their locale, assert that their songs hold a unique essentiality through its language and idyllic representation of their homeland and way of life. To its listening public, these songs represent who they are as a distinct people.

Such assertions of originality over hybrid cultural forms eventually raises questions of authenticity, which are linked to the identity of those who create and listen to them. In music, these questions often emerge when a performer or a new song is disembedded from its cultural origins, becomes commodified, crosses the boundaries of its prescribed genre (however porous these may be), or when its

aesthetics become embroiled in the politics of identity (Connell & Gibson, 2003). Yet musical authenticity, like collective identity, is not a given condition but a social construct that is discursively negotiated. As a social construct, it is built in music through the arbitration of commercial and state institutions (Baily, 1994; Yano, 2002, Jirattikorn, 2006; Hill, 2011), tailoring of collective memory and identity (Mach, 1994; Peterson, 1997), and deliberate molding of performers to conform to the norms of the trade and expectations of their publics (Lewis, 1997; Armstrong, 2004). In American country music, for instance, performers continuously signified through their lyrics nostalgic images of rural salvation and refuge, donned emblematic Stetson hats, and accentuated their voice with a Southern twang to imbue authenticity to their songs and hillbilly persona (Fox, 1992; Peterson & McLaurin, 1992; Lewis, 1997; Malone, 2002). In addition, events sponsored by state institutions, radio stations, and record companies have helped mask the African influence in the genre and legitimized it as a pure Anglo-American heritage (Malone, 2002). In some cases, the same discursive techniques are deployed to accommodate changes in a musical genre but still assert that it is still authentic. Contemporary country songs have incorporated pop, rap, and even horrorcore conventions, but for many of its performers, record labels, and fans these influences do not make the new hybrid songs any less 'country.' A song, in other words, will be original and authentic depending on the construction and negotiation of its codes, conventions, and expectations (Holt, 2007). As such, music scholars have pointed out that the relevant question is not whether a genre, song, performer, or event is authentic, but how it

was valued as authentic, why, and for whom (Frith, 1989; Peterson, 1997; Holt, 2007).

For the Karay-a, OKM is their authentic musical expression because it mediates their empowered identities and their own dream for a progressive homeland. But rather than focusing only on authenticity, which is only one of the aspects of the songs explored in this chapter, I am more concerned in analyzing the generative processes that gave rise to and legitimized OKM as a musical expression. My goal thus in this chapter is to analyze how vernacular mediation emerges by tracing the historical, social, and cultural conditions that gave rise to OKM and conceptualizing it as a preceding utterance for Kinaray-a.com and *Handum*. I will argue that OKM, as a link in the chain of vernacular mediation, elicited “responsive reactions and dialogic reverberations” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 94) from its intended addressees through its symbolic reconstruction of the Karay-a homeland and identity. By creating and widely disseminating these “cognitive referents” of attachments to a “common territory of origin and residence, and biological connection” (Grosby, 1994, p. 168), OKM songs set off a chain of utterances in the other new media analyzed in this thesis. As an utterance, OKM “cannot be broken off from the preceding links that determine it both from within and from without” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 94). OKM drew from ethnic symbolic constructs and folk and contemporary literary forms within its locale while its musical codes and conventions were largely patterned after the genre of American country music.

As discussed in the preceding chapters, mediation is a set of highly contextualized practices and as such it presents several difficulties in applying a single type of

methodology. For this chapter, I will use Simon Frith's (1998) concept of voice in popular songs to conduct discourse analysis of the voices of the speaking subjects in OKM. Analyzing these voices – including the theme, genre, intonations or “emotionally evaluative attitudes” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 85) – will show the speech intent in OKM songs and how its artists deploy symbolic meanings to achieve this and evoke responses from their intended addressees. Frith's notion of voice as a multidimensional meaning-making element that bridges the words and music in a song provides the conceptual focus in identifying the speech intent as well as the presence of heteroglossic voices, multiple identities, and movements between identity positions of the speaking subjects in the songs.

For Frith, a pop song inherently has multiple voices and these come in four categories: as musical instrument, as a body, as a person, and as a character. Voice as a musical instrument comes in the form of instrumental renditions that stands for the singing person. The instrumental part of a song and the alternating turns of musical instruments help express more meanings than a purely vocal performance would. Voice as a direct expression of the body enunciates not only the emotive elements of a song, but also gives the listeners an image of the personality (gender, race, class, and even affective qualities such ‘sexiness,’ ‘fatherliness,’ or humor) of the performer. Voice as a person refers to the performer and the multiple identities he or she wants to vocally enunciate or project to the public. It overlaps with voice as a character as the performer often takes on the persona of the protagonist of the song. In this last category, the implied person controlling the narrative of the song,

the quoted character, or the person whom the song is about can be heard through the lyrics (Frith, 1998, pp. 183-202).

My analysis would focus on the last three categories of voices in 57 songs selected from the first albums of OKM artists Bernie Salcedo, Dante Beriong, Sammy Rubido, Noel Alamis, and Edmund Infante, winners of the first OKM song festival, and the top 10 songs that generated the most hits from the online community kinaray-a.com. I chose to focus the analysis on the lyrics of the songs for two main reasons. Firstly, the rationale for the emergence and continuity of OKM rests largely on the use of the Kinaray-a language. This means that the songs derive their valence more, although not exclusively, from using the vernacular language rather than their specific rhythmic elements and melodic structure. As I will discuss below, one of the aims and central themes of OKM is removing the negative cultural connotations and stigma of Kinaray-a. As such, although lyrics are central to how songs are evaluated (Frith, 1998), it is more symbolic in OKM because they affirm an identity instead of functioning as just one of the components of a song. Secondly, the focal points of my analysis are the intents, symbolic elements, and narrative themes of OKM songs and these are largely conveyed through the lyrics. In addition, I also supplement the analysis of the lyrics with data derived from interviews of OKM artists and field observations in Antique. With all these, there is a strong reason to pursue future analysis of the other sound components of OKM to complement the findings from this exploratory study.

Before discussing the sociohistorical contexts that facilitated its emergence, there are two important points I would like to reiterate. Firstly, it is crucial to avoid the

tendency to isolate and fetishize OKM by emphasizing that the processes and patterns presented in this chapter are not unique to it. The fact that it largely carries the similar thematic and rhythmic conventions of a globally circulated and appropriated American music genre shows that OKM is a hybrid cultural expression that shares varying sameness and difference with other localized media practices. As Frith (1989) has pointed out, the notion of unique and pure musical traditions is misleading. In his argument echoed later by Arjun Appadurai (1996), Frith has emphasized that cases such as OKM are common because all over the world new musical traditions are being

spurred on by urbanization, migration, international mass communications, and the availability of radios and recorders which allow more and more people, for the first time in history, to create their own musical environments (p. ix).

The saliency of OKM in this thesis, however, lies not only in being a case of new musical tradition enabled by new media technologies, but in its capacity to function as a preceding utterance that elicited more cases of vernacular mediation, two of which are discussed in the following chapters. This brings forth the second point I want to make. OKM, as an utterance, is not the first medium to embark on the symbolic reconstruction of Antique and the ethnic identity of its people. Such efforts can be traced back to the founding of the *Binirayan* Festival in 1974 and the publication of Kinaray-a literature in the 1990s – both of which OKM songs also drew themes from. What sets OKM apart from these traditional forms of media is its wider circulation that enabled more Antiqueños and Antiqueñas within and outside the province to develop affective ties to their homeland and collective identity.

This chapter will first characterize OKM as a musical genre by locating it within the national and global musicscape. It will then discuss its history by highlighting the sociohistorical factors that led to its emergence and the contexts of its production and dissemination. The last part of the chapter will discuss the voices that enunciated the symbolic elements and themes that evoked new utterances from its intended addressees.

3.1 OKM in the Nexus of National-Global Musicscape

How do we define a modern and hybrid musical genre that claims to be an original aural expression of an ethnic group that asserts pre-Western origins? Or one that does not fit neatly within the prescribed conventions of known musical categories? A cursory review of OKM songs would reveal country, rock, hip hop, and even Calypso beats and profuse use of the electronic keyboard and its pre-recorded sounds, electric guitar, and rock drums. Some songs juxtapose these modern instruments with the banjo (whose origins is also contested); the *bandurria*, a Spanish lute that had taken root in Philippine music culture; the *kubing*, a bamboo jaw harp used by indigenous groups in Mindanao; and bongo drums. And yet to its composers, performers, and listeners, it is precisely the *heteroglossia* (Bakhtin, 1981) of the foreign, Philippine folk, and their own voices that makes their music originally Karay-a.

Instead of defining OKM based on distinctiveness, I would apply a Bakhtinian approach of analyzing the musical utterances it drew from and characterize it as a subgenre by locating it within the nexus of the Philippine-global musicscape. Like

any other rural place, Antique has not been isolated from the global flows of people and images and from developing its own version of “vernacular globalization” by hybridizing foreign and local meanings and elements (Appadurai, 1996, p. 10), and OKM is one of the outcomes of this. Situated between American country and Philippine pop, OKM can be characterized as Philippine country music based on the influences of these genres and the imprint of its own individuality manifested in its “style...worldview, and in all aspects of... [its]design” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 75). Before outlining the characteristics of OKM as a subgenre of country music, I would provide a short background of American country music and briefly discuss Philippine pop.

One of USA’s global cultural exports, country music is a genre classified under American popular music and traces its roots to the country’s rural south where it developed as a music by and for the working class (Peterson, 1997; Malone, 2002). Although often described as a ‘pure, Anglo-Celtic’ tradition, country music from its very start was a hybrid genre that melded American and African cultural influences. Historian Bill Malone (2002) provides a succinct account of the hybrid and working class origins of the genre:

the music was born in the rural South. It germinated there in a region that, though seeming to diverge dramatically from the mainstream of American life, nevertheless served as the nation’s major crossroads of musical cultural exchange. Poor Anglo Americans and African Americans viewed each other with suspicion across the racial divide, but they exchanged songs and styles virtually from the time of their first encounters in early colonial south. Out of this common crucible of poverty and pain, blacks and whites created a *mélange* of musical forms that eventually evolved into the nation’s major popular styles. From this fused musical legacy, country music emerged as the most vital voice of southern working class and a barometer of the revolutionary changes

that have marked the transition from rural to urban industrial life (p. 14).

First performed in simple venues such as home porches, streets, community dances, fiddling contests, church events, and political campaigns, the diverse styles of this homemade Southern American music were first shunned by record company executives biased against the unsophisticated, backward, and 'hillbilly' qualities of rural folks (Peterson, 1997). According to sociologist Richard Peterson, the impresarios based in upstate towns considered rural music as the

antithesis of their own aesthetic and worldview because it evoked the image of rural poverty and small-town morality that so many in the rapidly urbanizing America were trying to escape... The music maker was the country bumpkin, rube, linthead, cracker, or hillican to their up-to-date city sophisticate (p. 6).

But these record executives would soon push for the commercialization of American rural music after realizing that its audience constituted a huge market within and outside the national boundaries. Peterson states that 'country music' emerged in the 1940s as a collective term coined by the industry to institutionalize the various musical styles of rural America after experimenting first with the terms 'folk', 'hillbilly,' 'western,' and 'cowboy.' To differentiate it from the other musical styles being commercially promoted, the record industry created a "fabricated authenticity" for the genre by accentuating "the differences between country and popular;" fashioning a "distinctive image for the country performer;" and launching programs such as the Grand Ol' Opry show (p. 14). This commercial genre was disseminated worldwide with a "characteristic southern accent and a cluster of

preoccupations that reflected its southern working-class identity” that, in turn, “forever influenced both the definition and the public perception of country music” (Malone, 2002, p. 15). People all over the world thus had come to associate and expect the characteristic simple and predictable chord structure of the songs, use of the banjo and fiddle, Southern accent in the singer’s voice, and iconic hillbilly or cowboy/country girl fashion during public events and appearances (Peterson, 1997; Malone, 2002).

These discursively constructed conventions, however, have shifted as contemporary country songs now carry influences from other musical genres while its stars project a more polished, cosmopolitan look. In the US, songs like Toby Keith’s *I Wanna Talk About Me* (2001), Trace Adkins’ *Honky Tonk Badonkkadonk* (2005), and Big Smo’s *Kikkin’ it in Tennessee* (2010) imbue hip hop¹⁴ conventions to country music. In his *Country Life* (2008) and other songs, David Hutto pushes the boundaries of country music by infusing horrorcore styles. Similarly, artists like Shania Twain, Taylor Swift, and Carrie Underwood convey the hybridity of contemporary country by releasing songs that lean towards the teen pop genre and projecting an urban sophisticate image. All these hybridization have spurred a debate among critics and fans regarding the ‘authenticity’ of contemporary country music. Yet as Peterson (1997) and Lewis (1997) remind us, the criteria used to gauge the purity of a contemporary country song (simple melodic structure, southern accent, and the ‘hick cowboy’ or ‘Daisy Mae’ personas of its performers) were as much as fabricated as the ‘contaminating’ qualities and commercial excesses

¹⁴ For an insightful reading of the racial ideology behind the cultural hybridization of ‘hick-hop’ music and their videos, see Morris, 2010.

being questioned. Lewis also emphasize that along with the music, the tastes of its listening public shift over time, creating this discursive loop that further hybridizes the genre and the audience. Debating the authenticity of country music would seem a pointless exercise if one conceives the genre's conventions and its public's musical preferences as rigid and static.

Although the performers' image and the rhythmic and melodic conventions have changed, there is one thing that remained relatively stable within country music that gives the genre its individuality: its bias for the rural and working class narratives conveyed through multiple voices (Smith, 1980; Peterson & McLaurin, 1992; Malone, 2002). According to Malone (2002), country music expresses the hopes, longings, frailties and failed dreams of average people and often appeals through nostalgia, fantasy, romance, and pure escapism. Stories (sometimes autobiographical) of the rural idyll, valorization of simple life and working class, exile and disdain for the city, longing for the homeland and desire for return, love and heartbreak, religion, and patriotism are thus found across the various sub-genres of old and contemporary country music. In his analysis of the lyrics of 2,300 country songs released from 1966 to 1977, Smith (1980) identified recurrent themes of the homeland's geo-political units and natural landscapes; movement to and from the city and their reasons; longing for the home, family, loved one, and friends; and food. Similarly, Peterson (1992) finds the homologous and class-based themes of rural poverty, plight of farmers, exploitation at work, nation and patriotism, religion, and pride for the poor and hillbilly identity. With regards to the self-representation of females in country songs, Banes (1992) pointed out that while

the image of the gender have become empowered now, the same themes of nostalgia for the rural idyll, assertive pride on working and rural class sensibilities, love and heartbreak, nationalism, and religion can still be found across songs performed by women artists. There are themes, however, that rarely find venues in country music and these include race (Peterson & McLaurin, 1992) – which brought forth the accusation of country being the music of ‘rednecks’ – and queerness.

While one can argue that the above themes are not unique to the genre, the structure and the degree to which these are deployed in country songs separates country music from other musical categories. Peterson and McLaurin (1992) argued that country music is essentially a “storyteller’s medium” (p. 2) and this sets it apart from the other American music genres:

Whether related in the first or third person, the characteristic song narrates a specific story in detail from start to finish. This is nearly as true of carefully engineered contemporary commercial country songs as it is of nineteenth-century mountain ballads sung without instrumental accompaniment. In country music the other song elements are generally kept simple and predictable, the melodic range is slight, the rhythm is regular, and the orchestration is sparse or at least clearly in the background so that the words can be understood (p. 2).

Peterson and McLaurin explained that storytelling as a convention in country music developed over time through the negotiation of its folk influences, industry imperatives, and audience expectations. Out of these emerged a tacit expectation that composers of the genre should write songs with simple narratives by assuming “a world of dualistic forces counterpoised and contesting for the allegiance of the protagonist” such as good and evil, country and city, poverty and wealth, simplicity and opulence, morality and hedonism, and others. They also state that performers

are expected to convey their own personal stories through their songs and public image. This means that country performers should not only sing of stories, but of their own life stories by adopting a particular persona (accurate or not) and reinforce these during performances and public appearances. This is mainly the reason why artists like Hank Williams Sr fashioned a hillbilly identity, Dolly Parton recursively projects an image of her rags-to-riches story, and the more modern Taylor Swift deploys the simple, country sweetheart persona through her songs.

Two of the most common modes by which country songs convey stories are nostalgia and humor which both evoke affect (Malone, 2002; Ellis 2010). In his seminal book, sociologist Fred Davis (1979) defined nostalgia as an active and emotive longing for the past that is often reconstructed to signify “beauty, pleasure, joy, satisfaction, goodness, happiness, and love” or any “positive affects of being” (p. 14). Davis explained that the function of nostalgia is to facilitate the continuity of identity that provides the stability in light of the difficulties and traumas brought by modernity. Nostalgia “eliminate[s] from memory or at minimum, severely... mute[s] the unpleasant, unhappy, the abrasive, and most of all, those lurking shadows of former selves about which we feel shame, guilt, or humiliation” (p. 37). Humor, on the other hand, does not only entertain but also serves as a coping mechanism by deflecting the difficulties and trauma experienced (Nezlek & Derks, 2001). It also serves as a rhetorical strategy to drive a point, convince a person to act, or deter him or her from doing something as in the case of its use in advertising (Weinberger & Gulas, 1992). In country music, humor is enunciated from a first person point of view, whereby an ‘I’ character stands as a “metaphorical representative of the

socially struggling collective” and articulates loser or “self-deprecating narrative tales of fatalistic resignation” (Ellis, 2010, p. 169). Further, country humor is survivalist and pre-political. It does not preach a social message but will use an individual character “to illustrate the plight of the working class rather than call for class solidarity or resistance” (p. 169).

With its universal themes and affective narratives of working and rural class values and struggles, simple and predictable rhythms and instrumentation, and high-powered machinery for commercial distribution, American country music has become instituted as one of the major popular music genres within and outside USA. In other countries such as Canada, Australia, Thailand, Japan, Singapore, and Zimbabwe, American country music not only found wide acceptance but also developed a localized identity that carried modified conventions that are recursively shaping the dynamic sociocultural and political milieu of its new location (Watson, 1976; Thompson, 1992; Zilberg, 1995; Smith, 2005; Kong, 1996; Abramson, 2002; Gibson & Davidson, 2004; Jirattikorn, 2006; Furmanovsky, 2008). In the Philippines, country music, like other popular musical genres, was brought by the Americans during their colonization. But unlike in the countries mentioned above, it did not take root within mainstream pop music and was relegated to provinces due to its connotations of rurality and backwardness that run counter to the local industry’s strategy of projecting a modern, cosmopolitan musical identity. I will briefly discuss Philippine pop music before presenting the characteristics of OKM.

Philippine pop music is collectively called as Original Pilipino Music (OPM), and it is where OKM fashioned its title from. While it traces its roots back to the Spanish

colonial period where European influenced ballads like the *kundiman* and *habanera* were popular, it was not until the 1970s when the title OPM emerged as a rhetoric against the massive influx of American pop songs (Mirano, 1992; Santos, 1994). The local recording industry based in Metro Manila had to contend with high-powered American record companies for a slice of the listening public by creating Tagalog and English compositions that combined American and Philippine folk music genres. To ensure patronage, the local industry collectively labeled Philippine pop music as Original Pilipino Music and lobbied for the passage of Memorandum Order No. 75-31 mandating radio stations to play at least one local composition per hour. Currently, the *Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas* (Association of Broadcasters of the Philippines) requires radio stations to play at least four OPM songs per hour which it defines as:

Any music which is composed, performed, adapted, translated, or arranged by a Filipino – including adaptations and translations into Filipino or a Philippine dialect of foreign works – shall be considered an OPM (*Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas*, 2008, p. 18).

This definition and the use of an English title to assert itself demonstrate the local industry's desire to project a representation similar to, rather than different from, American and other foreign music genres. But this is not because of what Appadurai (1996) mistakes and ambivalently refers to as Filipino's pure nostalgia for all things American (p. 29-30). The simultaneous presence of English compositions, Tagalog songs with hybrid tunes, as well as "perfect renditions of some American songs" (p. 29) had more to do with the local record industry's strategy of casting its net wide rather than answering an explicit demand from its listening public. The local

audience was as much as what Peterson (1997) referred to as musical omnivores than any listening public because British, Australian, and Japanese songs have likewise found wide acceptance. Aware of this, the Philippine record industry took advantage of their privileged position of being able to market both English and Tagalog compositions and used the ethnicity of the performer or composer to justify these as OPM. The local record industry, however, selected particular genres and targeted a more cosmopolitan audience. Philippine music scholar Ramon Santos' (1994) definition of OPM provides a list of the preferred genres often hybridized:

a broad range of forms: [Philippine] folk songs, dance tunes, Broadway-inspired songs, rock 'n' roll... disco, jazz fusion, catering predominantly to a youthful audience in the urban centers (p. 37)

What is revealing in Santos' definition is the lack of mention of country music, which is one of the genres also brought into the country by the Americans and found wide acceptance in within and outside Metro Manila. In the northern Luzon province of Cordillera for instance, there were already local country-style compositions as early as the 1970s, the same time when Philippine pop was collectively labeled as OPM. In this province, performers do not only sing localized country tunes but don boots, plaid shirts, and Stetson hats while simultaneously asserting their indigeneity (Fong, 2007). In the Muslim Mindanao province of Cotabato, compositions following country conventions were used by the *Bangsamoro* rebel groups to protest against government incursion in their lands (Talusán, 2010). With Manila-based OPM, however, the genre was not utilized as much due to its 'hillbilly' connotations that would run counter to its strategy of

targeting urban-based audiences. If there were songs that employed country conventions, they were clumped under the category of ‘novelty songs’ which Santos (1994) defined as compositions with “highly witty narrative poetry sung to simple folk song style” and catering to a “more plebeian audience” (p. 46). The aim of this category is to convey and use humor to attract listeners rather than to develop localized country music or any specific genre as a whole. An example of a novelty song that used country conventions was Fred Panopio’s (1994) *Ang Kawawang Cowboy/The Pitiful Cowboy*, which utilized the rhythmic structure of *The Rhinestone Cowboy* popularized by Glen Campbell in the 1970s:

I’m the pitiful cowboy
My bubble gum is a dried plum
My lunch is always cassava
My older sister and my older brother
My mother, father, grandmother, the entire family
All of them are not cowboy
I’m the sole vagabond
The horse I have even has a button

The pitiful cowboy
Has a gun, but no bullet
Has a pocket, but no money
I am really a cowboy
Always alone
My horse don’t have feet
My briefs even have a hole in them

The self-deprecating humor common in the novelty genre is highly evident in this two-stanza composition. A parody of the dream of Broadway stardom of the hero in Campbell’s song, *Ang Kawawang Cowboy* ambivalently enunciates the voice of a broke cowboy wandering aimlessly or a man imagining that he is a cowboy. Like most Philippine novelty songs it does not present a full narrative and focuses only at

the particular moment of the character's introspection. Contemporary Philippine novelty music, however, has left country conventions and now follows rap, rock and roll, and generic pop as demonstrated by the highly popular novelty songs of mainstream artists Michael V. and Andrew E. This shift is reflective of the local record industry's decision to project a cosmopolitan, urbanized image.

Given the sociohistorical factors that have shaped American country music and Philippine popular music, I will now outline three main characteristics of OKM to situate it within the global-national musicscape and separate it as a musical category. Firstly, as a genre, OKM can be classified under the broad, culturally hybrid, and highly fluid country music. That the genre, rather than generic pop, rap, and rock and roll favored in OPM, would become the vehicle of contemporary musical expression in rural Antique is not surprising. Aside from the fact that country music is among the cultural products brought during the American colonization period, the universal themes of rural poverty, homeland, homecoming, displacement, and longing are the very issues being confronted and addressed by the contemporary Karay-as with the aid of new media. It is also the genre that could easily be deployed to subvert the *buki* or hillbilly identity and connotations of economic backwardness that have long been ascribed to the province and its people. As such, country music's recurrent themes of nostalgia for the idyllic rural homeland; polemic representation of city life; valorization of the working class and conservative mores; and deployment of humor, nostalgia, and gendered constructs (Cohen, 1990; Peterson, 1997; Connell & Gibson, 2003) also feature resonantly in OKM songs. Its affinity for featuring stories, accented voices, simple

accompaniments, and straightforward musical structure (Peterson, 1997) also enables easy localization and production. Further, parallel instances of institutional arbitration to enable wider diffusion and masking of cultural hybridity to legitimize an ethos of authentic purity were also carried out for OKM.

Secondly, OKM is a vocal performance delivered in Antique's vernacular patois. In other words, the language is the main element that defines a song as OKM rather than its theme, harmonic structure, or the birthplace of its composer. While such characteristic appears self-evident, the importance of the language in the OKM cannot be overemphasized. On one hand, OKM also developed out of the desire to remove the connotations of cultural backwardness from Kinaray-a. On the other, the presence of the language is itself the main criterion tacitly used by the composers in defining the essence of their songs, in such that a composition is accepted as authentic OKM only if it uses Kinaray-a in its lyrics. These are because in an OKM song Kinaray-a is not a mere vehicle of expression but – as sociolinguist Joshua Fishman (1996) emphasized regarding the relationship between language and ethnic identity – it becomes synonymous to the song itself in functioning as the requisite “identifier and authenticator” (p. 66) of Karay-a subjectivity. So while concessions can be made in incorporating foreign musical instruments and tunes, the use of Kinaray-a cannot be eschewed in OKM because it is the only marker of Karay-a identity left in the thoroughly hybrid subgenre. This explains why while OKM artists have released English and Tagalog songs, they do not label these as OKM nor do their listeners accept these as such. In contrast, OPM singers are allowed to create or even remake American, British, and South Korean pop songs and these are

marketed and accepted as OPM by virtue of the composer or performer being of Filipino lineage.

Thirdly, the scale of production, distribution, and consumption of OKM songs are significantly smaller than those of OPM. OKM singers are mostly self-made artists (few of them underwent formal music lessons), do not have the support of record companies, and earn their livelihood from other occupation. With the exception of festival-winning songs, OKM artists often work as the financier, composer, arranger, singer, editor, mixer, publicist, and distributor of their songs. Recording is often done in the makeshift studios and mixing and editing are facilitated with the aid of free or bootleg software. In addition, because the subgenre targets specifically the citizens of Antique, performances are conducted in community-level events within the province (although some OKM artists have been invited to sing in other regions). Outside the region, OKM songs rarely get aired except through the website kinaray-a.com. While this scale of production and mediation is certainly a question of economics, it does not diminish the subgenre's significance to its creators and listeners who view the songs as representations of their identity and symbolic expressions of their loyalty to their ethnic group. As Chris Atton (2001) has pointed out, size and scale are not always the sole determinants of a medium's significance.

In sum, OKM can be characterized a subgenre of country music located under the wider umbrella of Philippine popular music or OPM. As a type of country music, it shares similar themes, instruments, and rhythmic structure with its hybrid and dynamic American predecessor. As a subgenre of Philippine popular music, it is influenced and affected by the strategic choices of mainstream artists and the

decisions of the national recording industry and local radio stations. As a genre in the Bakhtinian (1986) sense, it is in active dialogue with the “thematic content, style, and compositional structure” (p. 60) of country music, OPM, and other works in its particular sociocultural sphere. More importantly, through its own intent and hybrid themes, styles, and conventions, it is “oriented towards the active responsive understanding (p. 75)” of its intended addressees who are being summoned to identify with and help in the reconstruction of the homeland.

The next section will discuss the emergence of OKM, particularly the socio-historical, cultural, and technological factors that enabled its development. It will highlight the role of external recognition for local musicians; the local institutional arbitrators; and the technology that shaped the subgenre into what it is now.

3.2 The Development, Production, and Circulation of OKM

Music has always been a part of the cultural landscape of Antique but it was not until the mid-1990s when a musical collective started to emerge and assert itself as the aural expression of the ethnic identity of its people. Antique, despite its peripheral geographic and socioeconomic position, has also been a site where global and national cultural forms continuously intersect with local customs and conventions. Western songs and styles as well as Philippine compositions have flowed into the province since the colonial period and have been performed or aired side by side with the folk and contemporary expressions. But what is interesting about Antique is that for so long its people have been content with using nonnative

musical conventions to express their identity, preferring instead to sing English, Tagalog, and Hiligaynon songs rather than use their own language.

This is not to say that there were no vernacular compositions in Antique prior to the emergence of OKM. The 1978 *Binirayan* Festival souvenir program, for instance, listed nine songs¹⁵ using the local language. At the same period, Bernie Salcedo, who was retrospectively considered as 'Father of OKM,' composed his unrecorded songs *Daw Sa Kanami Lang/How Wonderful It Is* and *Panawagan/Calling* (personal communication, January 27, 2011). These songs, however, were more of creative experiments for the composers and did not gain public merit in the English and Tagalog dominated musicscape of Antique. In addition, Salcedo and other Antique musicians continued to compose and perform non-Kinaray-a songs. Even the official anthem of the province, *Fair Lands of Antique*, is entirely in English:

Fair lands of Antique
Home of Visayans like me
Sugar cane, rice fields and palm trees
Mountains, and calm Sulu Sea
Happy and gay are thy mornings
Pleasant thy freshening breeze
Soothing the songs of thy children
Luscious the fruits of thy trees
Home of the peaceful and free
Dear to our hearts are thy stories
Here shall my home ever be (*Mga Kanlantahon*, 1978)

Having an English anthem patterned after American folk songs was one of the legacies of the country's colonization, and as such, in this case Antique is not unique.

¹⁵Save for a one-stanza song about Antique, I am not able to confirm the provenance of these compositions nor if these were created locally or translated into the Kinaray-a vernacular. My informant and translator Nonong Ejida (personal communication, January 28, 2011) stated that *Dandansoy* and *Inday Himos Himosa*, are very common in the Western Visayas region.

What is interesting is that it was only in 1996, two years before the official celebration of the centennial of Philippine independence, that a Kinaray-a anthem would be composed and replace the English song. While the other provinces in the country developed their own state anthems right after the end of the American colonization, it took Antique another five decades to compose in its vernacular. The resolution issued by the provincial government on the 29th of November 1996 mandating a songwriting contest to replace *Fair Lands of Antique* highlighted a sudden disinterest in the English song:

WHEREAS, the Fair Lands of Antique is a sentimental song about Antique in the English language but in its present form, very few of the Antiquen[ñ]os take it by heart and very few sing it because the majority of the people cannot memorize it or identify it.

WHEREAS, on the basis for the said shortcomings, the provincial theme song to be written in the local dialect (Kinaray-a) is likely to be imperative since it will rekindle the history, the land and people, the dreams and aspirations for the future, the character and virtues of the role in the overall scheme of development in Western Visayas and the Philippines as a whole (Resolution Launching the Search for the Provincial Theme Song of the People and the Province of Antique, 1996).

The sudden assertion that the song does not have a resonance among Antiqueños and Antiqueñas and the desire to revive the history, mores, and aspirations reveal a process of identity reconstruction that aligns itself to the nation. But this utterance on the importance of a localized musical identity was not an isolated imperative from the provincial government. It was instead a result of Antiqueño musicians gaining awards outside the province for their compositions and realizing that they can use their talent to create songs using their own language. In 1996, Dante Beriong

and Katz Amerilla both submitted Tagalog entries to the nationwide search for the theme song of the centennial celebration of Philippine independence and won the top two spots, with the former's song *Mabuhay ka Pilipino/Mabuhay Filipino* (Beriong, n.d. track 6) winning the quarter million Philippine peso prize. With the recognition boosting their confidence on their composing abilities (neither of them had any formal musical lessons), the two would start writing songs in Kinaray-a. In Antique, the news of their *kasimanwa* or fellow citizens winning prestigious national awards inspired other Karay-a composers to create songs in the vernacular and drew the attention of the listening public. In other words, the musicians themselves, provincial government, and the listening public realized that Kinaray-a songs are salient only after gaining external recognition for creating music using a language other than their own.

It is not surprising why external recognition is salient to the ethnic group and played a role in the emergence of OKM. As discussed in Chapter 1, Antique is regarded as the province of domestic maids and *sacadas* and this has left a negative imprint on the self-image of its people. Creativity and love for music were inherent to the people of the province, and local bands and singing groups are profuse. But the constant influx of English and Tagalog songs in Antique have made available alternative resources that can be used to deflect the stigma from being identified as the rural working class. This is why it took a long time for OKM to emerge and for its public not to view it as "very awkward to the listening ear" (Kasilag, 2007, p. 33). Bourdieu's notion of language functioning as a symbolic power that allows individuals to strategically position themselves within a market and a society was

thus evident prior to the emergence of OKM. With the negative connotations attached to Kinaray-a as the language of the rural working class, local musicians thus deliberately avoided using the vernacular. But as this thesis will illustrate, the initial discomfort over OKM was gradually replaced with pride for the subgenre, the language, and the rural class identity of the Karay-a.

Aside from external recognition, the role of institutional arbitrators *Paranubliun Antique* and the provincial government helped develop and legitimize OKM. The former is the main cultural non-profit organization in Antique and acts as the guild of local writers and artists. From 1995 onwards, it started sponsoring a series of songwriting workshops and contests that eventually gave OKM its name and identity. According to the non-profit's chair Francisco Ejida (personal communication, January 28, 2011), it was *Paranubliun Antique's* aim to promote and remove the negative connotations attached to their language, and so there was a deliberate policy that all participants, whether born in the province or not, be required to compose in Kinaray-a. To give a collective name for the compositions, *Paranubliun Antique* took its cue from OPM and entitled these as Original Kinaray-a Music with the assertion that its originality, authenticity, and relevance comes from the use of the language. The non-profit also coined the title 'OKM artists' to collectively call Kinaray-a composers and performers.

As a local non-profit, *Paranubliun Antique* is dependent on grants and often the themes for the songwriting contests reflect the thrust of the funding agency. Development-related topics such as environment conservation, anti-hunger movements, and women's empowerment are thus profuse in OKM, which imbue it

with pedagogical and sociopolitical aims. Although their influence might lead one to question the authenticity of the intent in some of the songs, funding agencies played a crucial role in helping motivate and train Kinaray-a songwriters by providing financial capital. Further, for a marginal province like Antique, poverty and environment degradation are salient socioeconomic issues while women's empowerment can serve to efface the negative connotations of the domestic maid identity of Antiqueñas. These themes, in other words, are not so imposed as they may seem. With many of OKM artists participating in *Paranubliun*-sponsored songwriting contests, their songs thus would carry either advice or social commentary. Edmund Infante, one of the OKM artists interviewed for the study, stated that:

Iyan ang isa sa mga unique na qualities ng OKM, nagbibigay sya ng aral... meron syang role. Kasi karamihan ng naririning mo sa radyo pare-pareho din naman, minsan may kabastusan pa. Makikisabay pa ba kami doon? So mahalaga na may lesson ang OKM.

That is one of the unique qualities of OKM, giving lessons... it has a role. Because most of what you hear from the radio are the same anyway, sometimes there is even obscenity. Will we go that way too? So it is important that OKM carry a lesson (E. Infante, personal communication, February 1, 2011).

If *Paranubliun Antique* as an institutional arbitrator defined an identity for OKM, the local provincial government helped legitimize this by sponsoring events, issuing policies, and funding a public recording studio in San Jose de Buenavista. As stated above, the local government sponsored a songwriting contest to replace its English anthem. Katz Amerilla's (1996, track 1) ballad-style *Antique Banwa nga Hamili/Antique Beloved Homeland* won the contest:

Antique, my hometown
A gift from God
Full of rich history
This is where the first *barangay* was founded

Beautiful Antique
Full of natural wealth
Your seas and plains
Meet your virgin mountains

Antique, beloved hometown
Spring of our life
We will sincerely and continuously love you
Your progress will go on

Pride of your people
The old and young
Founded by the ten Datus
Hometown of the free and peaceful

The song has several points in common with *Fair Lands of Antique*, particularly in the conjuring an image of the province as beautiful land of the “peaceful and free.” But in using the vernacular and drawing from the *Maragtas*, *Antique Banwa Nga Hamili* enunciates the distinctive identity of the homeland and its people. The provincial government also encouraged municipalities and villages in Antique to create their own official anthems. As such, aside from *Antique Banwa nga Hamili*, other Kinaray-a songs are played or performed during state-led activities and public ceremonies in school, festivals, and other celebrations. Outside official events, the state also encouraged radio stations to air more OKM songs. These enabled wider dissemination and helped remove the public’s initial discomfort over OKM.

New music and media technologies also played a facilitating role in the emergence of OKM. When the Yamaha DX7 with its polyphonic keyboard and preset

sounds became widely commercially available (and generally affordable) in the 1980s, it democratized music production across the globe (Pinch & Bijsterveld, 2003). Similarly, the wide availability of music mixing software as well as the desktop PC enabled small-scale musicians to splice recorded sounds and experiment with different musical styles. Further, with the spread of Internet use, the distribution of music became more efficient. In the case of OKM, all of its artists work individually and rely on their own personal resources to produce albums. With meager economic capital to hire professional instrumentalists and musical arrangers, they take full advantage of the diverse instruments and preset sounds within the electronic keyboard. Accessible music production technologies also enabled the setting up of home recording studios, which also helped them create commercials and political jingles. During election periods, candidates rely heavily on campaign jingles that use the mass language of their electorate. OKM artists are hired to compose these or perform during campaign periods. According to Rubido (personal communication, January 10, 2011), the minimum fee of P7000 or \$155 per song helps OKM artists like him to produce new albums. Needless to say, even with the support of *Paranubliun Antique* and the provincial government, OKM would not thrive without the aid of accessible music production technologies.

In terms of production and circulation, OKM is very much the underdog compared to the English and OPM songs that continue to flow into the province. Most of the recorded songs do not have copyright and are often randomly put together depending on the preference of the person buying the CD. Save for festival winning entries, each OKM song is the project solely of the artist from composition

to distribution because there is no recording company has supported its commercial release. This means that artists have to shoulder the all the fees associated in recording a song, which according to all those that I have interviewed, they never recover. In addition, they also have to contend with OPM songs for airtime even in the local radio stations of Antique. *Radyo Natin*, for instance, considers OKM as OPM and thus include its airing under the mandatory quota of four songs per hour (T. Siesa, personal interview, January 6, 2011). In other words, OKM songs are not given extra airtime by local radio stations. Although the AM station DYKA devote a one-hour show for OKM, not all get airtime because songs are selected based on their congruency to the values of the Catholic church which owns the radio station (E. Febrero, personal interview, January 18, 2011). Aside from radio, OKM artists disseminate their songs by holding concerts in the *bayle* or dances during village *fiestas* and community events.

One medium that immensely helped raise the profile of OKM songs to its intended public is the Internet through the online community kinaray-a.com. As I will discuss in the next chapter, the core group of kinaray-a.com included MP3 files of OKM songs and its lyrics on the website, making them more accessible to its diasporic listening public who found the songs resonant of their feelings of longing for the homeland. The relationship between OKM artists and kinaray-a.com members can be described as mutually beneficial, with the former gaining more exposure to the Antique diaspora while the latter being able to get free entertainment during its offline activities and helping express their longing for the homeland.

According to Beriong (personal communication, January 18, 2011), OKM artists like him “do not expect to gain profit” or earn their living from producing songs and this is the main reason why all of them have other sources of livelihood. Sammy Rubido, Bernie Salcedo, and Edmund Infante work as government employees while Noel Alamis has his own sign printing and small studio recording business. Their compositions, however, earn them cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) because of the local recognition they get. Alamis (personal interview, January 11, 2011) for instance, stated that most of the clients of his sign printing business approached him after watching him perform during *fiestas* and public events. In the case of Dante Beriong, his songs enabled him to be recognized by the Antique public and elected as a provincial council member for three terms now. These non-economic gains from OKM compositions help artists continue production despite the massive influx of English and OPM songs.

In sum, the development of OKM was facilitated by external recognition, the arbitration of local institutions, and the availability of new music production technologies. OKM from its outset had to overcome the stereotyped image of the people it represents and it took outside recognition – an ‘other’ in Bakhtin’s term – for it to gain saliency in its locale. As a socially situated utterance, OKM derived legitimacy from state and cultural institutions that aimed to rework the negative image of the language and its people and creating a point of articulation for Antique to the wider project of rebuilding the Philippine nation. Thus, despite being creative experiments with no overt sociopolitical aims at first, Kinaray-a songs eventually developed a goal to symbolically reconstruct the province, its language, and the

identity of its people. The next section will discuss how the speaking voices in OKM songs enunciated these goals.

3.3 Intents and Voices in OKM

OKM songs discursively reconstruct the image of Antique from an economically deprived homeland or *banwa* of peasant farm workers and domestics into an idyllic rural place calling its dispersed sons and daughters to come home and help in its progress. In doing so, OKM songs also efface the *buki* or the backward and hillbilly identities of the Karay-a. The songs utilize humor and nostalgia to deploy affective narratives of Antique as a homeland, rural life and its simple pleasures, the province's history based on the *Maragtas*, and religion.

This section will discuss the 'semiotic elements' (Bakhtin, 1986) or themes and narratives presented by the polyphonic voices in OKM songs. It will first present how the lyrics fuses voice as a person and body to the multiple characters of the songs. It will then highlight the thematic similarities and differences between American Country, OPM, and OKM and followed by a discussion of how these ethnosymbolic constructs create a point of articulation for the enunciation of an empowered identity crucial in achieving the sociopolitical intent of mobilizing for the development of the homeland.

To identify the voices in OKM, a frequency analysis of key words was first conducted prior to the discourse analysis of the lyrics. The songs present a character enunciating from the first person point of view (Table 1). By using the pronouns I, my, me, we, us, and our, the speaker here asserts confidence and authority and uses

direct address in the songs. The second person pronouns of you and your only form only about a third of the words most used in the lyrics. Interestingly, the addressee in the lyrics is a female as indicated by the frequent use of the gendered nouns *Inday*, *Akay*, *Karya*, her, she, woman, lady, and beloved (collocated often with a feminine pronoun). The first three feminine nouns are culturally salient words in Antique. *Inday* and *Akay* are terms of endearment and respect for a female relative or friend. *Karya*, on the other hand, has the opposite meaning as it is the colloquial term for the village harlot. In contrast, the masculine words Antiqueño, he, and his were only mentioned 94 times in the lyrics analyzed. The masculine noun Antiqueño, however, is the word often used when enunciating belonging to the province, implying that the main speaker in OKM songs is a male.

Table 1: Top 10 words in OKM lyrics

Word	Frequency
First person pronoun (I, my, me, we, us, our)	635
Second person pronoun (you, your)	287
Third person feminine nouns and pronouns (<i>Inday</i> , <i>Akay</i> , <i>Karya</i> , her, she, woman, lady, beloved)	135
Third person collective words (all, together, everyone)	102
Third person masculine nouns (Antiqueño, he, his)	94
Love	71
Kruhay	71
Let	60
Antique	53
Am	45
Home	39

The lead character enunciating in the songs analyzed is thus a male, and this is reflective of the fact that almost all OKM artists are men. While there is one song that stereotypes a particular type of female worker, it would be a crude generalization to state that OKM uniformly present an essentialized representation of women. The female or Antiqueña character in the songs enunciates a “heteroglossia” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 267) of voices to occupy multiple identity positions: a simple country gal, a farmer’s daughter, a beautiful and graceful lady, an assertive wife, a strong willed woman, and a dutiful citizen. Similarly, the male or Antiqueño character in the songs comes in the form of a henpecked beau; a proud hillbilly¹⁶ or buki; a hopeless romantic; a hardworking family man; a poor but proud worker; a religious faithful; a weary migrant longing to return home; and the dutiful citizen who loves his province and country. All these characters help symbolically construct Antique as an idyllic homeland and invoke its dispersed sons and daughters to identify with the province and help in its progress.

3.3.1 Reconstructing the image of the homeland

There is a polyphony of voices in OKM songs working to reconstruct Antique’s image from an impoverished province into the idyllic rural homeland. The voice of the dutiful citizen, for instance, evokes response by first representing his province as a beautiful land endowed with pristine mountains, seas, and plains. The much-loved

¹⁶Peterson (1997) defined the hillbilly persona associated with country music as the “rough, unschooled and simple minded person from the remote backwoods of the Appalachian mountains” (p. 7). *Buki* in Antique shares the same connotations of rural origins and simple mindedness but he or she is less rough and his or her poverty more emphasized. To give a more contextualized the meaning, I will henceforth use the term *buki* instead of hillbilly.

panoramic vistas of “mountains meeting the seas” and images of clear blue oceans teeming with fish and mountains filled with fruit-bearing trees and wildlife resonate in the compositions of Alamis, Amerilla, Beriong, Infante, Rubido, and Salcedo. This idyllic imagery serves to define the *banwa* or homeland as a land of natural beauty and resources, as exemplified by the second verse of the song *Antique Banwa nga Hamili* (1996, track 1) wherein the province is depicted as “full of natural wealth” like “seas,” green plains, and “virgin mountains.”

The use of geographic imagery to represent the homeland is generic in country music (Connell & Gibson, 2003). In the case of OKM, however, the deployment of such images is aimed at ascribing endearing qualities that could strip the ethos of backwardness of Antique and create affect toward the province. The dutiful Antiqueño extols the natural landscapes of Antique to efface the poverty-stricken image of the province and construct an alluring homeland with enough resources to offer respite and sustain its dispersed sons and daughters. The homeland may not be economically progressive, but it has its own natural riches. These idyllic images, in other words, help reconstruct a *banwa* beautiful enough to conjure identification and belonging. For instance, the protagonist in Alamis’ *Nagkita-ay Bukid kag Baybay/The Mountains and Seas Meet* (n.d., track 10) asserts himself as an ‘I’ character to construct images of tree-lined and windy plains that portray the province as an abode that offers repose to its weary sons and daughters:

In enchanting Antique, there are fresh winds that
Kiss each other
Oh Antique, thank you
The shade of your trees refreshes my feelings

Aside from deploying geographic imagery and place constructs to reconstruct the homeland, the voices in OKM songs romanticize rural life and “express distaste for urban landscapes and for city life itself” (Connell & Gibson, 2003, p. 79). OKM songs construct the proud *buki* persona for the Antiqueño to project similar polemic representations of the country and the city. The proud *buki* deploys nostalgia and humor in romanticizing rural leisure and domesticity. For him, the rural homeland is ideal because unlike in the city, leisure is within reach; relationships are intimate; and life – although austere – is uncomplicated. In the popular song *Pangabuhi sa Uma/Life in the Country* (Rubido, 2007, track 6), for instance, the proud *buki* portrays rural life as humble yet in all ways pleasurable. The song starts its narrative from the first person point of view and valorizes the difficulties of the remote rural:

The life in the country, houses are few, far from the road
Light comes from a lamp, ride from a cart

By including familiar rural scenarios of being “far from the road” and living in open and less populated spaces, the song creates a polemic binary between the rural and the urban. The proud *buki* in the song also lends Antique a more countrified image by emphasizing the quotidian acts of lighting oil lamps at night and riding in a wooden cart. He does not hide but instead highlights the stark realities in his province. Yet he compensates the lack of city comforts by emphasizing the simple pleasures afforded by his rural *banwa*. The proud and *buki* “by choice” (Peterson, 1992, p. 58) persona in the song then crosses the boundaries of country music by

singing in rap the coda to extol the limitless leisure his homeland offers. In here, the beautiful landscapes of Antique become a boundless playground:

Ride on a water buffalo to roam around
Swim in the river, bathe in the creek
Snare a monitor lizard, avoid the spirit
Use a sling shot to catch someone else's chicken

In highlighting the humble pleasures of the rural countryside, the proud *buki* also provides a nostalgic reminder of childhood. Bringing the water buffalo from the rice field is often a task for the rural youth, who would often find time to ride the animal and wander around before heading home. Further, he uses humor in the last two lines and inverts the familiar admonitions of elders who use superstition and fear to advice children against harming animals or destroying other properties while playing outdoors. Older kin in rural Philippines often warn against snaring a mythic creature disguised as wildlife or not to practice marksmanship on valuable farm animals to prevent squabbles amongst neighbors. With the use of these affective narratives of rural domesticity, Antique is thus symbolically reconstructed as a homeland wherein one can relive the pleasures of childhood. The merging of humor and nostalgia further strengthens the “positive affects of being” (Davis, 1979, p. 14) aimed for by the song.

The proud *buki* in the songs also deploys narratives of adult leisure and domestic bliss to depict the simple pleasures the rural homeland offers. In the last stanza of *Pangabuhi sa Uma's* coda, he again employs humor to construct images of pleasurable life for the rural (heterosexual) couple, where men imbibe on the local brew and women assert their sexuality:

Drink *tuba*¹⁷ and stutter
Ay *abaw Nonoy*¹⁸, do not make a scene
For *Inday* is calling and waving her hand
Go home and let us play house

By including *tuba* as a referent, Rubido's popular composition runs parallel with American country songs such as George Jones' (1959/1998) classic *White Lightning*, The Dillard's *Dooley* (Dillard, Dillard, Jayne, Webb & Pedersen, 1991), Chris Young's (2006) *White Lightning Hit my Family Tree*, and Luke Bryan's (2009) more contemporary *Time to Take my Drunk Ass Home*. In these songs, the local tippie that is almost synonymous to Appalachia is a "multipurpose symbol" which reflects and refracts a wide array of class, family, gender, and other socially embedded issues (Cruz, 1988, p. 151). *Tuba* in Antique is much like the potent bootleg corn whiskey of rural America: a cultural icon, a source of livelihood, a social cement, and a catalyst for disputes among family and friends. In *Pangabuhi Sa Uma*, however, the rural Antiqueño cannot act like the Western male character in American country songs who, according to Ellis (2010), are essentially "men with children's spirits, unwilling (or unable) to be tied down to the hardships of rural responsibilities" (p. 176). The *buki* Antiqueño can drink until he stutters but he is expected to have more self-restraint and maturity so that he could fulfill his marital and other social duties. This is precisely because a family-oriented and socially responsible persona is salient to the reconstruction of the homeland summoning for its dispersed sons to return

¹⁷An alcoholic drink made from the fermented sap of young coconut flowers and is the liquor of choice in rural Philippines due to its affordability and wide availability. To make *tuba*, the end point of the bundled flowers is sliced off and the sap is collected in a container made out of bamboo or wood. The resulting liquid is fermented by adding local yeast or, as what is done in rural Luzon for the similar liquor *lambanog*, heat distilled.

¹⁸*Noynoy* is a term of endearment, the masculine equivalent of *Inday*.

home and help in its progress. As such, he cannot forget that he should be ‘actin’ civilized’ (Young, 2006) nor be allowed to ‘hit on all the girls’ even when drunk (Bryan, 2009). The song also imbues greater, albeit sexualized, agency to Antiqueñas as *Inday* can announce in public that she wants to “play house” and can command her man *Noynoy* to go home once told. Like the representation of Antiqueños, it is crucial to deploy a positive – in this case empowered and assertive – identity for Antiqueñas so that they can play an active role in the reconstruction of *banwa*.

Aside from signifying images of adult leisure and empowered personas, OKM songs deploy food as an ethnic symbol to construct and evoke belonging to the pleasure-filled rural homeland, employing what Mannur (2007) described as ‘culinary citizenship’, wherein nostalgia is used by diasporic subjects to yoke “identity with culinary tastes and practices” and food becomes a “placeholder for marking cultural distinctiveness” (p. 13). In culinary citizenship, food functions primarily as a signifier of belonging and as such, its value lies in its symbolic connection to an identity rather than on being a comestible. Aside from being a marker of identity, culinary citizenship functions as a “palliative for dislocation” (p. 13) wherein a diasporic individual or group invents an image of ontological coherency of their cuisines to salve their nostalgia for the homeland. Like other cultural practices, Mannur emphasizes that what is salient in culinary citizenship is the deployment and acceptance of imagined authenticity rather than ‘authenticity’ itself. As such, it does not matter if the dish with all its correct ingredients is still served or if a culinary procedure was followed as prescribed. A dish or culinary

practice will always be deemed 'authentic' because it helps the diasporic subject construct belonging to stable identity.

In *Pangabuhi sa Uma* and five other songs, culinary citizenship is constructed not only for the diasporic individual but also those who have chosen to stay or are contemplating to leave. Six lines in the song function as a placeholder for Antique through the signification of food imagery that invokes affective belonging to the province. In the second stanza, culinary citizenship is conjured by the proud *buki* who elevates quotidian produce such as rice, bananas, root crops, and coconut into rustic delicacies:

Wake up in the morning, and have rice coffee, banana with
muscovado sugar
For lunch, taro with coconut milk, there are prawns and shore
crabs
For dinner, there is vegetable stew, how sweet the hot rice
smells
There is cassava cake and rice cake, there is *sapal*, *ay abaw*¹⁹,
how tasty!

The stanza likewise evokes culinary citizenship by ascribing delectability and extolling the pleasures derived from products and viands that cannot be easily found or replicated outside of the province. The inclusion of the unrefined sugar *muscovado* in the song anchors Antique as a homeland as it is one of the cottage industry products it is well known for. Rice is the primary agricultural crop of Antique and while it is accessible almost everywhere, the migrant worker who left the province will find that slow roasting its grains to make a drink that can substitute for coffee or fermenting them to make sweet cakes is time-consuming and

¹⁹*Ay abaw* is an expression of surprise, delight, or dismay.

impractical. Similarly, the freshwater crabs and seafood such as ‘tuna’ and ‘anchovies’ coded into the second and first stanzas are not as affordable outside of the province. In signifying and valorizing these comestibles, *Pangabuhi sa Uma* renders them pleasurable for those in Antique and symbolically within reach to the diasporic listener. Through these culinary significations, the song thus enables its intended addressees to articulate belonging to the homeland.

It is interesting to note that some of the dishes coded in *Pangabuhi sa Uma* are rarely served in the province nowadays yet the song is accepted as an authentic reflection of Antique’s cuisine. When I asked Rubido (personal communication, January 15, 2011) to define what *sapal* is (after my translator Francisco Ejida, who is more senior, stated that he has no idea what it was), he answered that it was ‘traditional fermented rice’ he encountered once several years ago and can rarely be found in the province. Similarly, several of my informants stated one would be hard put to find even in drinking tables the “stewed [edible] frog” mentioned in the first stanza. It is salient, however, to include these in the song as they imbue a pronounced rurality to Antique. Indeed, rice and coconut-based viands, plainly cooked vegetable stew and seafood, and trapped meat such as edible frogs are comestibles that stabilize Antique’s bucolic identity and its attachment to the soil and sea. More importantly, these rustic foods symbolically construct a bountiful rural homeland capable of nourishing and nurturing a simple yet pleasurable life for all its sons and daughters. Such deployment of food imagery can also be found in American country songs such as Hank William Sr’s (1952/2006) iconic *Jambalaya (On the Bayou)*; Dolly Parton’s (1971) *Chicken Every Sunday*; Hank William Jr’s

(1981) *A Country Boy Can Survive* wherein “catfish” and “good ole’ tomatoes and homemade wine” are extolled; and in Luke Bryan’s (2009) *What Country Is* which uses images of “butter drippin’ off a biscuit” and “homemade peach ice cream” to define the rural homeland.

By signifying images of nature-based leisure and rustic cuisine, *Pangabuhi sa Uma* symbolically constructs an idyllic rural homeland offering humble pleasures and works to efface the connotations of economic backwardness of Antique. And like most American country songs, it intentionally employs a Manichean worldview to signify the city as simply anarchic in order to justify that the rural place is the ideal homeland. The chorus of *Pangabuhi sa Uma* is particularly assertive with the idyllic rural identity it constructs for Antique, with its last line enunciated by a ‘buki by choice’ gratified with the simple pleasures and humble life the bucolic *banwa* offers:

Life in the country, I will not exchange
For the city, for the city life that is chaotic
Life in the country, I will not exchange
Even if you force me

Aside from valorizing the humble pleasures of rural life, OKM songs manifest intertextuality and draw imagery from past mediations to reconstruct the image of Antique. As discussed in Chapter 1, the province’s history is based on the *Maragtas*, an account of the origins of the Filipino people that has been discredited in academic scholarship. In Antique, however, the *Maragtas* is a salient part of the cultural identity of the province and is celebrated annually through the *Binirayan* Festival which commemorates the arrival of the 10 Bornean Datus and their purchase of Panay Island.

The significance of the *Maragtas* to Antique is 'remediated' (Bolter & Grusin, 2000) by OKM songs. Five songs that explicitly define the identity of the *banwa* and its citizens employ the narrative and central characters of the *Maragtas* to signify the Antique as a noble homeland, creating a sense of "transparent immediacy" (p. 21) for the account. Beriong's *Antique, Antiqueño* (n.d., track 3) and *Binirayan Kruhay!!!* (n.d., track 14); Infante's *Antiqueño Gid Ako* (n.d., track 1); Rubido's *Kinaray-a.com* (2009, track 11); and Amerilla's *Antique Banwa nga Hamili* (1996/2006, track 1) encode the narrative of the *Maragtas* into its lyrics to define the province as the cradle of Philippine civilization. In these songs, Antique has a well-defined and glorious past because it is where the country's first political unit was founded.

The songs also remediate the *Maragtas* to emphasize its significance to the identity of the contemporary Antiqueño. Beriong's *Binirayan Kruhay!!!*, which is the official festival song, reminds its listeners of their origins and links to a larger Southeast Asian identity. The first two stanzas of the song encapsulate the events that led to the flight of the Bornean leaders and how they finally settled in the village of Malandog:

Borneo, ruled by a cruel sultan
Forced the Malays to leave their land of birth
Led by the ten Datu
Riding on their sailboats, they searched for a new life

Because of Sumakwel, Aninipay was reached
Barter was made with a golden hat
The native *Ati*, dwelt in the uplands
The datus then built a *barangay* in Malandog

A similar account of the narrative events in the *Maragtas* is also found in Infante's *Antiqueño Gid Ako* (n.d., track 1). The presence of these chronologically ordered events in the songs indicates an anxiety over the continuity of the *Maragtas* in the collective memory of Antiqueños and Antiqueñas. Being a discredited account of Philippine national history, it has been excluded in state-sanctioned educational materials and rarely referred to by the national media. Ensuring the continuity of this history is crucial for Antique because it provides a powerful counterpoint to the stigma attached to the rural *banwa*. In the *Maragtas*, Antique is the birthplace of the Filipino nation. By highlighting the departure, arrival, and settling of the Malayan Datus, the songs – along with the other technologies of material representation in the province – enable the collective remembering of the glorious past and renegotiate its meaning for the present. In doing so, the songs also reveal the desire to append rather than separate the rural homeland to the larger nation and create a role for the people of the province in the symbolic reconstruction of the Philippines. Unlike other ethnic groups which use their newfound collective to call for separation from the state, the Kinaray-a sees itself as a component group of the Filipino nation and thus must help in rebuilding it. In *Antiqueño Gid Ako*, the addressee is explicitly reminded of the province's central role in nation building:

Ten Datus, with Datu Puti as the leader
Dwelt in Malandog
The Datus established a government
And the place progressed, and left a legacy

Until this present time
From which emerged the Filipino blood

The saliency of the *Maragtas* in OKM songs, however, rests more on its potential to act as a call for collective mobilization. Beyond reminding its intended addressees of their history, the songs construct a dialogue with the province's imagined past to express a yearning for a more progressive *banwa* and a belief that this can be regained. Beriong's *Binirayan, Kruhay!* for instance deploys a narrative that a better homeland is possible because Antique had been a land of "honor, justice, peace, and progress" before. The song then articulates the imperative of helping the homeland with the need to continue the "historic legacy" of their noble forefathers. The voice of the dutiful citizen in the last stanza of the song is particularly instructive and summons present-day Antiqueños and Antiqueñas to work collectively and fulfill their duty to their *banwa*:

You, me, and all of us are Antiqueños
We have a historic legacy, honorable Filipinos
Let us join, together for progress
Come sail Antiqueño, onwards to change!

This call for mobilization is articulated to the ascription of esteem to Antiqueño identity. The songs deploy the central characters of the *Maragtas* to signify a positive representation of the province's citizens. Infante's *Antiqueño Gid Ako* cites Sumakwel to evoke an image of the Antiqueño as a concerned citizen. The Antiqueño, being a descendant of an upright leader, should also envision and have the courage to work for a better *banwa*:

I am a real Antiqueño
The grandchild of Sumakwel, a great man
In the island of Panay the datu landed
Together with their families from Borneo
They had courage, they had a dream

It should be noted, however, that in remediating the *Maragtas*, OKM songs also continue what Foucault termed as epistemic violence to the indigenous Ati whose identity was used to construct a racial hierarchy among Philippine ethnolinguistic groups and highlight the cultural superiority of Spanish and American colonizers. The songs indirectly help in the continued silencing of the voices of the Ati in the discourse of nation building in spite of the increasing recognition of indigenous rights in Antique.

Lastly, OKM artists - like American country musicians - also draw from religion to reconstruct Antique as an idyllic homeland by representing the province as a “gift from God.” The voice of the religious faithful in Amerilla’s environment-themed composition *Bugay sa Antiqueño/Gift to Antiqueño*, (n.d., track 4) enunciates why the homeland is endowed with beautiful landscapes and natural bounty:

All things here on earth
Were created by God for mankind
In the land and sea, there are blessings given
So that man would not be burdened

The voice of the religious faithful is also used by Beriong (n.d., track 11) to represent Antique in his contest piece *Maghublag kag Magkabalaka Kontra sa Gutom/Be Concerned and Act Against Hunger*. Both songs paint a homeland that is blessed and was given as a blessing, wherein Antique has its lush landscapes and bountiful resources because of God’s grace:

We should offer a great thanksgiving
To the dear Almighty, for the natural wealth He has given us
Fishes in the sea, wild boars in the forest
These we inherited as time went by

It is not surprising that OKM artists would use religion in their songs about the homeland. Religiosity is still considered a virtue in Philippine society and expressions of this are apparent in the media and public events outside churches. Aside from the fact that most of the artists first learned the ropes of music making by participating in church choirs, they are active members of their congregations and compose praise songs. What is interesting in the presence of religion in OKM songs, however, is the extent to which it is used to espouse duty and loyalty to the homeland. Because Antique is a blessing entrusted by God to its citizens, it is imperative that they should not only receive it with gratitude but also take care and work for its progress. The summoning of responsibility towards the *banwa* is therefore framed as a moral duty, and in a society that considers religiosity as a virtue, there is nothing more effective than deploying religion as a strategy to conjure nostalgia, return, belonging, responsibility, and loyalty to the blessed homeland. Forgetting or ignoring the province is thus framed as turning away from one's faith. Such construction of duty and loyalty to the *banwa* is explicit in Amerilla's (n.d., track 4) *Bugay sa Antiqueño* wherein the voice of religious faithful is more assertive

You, me, and all Antiqueños
We have a part and are answerable to all
The natural resources we are blessed
Let us take conserve so that the younger generation can take part

In this song, the addressee is instructed to nurture the blessed *banwa* he or she was endowed with. In Beriong's 'rallying song' *Antique, Antiqueño*, this religious duty takes the form of a pledge:

Antique, you are the province that was bestowed to us
By God who gave you natural wealth
We will love your mountains, seas, and plains
At all times we will take care and use them well

Similarly, in Rubido's (2009, track 12) *Napulo Kasugo*/Ten Commandments religion is used to admonish and remind political leaders of their responsibility to the province (discussed more in Chapter 5). Religion therefore is among the central constructs in OKM songs due of its role in reconstructing the homeland.

3.3.2 Empowering the rural and domestic workers

OKM also symbolically reconstructs the poor, working class identity of the Karaya and removes the connotations of the cultural and economic backwardness to their ethnic identity. The similar "poor but proud" and "pride in being working class" themes identified by Peterson (1992, p. 57) were identified in the songs analyzed. Poverty and belonging to the rural peasant class is proudly embraced as a badge of honor first by drawing attention to the difficulties of the occupation and then using these to extol the virtues of hard work. While most of the occupations mentioned in the songs are for men (*tuba* gathering, fishing, and motorized tricycle driving), the domestic worker identity of the Antiqueña was also reconstructed through the themes of love, courtship, and women empowerment.

The convention of country music as a storyteller's medium (Peterson and McLaurin, 1992) is most visible in the songs that reconstruct the rural and domestic worker identities of Antiqueños and Antiqueñas. The songs *Mananggite*, *Pamalaran*, *Traysikul Drayber*, *Araguy Inday* (1 & 2) *Patadyong ni Inday*, *Probinsyana Guapa*, and

Karya characteristically have more stanzas and are detailed in the chronological progression of each scene being depicted. They also present a more elaborate account of the hardships experienced. These details are important as they provide more space to remove the ethnic group's multiple and layered negative rural class identity.

The voice of the poor but proud worker can be clearly heard from Rubido's (2007, track 10) first composition, *Mananggite* (*Tuba Gatherer*). Rubido first composed the love song as a poem in 1994 after joining a Kinaray-a writing workshop and entering the piece in a literary contest sponsored by the cultural non-profit *Paranubliun Antique*. He then tried developing chords for the poem but it was not until 2003 when he released it in his first album. In the song, the voice of the *tuba* gatherer valorizes the hardship and dangers of climbing coconut trees to get the sap that will be made into the local tippie:

Mananggite, I am called
I climb the coconut tree every morning and afternoon
I do not have a master, but I am a slave
Of my daily needs

My knees and elbows touch
Look closer, and see how hard
Yet on top I find happiness
Because from there I get to see the beauty of *Inday*
Because from there I get to see the beauty of *Inday*

The song romanticizes the poverty of the humble rural worker who has “no master” but is a slave to his daily necessities. He enunciates a spirit of contentedness and resignation to poverty, taking pleasure only from being able to get a glimpse of his object of affection. Too shy to profess his love, he resorts to climbing coconut

trees. In enunciating the character of a hopeless romantic, the song thus removes the attention away from the poverty of a person whose best food is a simple stew. Peterson (1992) calls this strategy of highlighting and deflecting the hardship and causes of poverty by appealing to other identities as “class unconsciousness” (p. 60), which he argues can be escapist and fatalistic if it does not serve to uplift the conditions of the working class.

The same valorization of working class and eliding of poverty can be found in two of Rubido’s other compositions. In *Pamalaran/Fisherman* (Rubido, 2009, track 11), the difficulties the livelihood is portrayed by narrating the how fishers go out to the sea at night. The voice of the hardworking fisher in the song simultaneously conveys feeling of weariness and persistence. In doing so, he invokes empathy that works to draw the attention away from the hardships caused by poverty:

The life of a fisherman
Adrift in the middle of the sea
Just like the stars far off the shore
Taking a chance while there is no moon

O, how hard it is to fish in the dark sea
Only the stars could tell where I am
O, how hard it is to fish in the middle of the sea
At the pull of the tide, the fishes go

At the clatter of the nylon string on the sides of the boat
Without luck, you might lose your finger
Hala pull, do not mind the hunger and rain
If I catch something, I can pay my debt

Rubido deploys the same narrative of working class sensibilities in his song *Traysikul Drayber /Tricycle Driver* (2007, track 7). In this song, the quotidian life of the driver of the most common mode of transport in Antique is enunciated through

the persona of a hardworking family man. The images of the sun-burnt shoulder and the expensive gasoline provide realist significations of the hardships experienced by the rural driver, while the use of the acronyms of the state's Land Transportation Office (LTO) and Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) denounces the oppressive system of bureaucracy he has to go through. Yet the first person "I" character of the song is determined to work hard. He cannot "back off" from the hardships of his trade because he is the breadwinner for his family:

The life of a tricycle driver
My fortune depends on the steering wheel, there is sadness,
there is happiness
Even if my left shoulder is sun burnt
I carry on as my family waits at home

No matter what the challenge is, I will not back off
Because this vehicle has no reverse gear
Payment for the franchise, and for this loaned motorcycle
LTO, BIR, and the gold-like gasoline

In choosing to depict the hardships associated with farming (*Mananggite*), fishing (*Pamalaran*), and providing services (*Traysikul Drayber*), Rubido thus highlights the plight of the poorest workers in his homeland and emphasizes the values of persistence (I climb the coconut tree every morning and afternoon/ I will not back off/ if I catch something, I can pay my debt); suffering (do not mind the hunger and rain/my left shoulder is sun burnt); and family duty (I carry on as my family waits at home). All of these inverts the impoverished *sacada* identities of Antiqueños into what Peterson referred to as "poor-but-proud" (p. 57) subjectivity. While Peterson has noted that this form of class unconsciousness carry the danger of deteriorating into a form of escapism, I would argue that such narratives of valorization is

important for ethnic group collectively articulating itself within a discourse that has so far painted them in a negative light. As Anthony Smith (1999) emphasized, strategic use of narratives are important resources by which groups imagine itself positively as a community. Further, the absence of explicit messages for class mobilization does not mean that its listeners cannot use the songs as starting point for mobilization. Frith (1998) also stated in his discussion of the polysemic meanings of lyrics that the “political power of a song need not bear any relationship to its intended messages at all” (p. 57). As this thesis will also try to illustrate, developing collectivity and converting this into action takes time and further interaction. Reworking their stereotyped representations, however, is a positive step towards that goal.

The desire for a positive collective identity is the reason why OKM artists also construct an empowered image for their female *kasimanwa*. It is interesting to note that of all the feminine pronouns used in Antique, the word *Inday* is the most frequently used in the songs analyzed. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the word is a term of endearment in Antique whereby it connotes respect or affection. But outside the province, *Inday* is the subservient, unkempt, and dull domestic help. Aware of such image and the conditions of poverty that drives poor Antiqueñas to work as domestics outside the province, OKM artists deploy narratives and messages that aim to efface the stereotyped image and empower their *Inday*.

Rubido’s (2007, track 9) *Patadyong ni Inday/Patadyong of Inday* employs the traditional hand-woven shawl of Antique as an ethno-symbol of female empowerment. The romantic Antiqueño character of the song enunciates from a

first person point of view to tell the story of *Inday* and encourages her to dream more. He also tries to ascribe a positive body image for *Inday*, who has been repeatedly represented as an unkempt domestic in the mainstream media. By representing her as naturally beautiful, he starts to peel away the stereotyped image of *Inday*:

Inday who is a farmer's daughter
Has a face that so serene, porcelain-like skin
She inherited her grandmother's *patadyong*
It suited her well, with her curvy body

She grew up farming
She can hold a plow and a spade
She endures the heat of the sun
By covering herself with her grandmother's *patadyong*

Ay Inday remember what your grandmother said
That a woman is not just for the kitchen
Ay Inday remember what your grandmother said
That a woman is also able to lead

The romantic Antiqueño in the song does not only construct a positive image for *Inday*. He pleads with her to dream bigger and look beyond the life of farming and domesticity by enunciating the voice of her respected elder female kin. Aside from imploring her to dream bigger, the song paints *Inday* as a woman who cannot be seduced by money. In the following stanzas of the song, the “pride in being working class” (Peterson, 1992, p. 57) is reinforced by constructing an image of arrogance for the white-collar doctor, engineer, politician, and millionaire. In this song, the polemic urban-rural representation characteristic of country songs is again employed:

Many wooed her, they come and go
There was an engineer, a doctor and a politician
And a millionaire with seven wives
He wanted *Inday* to be the eight
All that wooed her, no one passed
Since the wind blows stronger when they talk
Yet with my guitar and respectful strums
She accepted my love

A similar song to *Patadyong ni Inday* is Alamis' highly popular *Ang Probinsyana Gwapa* or *The Country Girl is Beautiful* (n.d., track 1) which emphasizes physical beauty. While the song runs the risk of presenting an image of docile and home-bound female that runs counter to Rubido's message in *Patadyong ni Inday*, it serves well to efface the image of the unkempt provincial domestic maid often portrayed in the mainstream media:

I have seen the girl that I want
Well-mannered and not a snob
Dresses simply but is very appealing
With a charming smile and lovely to look at

I went to visit their house
I felt the respect inside their home
There I saw their love for one another
This is the woman that I was looking for

Beautiful country girl, so demure
Beautiful country girl, so loving too
Beautiful country girl, so dependable

The song also deploys a subtle, internalized humor to represent an empowered *Inday* (with the word virgin standing as a double entendre) who makes her own decisions in choosing a life partner:

I asked for her love
She replied without hesitation
Abaw, Noel, I am sorry
Could you just wait for I am still young?

I waited for seven years
To be accepted by a virgin country girl
She asked me when we met again
Why did you return just now, when I already have a husband?

If *Patadyong ni Inday* and *Ang Probinsyana Gwapa* projected mostly the voice of a pensive romantic, two other songs of Rubido fully employed humor to construct an empowered and assertive image of the Antiqueña. *Araguy*²⁰ *Inday* (2007, track 12) and *Araguy Inday Part 2* (2007, Track 1) are serialized songs that narrate the ordeals of the henpecked Antiqueño whose mistake was to love the assertive and demanding *Inday*. The songs can be considered as localized versions of Weird Al Yankovic's (1992) *You Don't Love Me Anymore* and Filipino novelty singer Michael V's *Sinaktan Mo ang Puso/You Hurt My Heart* (Bunagan, 2002). To highlight the subtle difference between OPM's novelty genre and OKM, Michael V's hit was sung following the ballad conventions; lacked a specific object of affection; used a shorter time frame for the narrative, and highlighted urban constructs (traffic, movie, and the Sampaloc district of Manila):

You hurt my heart
Do you still remember when we were still together?
You put shattered glass
Into my sandwich spread
We will watch a movie
I waited one week for you
You told me you were stuck in traffic, I believed you

²⁰*Araguy* and *aguy* are expressions of pain, similar to ouch in English.

In *Araguy Inday*, however, the narrative is more detailed (starting from childhood up to marriage); Philippine folk and American country rhythms are combined; and rural constructs are numerous. Further, the henpecked beau does not complain but considers the violent painful ordeals that he went through as testaments of his enduring love for his *Inday*:

If you remember, it was harvest time
You pushed me into the thresher I was operating
I was lucky that the engine stopped running
So even if today I am one-armed, at least I am still breathing

If you still remember, in the sugar mill
Aguy, there, *Inday*, I suffered more
I just looked at you *Inday* and winked
You dunked me into the boiling sugar

Araguy Inday, the pain that I went through
My eye still aches, and I am left with one arm
Araguy, Inday, I suffered more in the mill
My face got burnt, my ear clipped

Ay, *Inday*, the pain that I went through
My heart hurts, my body aches
But *Inday* my love would not be any less
My love, my love, *Inday*, is only for you

The song depicts *Inday* as a person that is assertive, hard-to-please, and can defend herself. It also signifies the Antiqueño as a loyal partner that even though he already suffered injuries, he still loves and pursues *Inday*. The last two lines are emphasized as pledges by the henpecked Antiqueño who enunciates the words in tear-choked voice. In the sequel to the song which Rubido released three years later, his loyalty and perseverance are rewarded when *Inday* finally agrees to marry him.

The henpecked Antiqueño's suffering, however, did not end but went on when *Inday* asked for the impossible to satiate her cravings brought by pregnancy:

After my long courtship *Inday* got impatient
She finally accepted my love and we married
Even if we were already old we were blessed
But I suffered more from her cravings

She said, *Nonoy*, I want
The milk from an albino chicken
A white and seedless plum
And a duck embryo from a horse's testicle

If we peel away the layers of denotative violence in the songs and what Ellis (2010) accurately noted as the personalized, self-deprecating "loser" (p. 162) characteristics of country humor, we hear a voice enunciating loyalty to both his lady love and the homeland. *Inday* in the song is not only the assertive Antiqueña whose identity is being reconstructed to help in the progress of the province. She is also the homeland, as signified by the symbols of rurality such as the rice thresher and sugar mill and the difficulties that the loyal Antiqueño goes through in the quotidian tasks of his pastoral livelihood. Life in Antique is not easy and can be full of pain, but these do not diminish the love he has for his homeland. The "humble humor" that is "fatalistic in the face of hardships and victim-oriented in relation to point of view" (p. 169) used here highlight the working class conditions in the rural province as well as provide relief and coping mechanism.

With *Inday* serving as a symbol for the homeland, it is no surprise then that she is represented as the object of empowerment and affection in the OKM songs discussed above. As the embodiment of Antique, *Inday* shares a several qualities

with the homeland: simple, naturally beautiful, noble, and pleasing. She is also emphasized as strong-willed, hardworking, assertive, empowered, and loyal to her family and homeland. Such representations serve a double purpose of removing the poor domestic maid identity of *Inday* and ascribing more endearing qualities to the homeland being reconstructed. The use of a feminine construct to represent the homeland, however, runs the risk of essentializing an idealized image of Antiqueñas. Scholarship on postcolonial feminism has shown how the discourse of nationalism has always privileged the male gender as well as predetermined and contained female participation and agency (Chatterjee, 1990; Rao, 1999). In the context of OKM, one song explicitly uses a feminine construct to discipline those who abandon their ties to the homeland being reconstructed.

Rubido's *Karya* (2009, track 5) created a female character who is the antithesis of *Inday*. In Antique, *Karya* is the colloquial term for the village harlot and in the song she is depicted as a migrant sex worker who just returned from Japan. According to Rubido (personal communication, January 10, 2011), he wrote the song after singing in a village *bayle* or dance wherein one "obvious *Japayuki*²¹ kept deriding me all throughout the performance [and] shouting that I stop and hip hop songs [be played] instead." As a small segment of Philippine diaspora, Filipina workers who are employed in overseas nightlife industries have created what Aguilar (1996) has termed as transnational shame for other Filipinos and Filipinas who feel humiliated by the sexualized identity of and distance themselves from the former. In *Karya*,

²¹*Japayuki* is a neologism that means Japan-bound. It refers to Asian women who go to Japan and work in the country's nightlife industries. The word carries the connotation of being a prostitute (see Suzuki, 2011 for an explanation of the origins and evolution of the word).

Rubido uses the ethno-symbols of language, food, and pastoral livelihood to convey transnational shame and discipline the greatest transgression one could commit in the reconstruction of the homeland: severing one's ties to it. The upbeat song first flags humor by using as voice a pre-recorded comedy tune and then introduces *Karya* through the character of an elderly Antiqueño who uses a highly nasal voice as a parodic device:

Karya who is from the province
Is by nature snobbish
Many are wooing her
But she wanted a millionaire

Her parents sold their water buffalo
In her ambition to be a dancer in Japan
She got lucky with her dream
And so *Karya* went home rich

The first stanza affirms *Karya's* ties to their province and her personality as contrastive to *Inday's*. If *Inday* cannot be seduced by money and values respect and honesty in a life partner, *Karya* prefers those with material wealth and pursues to make her own. In forcing her parents to sell the water buffalo, *Karya* practically robs her family of their livelihood as the farm animal is crucial to subsistence rice farming. From the outset, *Karya* is thus represented as the anti-thesis of *Inday*. She is signified as snob, materialistic, and with no concern for her parents.

It is, however, in the second stanza that we become aware of *Karya's* main offense. While she goes back to her homeland, she has practically severed her ties to it. This is clearly illustrated by her refusal to speak Kinaray-a and her dislike of vegetable stew that grace the everyday tables of Antique. The disdain for her snobbery and pretense is thus conveyed through the deployment of language and

cuisine as ethno-symbols that mark one's belonging and loyalty to the homeland. The elder male character narrating the song imbue mockery to his voice by using Tagalog instead of Kinaray-a to verbalize the line "So now she speaks in Tagalog." Code switching in Antique has always been the strategy of those who do not want to be identified to the province due to the stigma brought by their *sacada* and domestic maid identities. In the song, however, code switching is deployed to conscientize those who deny their ties to Antique. After using language as an ethno-symbol, the elder male character of the song highlights *Karya's* lack of culinary citizenship (Mannur, 2007) and then reveals the rationale for her loss of affinity to the homeland:

She could no longer speak Kinaray-a
So now she speaks in Tagalog
She no longer likes to eat stewed vegetables
Karya is now classy, so this is what she wants

Umm ahh, umm ahh ahh...
Umm ahh, umm ahh ahh...
Umm ahh, umm ahh ahh...
Umm ahh, umm ahh ahh...

The repeated use of interjections voiced in an upbeat rhythm in the chorus paints a stark image of what *Karya* did for a living. This vivid sexualization drives the main message of the song: denying one's ties to the homeland is tantamount to prostituting oneself. *Karya* may have left her former trade, but by flaunting her newfound wealth and using this to distance herself from her rural *kasimanwa*, she becomes ever more a prostitute. In the last three stanzas of the song, jewelry and nail polish – although both very common in Antique – are used to construct otherness and highlight *Karya's* vanity, materialism, and betrayal of the homeland:

Gone are the cracked soles of her feet
The bruises while gathering hay on the hills
Her necklace is as long as a belt, her earrings as big as bracelets
Her scars are covered by jewelries

She no longer likes to step on the rice field
Because her toenails have just been polished
In dances she would stop *buki* songs
Karya is now classy, so this is what she wants

Karya who is from the province
Sexy when she goes to the streets
She no longer recognizes her companions before
They used to harvest rice together just to go to school

The deployment of jewelry and nail polish reveals patriarchal bias and what Bakhtin called as 'evaluative intonation' in constructing *Inday* as the keeper of the conservative mores of the homeland. *Inday* is simple, naturally beautiful, loves farming, and is loyal to her family, friends, and conservative values. On the other hand, *Karya* needs adornment, deplores the pastoral lifestyle, abandons her rural folks, and has loose moral values. Representations of *Inday* and *Karya* in OKM indeed runs the risk of reifying women into either sexualized objects or guardians of purity of the values of the homeland. Interestingly, during my fieldwork, it was females who often requested *Karya* to be played during radio programs. In kinaraya.com, the song was also praised by the female and male chatroom participants for its subtle yet profound messages. A female informant also told me that the song conveyed a common occurrence in the province wherein some of those who were able to leave Antique would consider themselves above those who stayed in the province:

eh kasi madami naman talagang ganyan dito. Nakalabas lang pagbalik ang yabang na... Tagalog na ng Tagalog, sasabihin na di na ako marunong mag Karay-a. Makakalimutan mo ba agad yun? Eh ako nga ilang beses ako pumupunta ng Manila pero pag nandito ako, karay-a ginagamit ko. Nakakainis ang mga taong ganun...

eh because there are a lot of [people] like that here. They were just able to go out [of Antique], [but] when they come back, [they are] very arrogant... [they speak] Tagalog always and say I do not know anymore how to speak Karay-a [Kinaray-a]. Can you right away forget that? *Eh* how many times do I go to Manila but when I am here, I use Karay-a [Kinaray-a]. People like those are really annoying...

The number of weekend radio programs I listened to and interviews I conducted are indeed far too few to be considered a representative sample, but the fact that women are asking for the song and people express disdain not to the explicit sexualized representation of *Karya* but to their *kasimanwas* who denounce their roots point to something other than female essentialism. The stigma brought by years of embodying a poor and *buki* identity is slowly being replaced by pride and desire to help the homeland. What emerges as salient as of now is to express loyalty to Antique and as such, there is lesser tolerance for code switching and cosmopolitan pretensions. Such evaluative attitudes over one's loyalty to his or her origins are not at all unique to the Karay-a. Bill Malone (2002) highlighted the saliency of the aphorism 'don't rise above your raisin' in rural America reflected by the working class narratives in country songs. Using the saying as the title of his book, Malone states that it is used to remind country folks not to forget their own origins and people while on the way or after attaining success. US bluegrass

musician Ricky Skaggs's (1981) same titled song elucidates the meaning of 'don't rise above your raisin':

Now you need not hold your head so high
Every time you pass me by
For that don't mean nothin to me you see
Don't get above your raisin' stay down to earth with me.

Now looky here gal you'd better be yourself
And leave that other stuff on the shelf
You're a country baby, that's plain to see
Don't get above your raisin', stay down to earth with me

A similar admonition of staying true to one's roots is found in *Karya*, whereby those who ashamed of the homeland are collectively reminded to stay true to their origins. The last line of the stanza deploys the Kinaray-a expression "*wara pa ngani gatunaw ang tangkong sa busong, nagtatagalog na*" which translates as 'the water spinach in your stomach has not been digested yet and you are already speaking in Tagalog.' It means that one is already pretending to be somebody else even though he or she has not gotten far from the hearth:

This Kinaray-a song of mine
Is a reminder to all *Karya*
Look at the mirror and think about
The water spinach that is still inside your stomach

The song *Karya* is a product of the convergence the years of carrying the stigma that essentially stemmed from Antique's socioeconomic conditions, Rubido's experience in the village *bayle*; and the sexualized and commoditized body of female migrant workers in the era of globalization (San Juan, 2009). It carries a legitimate, if not ideal, intent of reminding its publics not to forget the homeland that nurtured them. Nevertheless, there is stereotyping and OKM artists have to thread carefully so

that in addressing the misrepresentation of class-based issues of ethnic identity construction, it does not commit epistemic violence to women, the indigenous Ati, or other social groups. As the dialogic reconstruction of Karay-a subjectivity is still ongoing, however, a stereotyping voice holds the possibility to be "re-accentuated (ironically, indignantly, reverently, and so forth" and can be "repeated with varying degrees of reinterpretation" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 91).

3.3.3 Conjuring the diaspora

Another theme OKM has in common with American country music is the longing for the rural homeland. In OKM, the voice of the weary migrant yearning to go back to his beloved homeland or the desolate lover who was left behind and forgotten loudly resonates. In the songs *Mauli Gid Ako Sa Antique/I Will Go Home To Antique* (Beriong, n.d., track 1); *Layas Antiqueño/Diasporic Antiqueño* (Amerilla & Flores, 2006), *Napuklak/PUK Locked* (Rubido, 2007, track 3), and *Kataposan nga Panakayun/Final Voyage* (Salcedo, 2006), expressions of homesickness and nostalgia reverberate heavily. These "exile songs" (McLaurin, 1992, p. 21) have found resonance to its listening public because the people of the province have long had a history of being migrant workers. But unlike American country songs, OKM songs explicitly construct a homeland that is calling for its dispersed sons and daughters to come home rather than just reflecting emotive feelings of whom Smith (1980) referred to as the rural Ulysses.

The most popular song in kinaray-a.com (10,591 hits) is Dante Beriong's *Mauli Gid Ako Antique*. In this song, Antique's representation as an idyllic *banwa*, culinary

citizenship, and valorization of the ethnic group's working class identity are fused together. The song enunciates a male "I" character aching to go back home after a long period of absence. At the start of the song, the a polemic representation of the rural and the urban is conjured by establishing the latter as an unfriendly place:

I have been studying in a far place for so long
I have been working in a far place for so long
Chasing the hours in every opportunity
In this difficult place, chaotic situation

By constructing the characters of the college student and urban worker, the song appeals to the most common members of Antique's diaspora. In the second stanza of the song, images of the rustic food of the province are deployed not only as a palliative for dislocation, but to evoke further longing to the homeland. The pronounced stress on the interjections *Ay* and *Sus* heightens the yearning being constructed for the viands and fruits common in Antique:

Ay, how I miss the fresh fish
The stewed and steamed vegetables
Sus, how I miss *bandi*²² and *sinegwelas*²³
The custard apple and *kamunsi*²⁴, sweet turnip, and guavas

The chorus of the song turns the longing into an imperative to go home, with the narrating character spurring this longing into action: he must go back to the homeland. But while *Mauli Gid Ako Sa Antique* similarly constructs Antique as an idyllic and "peaceful place," it goes further than the other songs in invoking longing

²² Peanut toffee

²³ A type of plum

²⁴ Sweet tamarind

for the homeland by signifying one's hearth. It is not only the province that is longed for but also one's home and family – two constructs that are sure to resonate for the diasporic individual:

I will go home to Antique
I will go back to that peaceful place
I will go home to Antique

Hay I miss sleeping at our house
(and the food at home)
*Toto*²⁵ and *Inday*
To swim in the sea
And the food at home
Mother and Father

Yet in *Mauli Gid Ako Sa Antique*, there is what McLaurin (1992) similarly noted in American country as the “implicit admission that the southern economy could not support those who left” (p. 21). The diasporic Antiqueño has come home but still has to leave and continue to work or study. To ease the sorrow over the continued dislocation, the narrating character articulates a deep yearning for his hearth, food, and homeland:

If only when I leave
I could bring the things that ease my longing
If only in my journeys
I could bring along the love that would relieve my sadness

In contrast, Amerilla's *Layas Antiqueño* explicitly implores the province's overseas workers to come home. The narrating voice pays homage to his overseas *kasimanwa* by emphasizing the sacrifices they made just “to give better life to family

²⁵A term of endearment for the younger male relative or friend

and parents.” He then points out that it is time for his addressee to come back home, having reached his goal of saving enough for his family:

You bore the scorching heat in Middle East
The loneliness in Hong Kong and Singapore
The coldness in America and Canada
The solitude in Europe

Layas Antiqueño (come on, come home)
Layas Antiqueño (bring your success along)
Your entire family misses you
They long to embrace and love you

In Mark Quintela’s (2006) *Antiqueño Ako/I Am An Antiqueño*, the supplication to go home comes in the form of a pledge of the dutiful citizen. The “I” male character in the song first asserts that he is a “proud Antiqueño” before revealing that he has to leave to find work and help his family. Yet despite the hardships that he goes through, he does not forget that he has a duty to this province:

I experienced hard work
Just to find blessings, I endured fatigue
Teary-eyed, I would bear anything
Help for the hometown, comfort for the family

I am an Antiqueño, I am an Antiqueño
I have a beautiful dream for my fellowmen
My province’s progress I shall support

The last line of second chorus articulates the overall collective intent in the OKM songs analyzed in this chapter: mobilizing to help the homeland. Years of economic marginality have forced Antiqueños and Antiqueñas to look for work outside their province, with most of them working as farm hands or domestics. This in turn has ascribed a poor, socially backward identity to Antique and its people and prompted

most of them to hide their ties to the province by code switching. OKM subverts these stereotyped images but goes further by imploring its addressees to go back so that they could help in Antique's progress. Using the ethno-symbols of territorial landscapes, language, food, religion, history (imagined or not), and hearth, the polyphonic voices in the songs first construct Antique as the idyllic place that has nurtured and is capable of sustaining a pleasurable life for its citizens. It is a beautiful homeland worth mobilizing for, and is waiting for its diaspora to come back home. The voices in the song also reconstruct the *buki* rural worker and domestic maid images into empowered identities that should help and never turn their back to the homeland.

3.4 Conclusion: OKM as a Preceding Utterance

The case of OKM illustrates that vernacular mediation is not a random occurrence made possible by the affordances of new media technologies or by the sole creativity of its producers. OKM artists relied on institutional arbitration and appropriated local, national, and global elements and conventions to create their own culturally hybrid subgenre. Further, they drew from their previous utterances such as religion, the *Binirayan* festival, and Kinaray-a literature to mediate their collective aim of bringing socioeconomic emancipation to their homeland. OKM, as an utterance, is "filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 91) and thus cannot be considered as "virginal" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 279) or entirely new communicative acts. As we have seen, the emergence of OKM – its development, legitimization, and acceptance – were discursively facilitated by the national and

provincial governments, *Paranubliun* Antique, and its artists and listening public by using decrees, competitions, and culturally salient symbols and narratives. In addition, the common experience of and stigma from the ethnic group's stereotyped identity enabled the subgenre to be established. The Karay-a had a compelling social aim and task: to remove the stigma ascribed to their working class identities and OKM, by being able to conjure nostalgia and affect, was a medium well positioned to help complete this.

In OKM we see the process of what Stuart Hall (1991) referred to as identification, or the "effective suturing of the subject to a subject position" (p. 6). Hall defined identity as "points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct" (1996, p. 6) for the group or individuals involved. As points of articulation, identities for Hall are not finalized products but are ongoing constructions that are "never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (2003, p. 392). A collective does not construct an identity out of nothing, but is obliged to suture themselves within a dominant discourse. But these suturings are "unstable points of identification" (p. 394) and thus allow the group to reconstruct the identity when needed.

In reconstructing the identities of their homeland and ethnic group, OKM songs create a point of juncture or articulation for Antiqueños and Antiqueñas within the discourse that has so far painted them in a negative light. Like Hall, I view the identities in the songs not as novel constructs but as discursive representations that the voices in the songs were "obliged to take up" (p. 6). One cannot construct an entirely new identity but has to use the constructs available within a specific

discourse and rework these. In OKM songs, the homeland is still the same poor rural place and most of its people still belong to the same social class. OKM artists, along with the institutional arbitrators that legitimized the subgenre, were hailed into those subject positions and actively reworked these using their ethno-symbolic resources.

But unlike Hall, I view the identities as more than a mere, temporary positioning that will be 'un-sutured' once the subject is hailed again to articulate his or her identity within a discourse. Such conceptualization of identity does fully not take into account its active role in shaping future articulations or 'positionings', particularly those that actively seek responses from its subjects. Once un-sutured, previous subject positionings often fade as faint echoes in the background unless they become again the focal point of identity politics, which does not happen even for marginal groups all the time. The identities in OKM were not mere reconstruction of the *buki* and domestic maid or nostalgic representations of the homeland that would help the migrant cope with the difficulties of dislocation. They have a further, internal, and reflexive aim, and that is to address the reason why in the first place they have to leave their province and work as farm hands, domestic maids, or blue collar overseas employees. OKM songs have used local, national, and global elements and conventions to imbed addressivity and accomplish the crucial task of evoking affect or belonging to the homeland and these indeed conjured responses from its dispersed publics as the next two chapters will show.

It is in this sense that I conceptualize OKM as a preceding utterance in the ongoing process of vernacular mediation. While indeed its emergence was facilitated

by the more accessible new media technologies, it was also enabled by other factors. Further, its impact lies not only in allowing its subjects to “gain visibility and voice” and “present alternative or marginal views” (Lievrrouw, 2011, p. 2) but in conjuring responses from its addressees. Echoing Bakhtin (1986), I stress the role of OKM’s addressivity or the “quality of turning to someone” (p. 99) and show in the next chapter how the reconstructed homeland and identities in the songs were further reworked and helped enabled small but significant acts of collective mobilization.

Chapter 4: Vernacular Mediation and Mobilization: The Case of kinaray-a.com

Reach for the dream under the heat of the sun
To the heavens whisper the words of longing
Embrace what would link you and me
Islands were gathered to connect the dream

Oh wind, carry the letters from our minds
Let them flow from our fingers with hope
So that the eyes could embrace again
The loved ones left behind

- Sammy Rubido, Kinaray-a.com, 2009

Diasporas are one of the social groups that highly benefitted from the growing ubiquity of the Internet. In this age of mobility, the accessibility, affordability, and time-and-space shrinking properties of the new medium help migrants to reconstruct hybrid identities, foster ties to their new country, and reconnect to their homeland (Dahan & Scheffer, 2001; Bernal, 2005; Ignacio, 2005; Komito, 2011). The Internet also helps ease the trauma brought by their displacement and enables them to build social ties among their dispersed members (Brinkerhoff, 2009). Whether voluntary or forced, displacement conjures “a state of sojourn, estrangement and homesickness” (Baumann, 2010, p. 23) that in turn gives rise to the desire for belonging and collectivity. This desire to recontextualize oneself has resulted in extensive use of the medium. According to Bernal (2010),

members of diasporas have been deterritorialized and decontextualized, but they may experience this not so much as liberation, but rather as dislocation and displacement. Therefore, they tend to use the Internet in part to undo the effects of their mobility rather than to enhance mobility. They may seek, through their online practices, to recontextualize themselves, and in some sense even to

reterritorialize themselves through cyberspace. They do so by creating or visiting online versions of 'home' (p. 167).

Studies of online diaspora have illustrated the capacity of the Internet to function as a space wherein those who experience deterritorialization enunciate their voices, construct communities to belong to, and negotiate their identities. For instance, Mitra's (2001, 2004) work on the Southeast Asian Women's Network (SAWNET) illustrated how the web enables diasporic women to enunciate a collective or "hypervoice" (2004, p. 203) that challenges the representations of their gender as weak, passive, and submissive. Elsewhere, Bernal's study on the online community dehai.org showed how globally dispersed Eritreans longing for their homeland constructed a virtual space that functions as a transnational public sphere in which issues and policies in their homeland are debated. By influencing policy formulation in Eritrea, dehai.org enabled its diasporic members to participate in their nation's politics. In the Philippines, McKay's (2006) study on the online community of indigenous Cordillerans showed how the Internet facilitates the construction of a transnational and hybrid online-offline space where members can develop collectivity. Similarly, Longboan's (2011) research on the same group found that web blogs and online communities enable members to collectively challenge stereotyped representations carried by the mainstream media and tourism industry.

For diasporic groups, collective identity is salient because it functions as a resource to develop "an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation" (Hall, 2003, p. 235). Linking the importance of the Internet and identity to diasporic groups, Brinkerhoff (2009) stated that one of the main reasons why diasporic individuals attach themselves to an online collective is that they are

able to have opportunities to “explore and negotiate their individual, as well as community cultural identities” (p. 37). Such negotiations can result in activities that develop online and offline support groups and contribute back to the homeland. As these studies illustrate, the factors that gave rise to and sustain diasporic and ethnic new media practices are more complex than what Deuze (2006) considered as the pull of convergence culture. The varying sociohistorical conditions surrounding the subjectivities of these groups give rise to manifold ways of using the Internet to cope with their displacement and question prevailing structures and representations of their identities.

For the Karay-a, displacement is nothing new. As discussed in the previous chapters, they have a long experience of being migrant workers due to the lack of employment opportunities in their homeland. Whereas during the Spanish colonial period most of them worked as *sacadas* and domestic helpers in their neighboring provinces, at present many²⁶ of them are Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) or work in the other metropolitan regions of the Philippines. In OKM, these collective identities were reconstructed to conjure belonging and affect towards the homeland. In the online community kinaray-a.com, these identities were further reshaped by diasporic Karay-as.

For this chapter, my goal is to analyze the active nature of vernacular mediation by tracing the extent to which it generates new utterances and actions from its addressees. I will trace how diasporic Karay-as continued the symbolic

²⁶The latest survey of OFWs in Antique by the National Statistics Office still quotes figures gathered in 2000, which reported a total of 6,779 OFWs. This number does not reflect the correct number of OFWs from Antique.

reconstruction of their ethnic identity and homeland and developed collectivity in the process. For this chapter's methodology, I will draw upon Jennifer Brinkerhoff's (2009) framework in analyzing digital diasporic communities. Her approach enables the general Bakhtinian framework of this thesis to take into account the relationship among identity, technology, and social capital and how these allow opportunities for the achievement of collective aims. For her, the Internet is a "dialogical space" (p. 54) where diasporic individuals share narratives and form communities with their own self-defined rules and norms. These digital diasporic communities provide several forms of benefits to its members. These include material benefits such as information, referrals, and tangible outcomes; solidarity benefits or the feeling of association and belonging to a collective; purposive benefits which can include collective efforts on conflict mitigation, policy influence, integration, and socioeconomic development; and cultural identity benefits (p. 37) that enable members to engage with others and explore and negotiate their individual and collective identities. Drawing from Robert Putnam (2000), Brinkerhoff added that bonding or 'strong' ties among people with a common background further develop from the cultural identity benefits that these online communities provide. More importantly, these bonding ties function as symbolic resources for collective mobilization.

In their search for belonging, diasporic Karay-as reciprocally shared narratives of their migrant lives in the online community kinaray-a.com. Although it started as a single utterance of an individual, it evoked active responses that resulted in the formation of an online community with 12,209 members. By reciprocally sharing

their experiences and further reshaping their *stereotyped* identities, these members developed an online collective that resulted in small acts of mobilization.

4.1 Building a Dialogical Space: The Emergence of kinaray-a.com

Fridy Pe Panaguiton started kiniray-a.com in 2006 as a personal experiment and out of the desire to share his web design and management skills. The Metro Manila-based Antiqueño worked as the web engineer at the head office of the Catholic radio station Radio Veritas Asia and had just finished designing a homepage for his alumni group when he found out that aside from a few Yahoo email groups, there was no online community for Antiqueños and Antiqueñas. At first, Panaguiton had an instrumental aim for the website he wanted to create: he envisioned it to serve as a venue to connect diasporic Antiqueños and Antiqueñas with one another. As a *layas na Antiqueño* himself, Panaguiton knew about the longing one experiences upon separation from his *banwa*. For him, there is a “different feeling and happiness” from talking with a *kasimanwa* when one is away from the homeland, and it was the desire to reconnect with fellow Antiqueños and Antiqueñas that was his prime motivation to create the website (personal communication, December 21, 2010). Right from the beginning, Panaguiton had a clear notion of who his intended addressees would be, and strongly identified with them.

To create kinaray-a.com, Panaguiton used a template from the open source web content management system Mambo (now Joomla) and browsed other community websites like dinagyang.com²⁷ and istorya.net²⁸. The draft website included member

²⁷ Dinagyang.com is an online community for the ethnolinguistic group Hiligaynon.

registration, synchronous text-based and video chat rooms as well as asynchronous Forum and Guestbook sections. It also included a short background of Antique and a few news articles on the current affairs of the province. Panaguiton intended to have antique.com as its domain name in order to reflect the name of his province. He found out, however, that it had already been registered to an American online store selling collectible items. He then named the website kiniray-a.com after their language, making it more identifiable to his intended addressees. The domain name, however, was revised to kinaray-a.com as I will discuss below.

Panaguiton actively disseminated kiniray-a.com to his intended addressees using the online communities that preceded it. To announce the presence of the website, he emailed all the members of *Iririmaw Tatun*²⁹, Antique Circle USA, and other email listservs that he was aware of. The presence of these earlier websites or ‘preceding utterances’ implies, if not directly reflects, the expressed need for belonging and collectivity of diasporic Karay-a and the ability to harness new media. Aside from these email groups, Panaguiton also posted a hyperlink on the online guest books of his former schools in Antique, and dinagyang.com. He emailed all his Yahoo Messenger friends about the website and also logged on up to the early hours of the morning in the chat room to interact with new members of kiniray-a.com “so that they would feel welcomed” (personal communication, December 21, 2010). He likewise replied to the emails he received and commented on the messages posted on the Guestbook pages like the one below:

²⁸ Istorya.net is an online community primarily for the ethnolinguistic group Cebuano.

²⁹ *Iririmaw Tatun* (2003) is a Yahoo email group for diasporic Karay-a whose title directly translates to “we are all together.” It was founded in 2003 and had a peak of 357 members. According to Panaguiton (personal communication, January 16, 2011), it is now inactive.

Joey20 21 September 2006 11:44 PM

It is really great that there is a web for kinaray-a!!!

Admins Comment:

this is really for us!!! Pls. spread it at the net... tnk u
("Guestbook," 2006, entry 15)

Panaguiton's invitations reflected a pronounced addressivity and a desire to have a continued dialogue. He evoked and anticipated responses from his addressees despite his initial ambivalence toward the importance of kiniray-a.com. He stated that at first he was not sure how the website would be received. For him, kiniray-a.com and all his efforts in making it were "not that serious," and that he "just wanted to create a site for Antique" (personal communication, December 21, 2010). But members increased everyday and expressed not only positive feedback but also suggestions on how to improve the website. Some of the earlier members also complained after experiencing technical difficulties in logging onto the chat room or registering on the site because it interrupted their ability to interact with their *kasimanwa*. These forms of feedback, which in dialogism are but active responses from addressees, further motivated Panaguiton and prompted him to view kiniray-a.com as more than the website he first envisioned. Reflecting on how the members expressed their longing for Antique on the Forum and Guestbook pages, Panaguiton stated that:

I realized that kinaray-a.com was different. In the Guestbook there were a lot who liked it, a lot who miss Antique. It's like you are also helping... even just through this website you help their needs (personal communication, December 21, 2010).

Kinaray-a.com, however, is not the sole effort of Panaguiton. Butler, Kiesler, and Kraut (2008) argue that a single individual or a leader rarely does the work of online community building. A set of members will do more work than others and help the leader in building their community. In the case of kiniray-a.com, community building was mainly led by its initial core group whose members included Panaguiton's Manila and overseas based *kasimanwas* he met in the chat room, including former schoolmate Manuel Magbanua, Jr who would direct the Kinaray-a short film *Handum* with the help of the online community (see Chapter 5). The first task of the core group was to give a more distinct 'brand identity' to kiniray-a.com. To begin with, they changed the domain name of the website. According to Panaguiton the core group had to revise the domain name from kiniray-a.com to kinaray-a.com after a member raised a question regarding the correct name of the language. He stated that they had to "research the correct name because it had many versions before" and at the time he first uploaded the website he "was not sure it if was kini[ray-a] or kina[ray-a] or if it was dialect or language already" (personal communication, December 21, 2010). As discussed in Chapter 1, the Kinaray-a is undergoing a process of language emancipation (Huss & Lindgren, 2011) and a part of this effort was the selection of its 'official' name.

Two female members of the core group volunteered as regular writers and authored the background materials for Antique and its culture and the rules of the website. They also initiated forum topics to start discussion threads and included a Literature section wherein members could post their own poems, short stories, essays, and proverbs. Magbanua was an avid supporter of OKM and lent his CD

collection to Panaguiton to be converted into MP3 files and posted in kinaray-a.com. Magbanua also uploaded on the website the music videos of *Kruhay Katahum kang Antique* and *Antique Banwa nga Hamili* which he both directed. All these efforts created a distinct identity for kinaray-a.com and built “dialogical spaces” (Brinkerhoff, 2009, p. 54) in which all members could contribute to the ongoing reconstruction of their collective identity and homeland.

Aside from these, core group members also formulated a mission and vision statement for the online community so that it would have a formal and clear purpose:

Mission

To reunite Antiqueños all over the world and to preserve the native language of Antique.

Vision

Aims to gather Antiqueños to engage in activities that bridge opportunities for growth and prosperity of Antique (“Mission and Vision”, 2006).

Both statements enunciated the intent of the members to develop collectivity, reconstitute their identity, and reconstruct their homeland by drawing from their cultural resources and one another’s social and economic capital. Panaguiton (personal communication, December 21, 2010) stated that they envisioned kinaray-a.com to serve “as a bridge” for its globally dispersed members to Antique, with the end goal of helping in the cultural and economic development of the province. He explained that diasporic Antiqueños and Antiqueñas wanted to be updated on the events in Antique, and are willing to help their province but are just “waiting for someone to tap them for help.” He added that the help from an ordinary *kasimanwa*

is different from the assistance given by local government leaders because of their sincerity:

because if it is the government, there is politics. Often there must be something in return. And sometimes you cannot avoid that there is someone who is corrupt. The help that comes from ordinary Antiqueños and Antiqueñas is really different. It's like for them they really just want to share their blessings (personal communication, December 21, 2010).

A salient component of the mission of the online community is the 'preservation' of Kinaray-a. The website, however, is heteroglossic because it also includes entries in English, Tagalog, and Hiligaynon. The incorporation of these languages arose from the objective of developing a more inclusive collectivity rather than maintaining an essentialist notion of Kinaray-a. Well aware of the linguistic hybridity of their addressees, Panaguítan and the core group members intentionally included other languages in kinaray-a.com:

It will be hard if we focus only on Kinaray-a because there are Antiqueños who didn't grow up here. So some of them don't know Kinaray-a but they can understand English and Tagalog. Those are the options there, they can choose English, Tagalog, and Kinaray-a... Besides the writers are Antiqueños, whether they write in English or Tagalog or Kinaray-a (personal communication, January 16, 2011)

Thus in kinaray-a.com, what is salient is the ongoing dialogue and the collective participation of the members and how these could all be articulated to the aim of bringing progress to Antique. Panaguítan stated that for them, it does not matter what language a member chooses "just as long as it is for Antique" (personal communication, January 16, 2011). As such, unlike in OKM, English and Tagalog function in kinaray-a.com as languages of inclusivity rather than Bourdieu's markers

of higher social class. This does not mean that Kinaray-a was accorded lesser significance or its inclusion in the mission statement was a mere rhetorical device to encourage membership. On the contrary, members of the online community collectively conducted language emancipation projects for Kinaray-a. The evolving language, although highly salient, is only one element in the reconstruction of their hybrid collective identity. Also, the presence of English is not so uncommon in diasporic online communities aiming to form collectivity. Parham's (2004) analysis of the Haiti Global Village, for instance, shows how the website's design team used mainly English because its frequent users are in Anglophone countries. Bernal's (2005) study on an Eritrean online community highlights how English was chosen "to avoid any language choice that would be perceived as tainted by sectarianism" (p. 665).

As discussed earlier, the core group added the Antique, OKM, and Literature subpages in the website but other members would also give suggestions and contribute to further improve kinaray-a.com. Because overseas members expressed the need for updates on news and events in the province, a number of Antique-based members volunteered to regularly post news (F. Panaguition, personal communication, December 21, 2010). The core group also conducted a logo design contest for members to come up with an official symbol for kinaray-a.com and gave comments to improve the winning entry. As such, the revision of the domain name, formalization of the mission and vision, and addition of other languages and content were all active responses of members who wanted to construct a hybrid Karay-a identity to their own online medium.

In addition to building spaces for creative dialogue, the core group also facilitated offline activities that would start to create bonding ties among the members and become precedents for collective mobilization. They organized for members who were in Metro Manila to meet at least twice a month. These 'meetings' were more like leisure gatherings as they consisted of dinners, Karaoke singing, birthday celebrations, and out of town excursions. The offline meetings help formed bonding ties among members and encouraged new registrants. By the time the core group had planned to formally 'launch' or inaugurate the website in Antique, Panaguiton estimated that kinaray-a.com had almost a thousand members (personal communication, December 21, 2010).

The idea for the inauguration of kinaray-a.com stemmed from the aims of the online community to develop collectivity and reconnect diasporic members back to their homeland. While the social gatherings for members in Metro Manila were already becoming regular, Panaguiton suggested holding an event so that "local and overseas-based members will have an eyeball in Antique itself" (personal communication, December 21, 2010). More than a social gathering, the inauguration would also become an exercise of collectivity after overseas members volunteered to contribute finances and Antique-based members coordinated the logistics. The members agreed to have the launch on the 29th of December when most of them could attend as they headed to their hometowns for the holiday period, and to hold it in Antique's capital San Jose de Buenavista to accommodate more guests.

The program schedule collectively prepared for the event reflected the hybrid online/offline nature of kinaray-a.com and the desire of members to anchor the

online community to their physical homeland. It included a motorcade of members around the downtown area of San Jose de Buenavista to announce the presence of the online community to more of its intended publics; a performance of OKM artists to promote the home grown music; and online video streaming and chat to allow the participation of diasporic members who were unable to attend the event. Relatives were also invited to have a video chat with their diasporic family members (personal communication, December 21, 2010).

During the event, the core group exhibited a video that eventually served as a documentary and promotional material of *kinaray-a.com*. The 17-minute video featured the history and aims of the online community and testimonies from mostly diasporic members thanking Panaguiton for creating *kinaray-a.com* and inviting their other *kasimanwas* to register. Members overseas were able to participate by giving testimonies and holiday greetings recorded through phone calls and online video conferencing. The resulting video patently enunciated the identity of *kinaray-a.com* as a website that aims to help in the socioeconomic and cultural development of Antique. Its lead-in stated that:

September 4, 2006, ten in the evening, the most ambitious website for Antiqueños started. The mission: to gather the Antiqueños all over the world and preserve the native language of Antique. It aims to unite the Antiqueños in helping the activities that will provide opportunities for the growth and prosperity of Antique (Kinaray-a.com, 2006)

In summary, *kinaray-a.com* as an utterance was initiated by a single individual but developed into an online community through the collaborative efforts of its members. Its core group constructed spaces for the dialogic interaction and

facilitated offline activities. The revision of the domain name, formulation of the mission and vision, and the collaborative creation of the logo and first promotional video gave the online community an individuality that encouraged more membership. Through the addition of the Antique, OKM, and Literature sections, the core group constructed dialogical spaces for creative personal and cultural expressions. Further, by initiating offline activities such as the meetings in Metro Manila and the inauguration in Antique, the core group was able to facilitate nascent bonding ties among diasporic and Antique-based members. The next section will discuss the resulting website structure that was collaboratively created, and a demographic profile of the members of kinaray-a.com based on the online survey conducted by the research.

4.2 Structure and Membership of kinaray-a.com

This section will discuss the overall website structure of kinaray-a.com, the results of the content analysis, and the findings from the online survey conducted from February 2, 2011 to July 19, 2011. The survey was able to generate responses from 82 respondents or less than 1% of the members with a completed response rate of 83%. While the results cannot be taken to be representative of the entire population, they nevertheless help present an insight to factors that motivated membership and participation.

There are several social and technological factors that can influence the attraction and participation of members in online communities. Ridings and Gefen (2004) stated that social factors such as information needs, recreation, friendship, and

social support exchange are the main factors that attract people to become members. In their study, they asked the open-ended question "Why did you join?" in 27 online communities and found out that people were motivated to join online communities because they could access information that is specific to their interests and engage in recreational activities like online games and watching videos. People also registered because online communities give a sense of cultural belonging and enable them to engage in a reciprocal exchange of emotional support and encouragement with individuals they identified with.

The similar motivational factors were found in analysis of diasporic online communities. In her study, Brinkerhoff (2009) stated that members gain purposive, material, solidarity, and cultural identity benefits in joining these communities. Yuqing, Kraut, and Kessler (2007) argued that while individual and collective identity benefits are crucial in motivating members to join an online group, these can be affected by the structural aspects such as website architecture, content, and policies of the online community. As such, it is crucial to have an online community website that has easy navigational structure, themes, and norms that are supportive to the kind of identity it fosters.

Kinaray-a.com's website had a simple navigational structure patterned after a Joomla 1.0 online community template. It was a heavily textual website, with three multimedia files, 21 photo albums, a few graphics, and few hyperlinks integrated into the main content of each page. The only active multimedia files were the videos produced during its inauguration and anniversary celebrations. There were no personal photo albums on the website, and all of the pictures were either about

Antique or the activities of the online community as a whole. Graphical elements were limited to the logo, navigation tabs in the home and index pages, map of Antique, and emoticons. Kinaray-a.com also had few hyperlinks on its pages, being limited only to the organizational partners of the online community and Panaguiton's Internet café and audiovisual production businesses. In addition, the format of each page did not vary much from the Joomla template used by the website. Despite its basic features, members considered kinaray-a.com their 'online homeland' where they could interact with their *kasimanwas* or fellow citizens.

Kinaray-a.com had separate home and index pages. Its homepage (Figure 2), the main point of entry to the website, was in English and mainly contained an appeal for donations to pay for hosting fees that reflected the dependence of the online community on the contribution of its members. The index page (Figure 3), on the other hand, highlighted OKM songs and the live streaming widgets of local radio stations in Antique. Panaguiton (personal communication, December 21, 2010) stated that live radio broadcasts and the MP3 widget that featured 81 OKM songs were always sought by members based overseas and this was why they placed these on a prominently position within the index page.

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Figure 2. Homepage of Kinaray-a.com, January 21, 2011
(<http://www.kinaray-a.com>).

NOTE:
This figure/table/image has been removed
to comply with copyright regulations.
It is included in the print copy of the thesis
held by the University of Adelaide Library.

Figure 3. Index page of Kinaray-a.com, January 21, 2011
(<http://www.kinaray-a.com/index.php>).

Kinaray-a.com contained six secondary pages: **Antique**, which presented the history, language, geography, officials, transportation, tourist attractions, and local products of the province and its eight municipalities; **Tourism**, which featured the *Binirayan* and the fiestas and village-based festivals of the province; **Gallery**, which contained the MP3 player and lyrics of 81 OKM songs, multimedia files, and photos; **Community**, which contained the guestbook and forum pages; **Literature**, which contained pages *Harubatun* (proverbs), *Sugidanun* (epic story), *Binalaybay* (poems in Kinaray-a), Poems, Short Story, and Essays posted by the members of Kinaray-a.com; and **Members**, which included a registry of those who joined. The Forum section contained a total of 2,449 topics and 24,239 replies while the Literature section a total of 721 entries. The major themes identified from the pages sampled were poverty in the province and the value of education; nostalgia for Antique, family, and friends; difficulties of being a migrant worker; Kinaray-a as an esteemed language; the *Maragtas*; critique of the sociopolitical conditions in the homeland; charity projects of kinaray-a.com members in Antique, and appeal for donation to maintain the website. Except for the last three, these themes were also found the OKM songs analyzed in the preceding chapter.

If kinaray-a.com's structure and layout were simple and text-heavy, it was because members gave more saliency in sharing self-narratives and using their language to express their identity. Results from the online survey and the interviews conducted showed that members were attracted to and joined the online community for solidarity and cultural identity purposes and not because of its aesthetic features. Members were aware and even complained about the 'outdated' features of the

website and not being able to post personal photos, and yet they participated on the online and offline activities of kinaray-a.com because it connected them to their ethnic community. These desires for community and identity affirmation is reflective of the conditions and experiences brought by the sense of detachment for those in the diaspora. Before further discussing the motivations in joining and participating in kinaray-a.com, I will first present a profile of its members based on the results of the online survey.

Table 2 presents a demographic profile of the survey respondents. As shown in the table, members are not limited to the youth or any other age group. The highest frequency of respondents, only 34%, belong to the age bracket 20-29 while the rest are distributed in different age groups that are known to be frequent users of the Internet. This can indicate that the online community held an appeal to all age groups. The majority of respondents are male (55%) and born in Antique (63%). The majority (61%) of them are also diasporic, with 29% in overseas countries such as Kuwait, The United Arab Emirates, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, United Kingdom, Japan, Austria, Germany, and Spain, and other countries such as the United States of America, South Korea, Australia, and Ghana. Diasporic members within the Philippines (32%) are mostly in Metro Manila and its neighboring metropolitan provinces.

Table 2: Demographic information and language use of the respondents (N=82).

Variables	% (N)
Age	
15-19	11.0 (9)
20-29	34.1 (28)
30-39	19.5 (16)
40-49	13.4 (11)
50 above	14.6 (12)
No response	7.3 (6)
Gender	
Male	54.9 (45)
Female	37.8 (31)
No response	7.3 (6)
Place of Birth	
Antique	63.4 (52)
Western Visayas	9.8 (8)
Metro Manila	9.8 (8)
Other provinces	8.5 (7)
No response	8.5 (7)
Place of Current Residence	
Overseas	29.3 (24)
Antique	28.0 (23)
Metro Manila	17.1 (14)
Western Visayas	2.4 (2)
Other provinces	12.2 (10)
No response	11.0 (9)
Language Use	
Monolingual	12.2 (10)
Bilingual	2.4 (2)
Multilingual	83.0 (68)
No response	2.4 (2)

About 85% of the respondents used more than one language. Kinaray-a, Hiligaynon, Tagalog, and English were the most widely cited although some respondents listed other Philippine (Ilocano, Bicol, and Akeanon) and foreign (Arabic, Korean, Spanish, and Deutsch) languages. The presence of these languages in their responses reflected the diasporic location of the respondents and confirmed Panaguition's account of the linguistic *heteroglossia* of the members of kinaray-a.com.

All of the respondents indicated lengthy use of the Internet (Table 3). Majority of them used the medium several times a day (60%) and was online for at least 3 hours daily. Although 58% of them stated that they access the web at home, several listed as many as three places of Internet use (median was home, workplace, and Internet shop/café). They also used the Internet for a variety of overlapping purposes, with 83% of them accessing the web to connect with family and friends, look for news and specific information, engage in recreational activities by playing online games and downloading music and movies, and updating information about oneself in social networking sites.

Table 3. Internet use of the respondents (N = 82).

Variables	% (N)
Frequency of Internet Access	
Several times a day	60.0 (49)
Once everyday	13.4 (11)
Several days a week	15.8 (13)
Once a week	3.6 (3)
Once a month	1.2 (1)
Other response	2.4 (2)
No response	3.6 (3)
Time spent online	
Few minutes to 1 hour	11.0 (9)
1-2 hours	11.0 (9)
2-3 hours	4.9 (4)
3-4 hours	12.1 (10)
4-5 hours	4.9 (4)
5 hours or more	51.2 (42)
No response	4.9 (4)
Place of Internet Access	
Home	58.5 (48)
School	3.6 (3)
Workplace	43.7 (35)
Internet shop or café	28.0 (23)
Other response	15.4 (12)
No response	4.9 (4)

Table 3. Cont...

Purposes of Internet use	
Communicate with family and friends	90.2 (74)
Research for a specific information	74.4 (61)
Get the latest news	68.3 (56)
Download music and video	35.3 (29)
Send out work or business information	34.1 (28)
Upload information about yourself	30.5 (25)
Purchase goods and services	17.0 (14)
Play online games	12.1 (10)
Other response	4.9 (4)
No response	4.9 (4)

The respondents listed social networking, portal, news and entertainment, and video and photo sharing websites as their most visited sites. The frequency count of the responses showed that the top often visited websites were Facebook; Yahoo (Messenger and email); Google services (search engine, Gmail, Google Map, Picasa, and You Tube); Philippine news and entertainment sites (abs-cbnglobal.com, philstar.com, and filipino-channel.com); international news sites (cnn.com and bbc.co.uk); other social networking sites like Twitter and Friendster; and kinaray.a.com. Although kinaray-a.com was at the bottom of the list, it was still among those that they frequently visit. Facebook's rank as the most visited site, however, indicated that the respondents have a more interactive alternative for creating and maintaining connections to their family and friends from Antique.

Table 4. Year of membership and frequency of visit to kinaray-a.com (N=82)

Variables	% (N)
Year of membership	
2006	22.0 (18)
2007	8.5 (7)
2008	19.5 (16)
2009	14.6 (12)
2010	9.8 (8)
2011	9.8 (8)
No response	15.8 (13)
Mode of learning about kinaray-a.com	
Through friends	24.4 (20)
Through relatives	14.6 (12)
Own Internet search	35.4 (29)
Other response	6.1 (5)
No response	19.5 (16)
Frequency of visit to kinaray-a.com	
Several times a day	20.7 (17)
Once everyday	3.7 (3)
Several days a week	24.4 (20)
Once a week	17.1 (14)
Once a month	2.4 (2)
Other response	12.2 (10)
No response	19.5 (16)
Time spent on kinaray-a.com	
Few minutes to 1 hour	39.0 (32)
1-2 hours	12.2 (10)
2-3 hours	6.1 (5)
3-4 hours	2.4 (2)
4-5 hours	7.3 (6)
5 hours or more	8.5 (7)
Other response	3.7 (3)
No response	20.7 (17)

Table 4 presents the respondents' years of membership to kinaray-a.com and their frequency of visit. The majority (64%) have been members for at least three years. More than a third (39%) have learnt about kinaray-a.com through the referral of family and friends while 35% found out about it by searching on the Internet. While most of the respondents accessed the Internet several times a day, only a quarter of them visit kinaray-a.com daily and about 8.5% of them stay for 5 hours or more. These results indicate that the respondents are using more of their online time on other websites. When in kinaray-a.com, majority of them visited the chat room, radio streaming, OKM, and Literature sections.

More than half (58%) of the respondents stated that they joined kinaray-a.com for solidarity and cultural identity purposes (Table 5). About 34% stated explicitly that they registered as members because they wanted to have more of their *kasimanwas* as friends, reflecting their need for belonging to a community. For instance, Respondent 49 who is based in the US stated that he joined because he wanted "to make friends with Antiqueños" while Respondent 41 who is based in Austria said that he registered because he wanted "to get in touch with Antiquenios all over the world." On the other hand, 24% of the respondents indicated that they joined the online community for cultural identity purposes, asserting that being a part of the community is an expression of their pride in their ethnic group. Respondent 56 who is based in Metro Manila cited that he was a "proud Antiqueño and Kinaray-a" while Respondent 66 who also lives in Metro Manila asserted that she registered in kinaray-a.com because she was "a real antiqueña in blood." Eight respondents wrote combined solidarity, material, and cultural identity benefits as

their main reasons for joining kinaray-a.com. A respondent residing in the Japan wrote the reason for his membership was:

To update any new's in my land "ANTIQUE" and communication to my family and have a more friends true this site... Thanks who make this site Kinaray-a.com.

Table 5. Reasons for joining kinaray-a.com (N=82)

Variables	% (N)
Solidarity	34.1 (28)
Cultural identity	24.3 (20)
Material	9.7 (8)
Purposive	0 (0)
Combination	3.6 (3)
Other response	7.3 (6)
No response	20.7 (17)

In sum, even though kinaray-a.com had a text-heavy structure, it attracted members due to their need for solidarity and collective cultural identity. It can be assumed that this is reflective of their condition as diasporic individuals, whereby their disembedding from their hearth and homeland and the difficulties of migrant life fostered the need for community and a stable identity. While they are exposed to and use highly interactive websites, they considered kinaray-a.com as a home because it provided a dialogical space where they can interact with and affirm their hybrid identities with their *kasimanwa*. The next section will discuss the discourses by which they enacted their solidarity and collective identities online.

4.3 Dialogical Construction of Collectivity

Expressions of collective identities function as powerful motivations for diasporic individuals to mobilize (Brinkerhoff, 2009). These shared identities create a sense of belonging and reinforce the pride an individual has for his or her group, making him or her more inclined to participate. Collective identities, however, should first be constructed before they can function as a resource for mobilization (Kramer, 2009). In *kinaray-a.com*, collective identities were discursively constructed among members through the reciprocal sharing of self-narratives or accounts of self-relevant events and experiences across time (Gergen & Gergen, 1983). Among the identity-related discourses that emerged from the content analysis, three emerged as highly salient in the construction of social ties that led to mobilization. These are longing for the homeland, domestic maid identity, and poverty. In particular, the members' exchange of experiences regarding poverty led to a critical awareness of the social issue that led them to donate as well as critique the political conditions in Antique. These themes are also present in OKM, but as I will argue below, while the songs did evoke responses by deploying affective images, the members of *kinaray-a.com* extended these by sharing their experiences within the online community. The members of *kinaray-a.com* were, in Bakhtin's term (1986, p. 69), are "actively responsive" to the voices of OKM songs and the other enunciations.

4.3.1 Longing for the homeland

One of the themes that articulate kinaray-a.com as an utterance to OKM is the affective longing for the homeland the latter evoked. In the Forum, Literature, and Guestbook sections, members shared how listening to OKM songs eased their longing for Antique. Among the earliest Guestbook entries were expressions of appreciation for including OKM songs within the website. For instance, Daniel³⁰ from Austria noted how “pure Kinaray-a songs” lessened his longing for his province and encouraged OKM artists to produce more:

I would like to commend the Composers and the singers of the pure kinaray-a music here in our website (to Dante Beriong, Sammy Rubido, Mark Quintel, Nonong Egida, Katz Amerila and Hon. Victor Condez. It is nice to listen to your songs! Relieves the longing for Antique! I wish you could compose more Songs. Daniel Cruz (a native of Hamtic who was carried off to England, Europe) (“Guestbook,” 2006, entry 53).

Another member named Yvette voiced the same appreciation and articulated the value of kinaray-a.com to its dissemination of OKM songs:

Hallo to all! What a nice site!! My longing is eased every time I listen to kinaray-a music. *Kruhaaaay* Antique!!! (“Guestbook,” 2006, entry 42).

Yearning for the homeland is common sentiment among members of any diaspora (Bernal, 2010). In kinaray-a.com, it is one of the themes that enabled members to build bonding social capital. By sharing personal experiences, members addressed their community seeking needs and at the same time renegotiated their

³⁰Names of respondents and other identifying attributes were changed to protect anonymity.

identity as migrant workers and citizens of their province. Although the theme of longing for the homeland is also present in OKM, I argue that the potential to build collectivity was greater through the online community because of the interactive features of the Internet. Further, unlike in the songs, the difficulties of migrant work were not valorized. The multiple speaking subjects in kinaray-a.com presented them as first hand experiences, enabling the collective identity being reconstructed to be more personal and vivid, while encouraging others to share their narratives as well. The resulting cultural identity thus has more of what Kramer (2006) considered as 'symbolic importance' for those participating in its construction because it carried and affirmed the aggregate experiences of the social group and held more potential to create the social capital needed for collective acts.

Such reciprocal sharing of narratives to affirm the collective self was seen in the forum topic Life Abroad where member Leroy first posted the question '*is it worth leaving ur loveones just to work abroad for money?*' to start a discussion thread. The emotive framing of the question imbues it with more addressivity, and the responses of other members carried highly personal accounts. Marlo, who is also an OFW, answered the question by sharing his experience:

others think that its nice if you are abroad they don't know that your tears and mucus mix... Especially if you are sick nobody's there to comfort you... you need emotional strength and fight and fight on battle for as long as the years you have signed on in your contract *hay* life abroad... im thankful because i'm going home in july yohooo!!!! no more tears and loneliness, depression during winter and dazed while driving hahah...("Real Life Abroad", 2006, comment 35)

By articulating his deep longing for the homeland with the hardships he experienced, Marlo here affirmed the migrant worker identity common among kinaray-a.com members and at the same time allowed the exchange of emphatic support needed to develop bonding ties. His emotive post evoked similar accounts from other members. For instance, Lena, a member residing in South Korea, responded by sharing the difficulties she experienced from being separated from her homeland and marrying a foreigner. In this way, she was able to deflect the hardships she went through and motivated her migrant *kasimanwa* to persevere:

just try to live abroad. perhaps others get used to it but most suffer from homesickness... you just imagine, the language, culture, tradition, and food are different here. good if you just go here to work as OCW [overseas contract worker] at least it is only your boss and colleagues whom you have to relate with, but if you marry like me, you have to do too much adjustment...especially when there is a racial discrimination! ("Real Life Abroad", 2006, comment 42)

Such sharing of experiences also evoked the emphatic support from non-diasporic members. Antique-based member Ray deployed the image of the empowered Antiqueño to voice his encouragement to his overseas *kasimanwa*, stating that they are "born to be strong" and have been "tested in hardship." Other members who have worked overseas before contributed in the discussion by giving advice:

As a former OFW, I agree. One must really save (that is if there is something is left considering all the expenditures nowadays) for the future so that you will be able to go home early in a short span of time. Never mind the luxuries, important to be together with the family ("*Buhay Middle East Talaga/Life in the Middle East Really*", 2006, comment 28)

Guided by a norm of constructive dialogue, the above thread continued the reciprocal exchanges of personal narratives and advice. In doing so it helped build up solidarity or the “feeling being connected to others” (Brinkerhoff, 2009, p. 37) amongst members and added more symbolic value to their working class identity. But aside from highlighting the hardships endured by migrant life, members of kinaray-a.com further reworked the stigmatized image of the domestic maid as I will discuss in the next section

4.3.2 Uplifting the dignity of the domestic worker

Scholarship on Overseas Filipino Workers or OFWs have highlighted exploitative and indentured labor conditions endured by Filipino migrant workers who are mostly females working as domestic helpers or semiskilled laborers (Anderson, 2000; Parreñas, 2001a, 2001b; San Juan, 2009). Most of these female OFWs are professionals with college degrees but are underemployed in domestic or multinational service sectors (San Juan, 2009). They are vulnerable to class stigma, exploitation of employers, including sexual harassment and abuse, excessive work hours with no overtime pay, and substandard living conditions (Parreñas, 2001a). Moreover, the presence of the domestic helper and the sex worker has created a maid-dominated and sexualized identity that is considered as a “transnational shame” (Aguilar, 1996, p. 122) for other Filipinos and Filipinas. In this sense, Filipina domestic helpers experience stigma not only from other nationalities but also from their fellow citizens.

This stigma over the maid-dominated image of Filipinas has long been felt by Antiqueñas due to the history of the province as a source of domestic help. As I discussed in the previous chapter, outside the province, the term *Inday* is synonymous with domestic help. In OKM songs the image of *Inday* was reconstructed into the empowered Antiqueña by eliding all of her association to being a domestic helper. In kinaray-a.com, however, female members working as overseas domestics disclosed their occupation and reworked their stigmatized image by explicitly sharing self-narratives of hard labor, stigma, and commitment to family. In the Forum section, a member working as a domestic helper (DH) in Hong Kong started a thread entitled *Ang Kabuhi kang mga Domestic Helpers* (The Life of Domestic Helpers) and narrated her endurance, sacrifice, and perseverance:

Domestic helper... is what they call her different from what others think, but if you could understand what you call as domestic helper, you will be emulate her because a domestic helper helps everyone. Family, government we support. We bear the sadness, pain, and longing for our loved ones... Since the day we left the house of our birth, we did it with courage for the sake of their daily needs, we faced the problems so that they will all become happy. I sacrifice in order to give them a future, as one of the domestic helpers here in Hong Kong I am never ashamed of my work because I also help everyone, and we carry on. this is why you should not put down domestic helpers (*“Ang Kabuhi kang mga Domestic Helpers”*, 2006)

The image of the hardworking domestic in the post evoked emphatic support from other the members of the online community. Members responded by attributing esteem to domestic helpers and lauded them as “heroes.” They described domestic work as “a righteous job, clean and upright” and criticized other Filipinos

and Filipinas for stigmatizing domestic helpers. In the following comment, a member attributed dignity to domestic helpers by commending them as productive citizens:

What is bad about being a domestic helper? It is good that one has an ambition in life rather than go around and gossip the whole day.... (*“Ang Kabuhi kang mga Domestic Helpers”*, 2006, comment 4)

In another comment, a member criticized foreign employers who mistreat Filipina domestic helpers:

education to children start at home you know, so who is always left with their children? nobody except the Filipina DH. They should be thankful, their future depends on us... (*“Ang Kabuhi kang mga Domestic Helpers”*, 2006, comment 10)

Some members posted constructive responses by stating that their mothers and other relatives were once overseas domestics who “made sacrifices just to earn” and give their family “a better life.” Amelia, one of the senior members of the online community, revealed that she worked as a domestic helper and benefitted from it in the long run despite the hardships she encountered:

Thanks to the DH employment, that was an opportunity that made me go out the Philippines. Thank God for that opportunity... If we try to look at it on the positive side, any country where you are working is your training ground to develop perseverance, skills, and the wisdom to move on. Those are all bridges of success. (*“Ang Kabuhi kang mga Domestic Helpers”*, 2006, comment 18)

In sharing their self-narratives, the members attributed dignity to one of the most stereotyped constituents of their ethnic group. While these online dialogues may not right away alter the image of *Inday* in the broader national and international imaginary or erase the stigma faced by overseas Filipina domestics, at the very least these strengthened their collectivity. Further, these posts gave rise to more

enunciations that allowed them to identify the root cause of their stigmatization and separation from their homeland as well as deliberate solutions.

4.3.3 Questioning poverty in the homeland

One difference between the meanings in OKM and kinaray-a.com is the framing of the issue of poverty. Both vernacular mediations acknowledge the presence of poverty and carry the intent of helping bring progress to their homeland. But OKM avoided representing poverty as a social problem that needs to be addressed. The songs instead romanticized poverty to construct an image of an idyllic homeland that may encourage Antiqueños and Antiqueñas to go back to the province. In kinaray-a.com, poverty was patently discussed. In some instances, it was framed in accounts that used food as an ethno-symbol to highlight how the social condition affects the home. Instead of the rustic fare of fresh fish and vegetable stew in OKM, kinaray-a.com members discussed how they had to save on their “dried fish” and “canned sardines” – which are considered as food of the poor in the Philippines – to ensure their next meal. In the post entitled *Istorya ni Nene* (Story of Nene) in the Literature section, a member shared her experience of having to stretch their food for the following day:

It is late in the afternoon when *Nanay* arrived from downtown. Me and my brother Ontoy were already hungry, waiting for the rice and viand for dinner. Luckily, she was able to buy food for us. I helped *Nanay* cook the two milk-tin-full of rice, which will also cover our breakfast for the next day. I grilled the two pieces dried fish in the remaining embers used to cook the rice. I kept the other three pieces for the next day (“*Istorya ni Nene*,” 2006).

In some posts, poverty was discussed in first-hand accounts that also cited the lack of education, medical, and other basic services in Antique. Members shared their experiences of having to travel for hours through the province's unrepaired and unlit highway to get medical services or finish their degree. They also cited the lack of livelihood opportunities as the main reason for leaving and enduring the difficulties of being a migrant worker. In the forum topic *Real Life Abroad* for instance, members stated that going overseas is the only way to improve the living conditions of their family. In this thread, a Japan-based member expressed his longing for his family yet emphasized the need to endure the separation to provide for their future. Similarly, a Dubai-based member state that going overseas is the only way to improve one's living conditions:

The economy in the Philippines isn't good. People go abroad to work so they can make money and provide for their families... so many pilipino people go to another country to work!! people called working in abroad or DH... this people are hero of d family...bcoz d sacrifice too much to give nice life of dr FAMILY...d encounter loneliness, boredom, homesick.. but they still fight dis feelings bcoz of the family poverty!!! ("Real Life Abroad", 2006, comment 17)

But more than acknowledging the presence of poverty in the province, members also interrogated its root causes. For some of them, the online discussions and the images of the idyllic homeland and rural life signified by OKM songs did not ease but made more vivid their longing. The songs also made them question why in the first place they are absent from their province. In the Literature section, Gina, a member residing in Thailand, posted a poem in "response after listening to kinaray-a songs" ("*Bulong sa Kahidlaw?*", 2006) which reflexively asked if the songs address the real reasons for their longing. She began her poem by signifying the same geographic

landscapes of Antique and acknowledging her longing for her beloved homeland. In the third stanza, however, she asked why the migrant Karay-a cannot go back to Antique:

What is it that hinders us
To go home to a beautiful province?
Antique, you are still the only
Home in my heart.

Gina still considers Antique her true homeland but also acknowledged that the province cannot economically support its citizens. The comments thread for the poem identified corruption as the root cause of their separation from their homeland. Similarly, in the Forum and Literature entries analyzed, corruption was identified as the most common reason for poverty. The discussions in these entries were filled with highly “evaluative intonations” (Bakhtin/Voloshinov, 1973) and used strong words to criticize the political leaders of Antique. In the following comment to a poem about a child missing her absent OFW mother, a member criticized their local officials for neglecting their duty instead of giving the usual commendation for the written piece:

homesickness is what we primarily feel if we are far from our loved ones, but we cannot do anything because what all that we want is to save money in order to help our families. We have no future with our politicians. They do not have economic and social plans, projects, or programs. We have to strive hard for our families. I just hope politicians could read this, and that may they have a heart. (“Homesickness”, 2006, comment 4)

The use of highly evaluative words to critique local government officials was also seen in the comments on the essay *Nadimat* which discussed the difficulty of

travelling to and within Antique. It started by extolling the beautiful landscapes of the province and ended with the lament that while it is good to visit Antique, its undeveloped roads and lack of infrastructure make travel difficult. The comments posted for the essay accused government officials for pocketing public funds. A Manila-based member for instance affirmed his belonging to Antique and was appreciative of the homeland that nurtured him but criticized local officials for serving their own interests at the expense of the province:

You are exactly right sister, let us forget about our immature leaders, corrupt officials, after all they are not ANTIQUE. I pray that lightning would strike them that they may wake up. I, too, love Antique because it cared for me when I was young, it introduced me to the world, it gave me food and helped me grow. It is just too frustrating to listen to our leaders who just think of themselves (*"Nadimat"*, 2006, comment 4)

More than any other segment of the digital Karay-a diaspora, members who worked as domestic workers overseas were the most critical of politicians. In the following Forum post *Masubo man Matoud ang Amon Gin Agyan/What We have been Through is Truly Sad*, a member working as a domestic helper compared herself to a water buffalo, a symbol of benevolent industriousness in rural areas, before criticizing the country's state leaders:

we domestic helpers... work for almost 24 hours and even when we are exhausted, in pain, long for our family, and even our hands are wrinkled and feet full of varicose veins, we keep bearing it because it is our only means to give our dear family a good life. I hope that those rats sitting in our government should emulate us to work hard for the welfare of our government, not just outward pretense with nothing to produce (*"Masubo man Matoud ang Amon Gin Agyan"*, 2006)

These reciprocal sharing of narratives and emphatic support enabled kinaray-a.com members develop awareness that they belong to a collective that had long been culturally marginalized due to the economic status of their province. These online enunciations, along with the self-narratives of longing and stigmatization, are not just mere expressions of dispersed individuals searching for ways by which they can continue a coherent subjectivity brought by separation from their homeland (Hall, 2003). They are also geared toward the purpose of helping bring socioeconomic emancipation to their province. In a sense, the class unconsciousness (Peterson, 1992) in OKM music has been transformed in kinaray-a.com into an active awareness that will enable the members to work towards attaining the their vision of creating “opportunities for growth and prosperity of Antique” (Kinaray-a.com, 2009, “Mission and vision,” para. 4). Awareness that there is a social issue that needs to be addressed strengthens the social ties of a group and is a crucial step in mobilization. The next section will discuss the collective acts that kinaray-a.com members conducted to help their homeland and their less fortunate *kasimanwa*. These include online language emancipation, donation of bed covers, and community outreach in an indigenous village.

4.4 From Mediation to Collective Mobilization: The Community Projects of kinaray-a.com

For diasporic communities, expressing an empowered cultural identity is a salient way by which they can continue a coherent sense of being (Hall, 2003). According to Brinkerhoff (2009), one of the means of expressing and affirming this

collective identity is by mobilizing on behalf of the homeland. Collective acts for the homeland reinforce a group's identity by imbuing pride and, if successful, create precedents for future mobilizations (Brinkerhoff, 2009). In kinaray-a.com, the reciprocal sharing of self-narratives enabled the development of bonding social ties that led to small acts of online-offline mobilizations. These include the online language emancipation of Kinaray-a, donation of bed covers to the sole hospital in the province, and community outreach in an indigenous village. These are not the only collective acts conducted by kinaray-a.com members, but they were chosen for analysis due to their explicit links to the mission and vision of the online community to promote their language and help bring emancipatory projects in Antique. They also illustrate how the online dialogues result in offline mobilization.

4.4.1 Online language emancipation of Kinaray-a

Joshua Fishman's (1989, 1996) concept of language as an ethnocultural symbol for an individual's being and becoming is well illustrated in the way by which kinaray-a.com members symbolically reconstructed the image of their patois. Facilitated by an interactive medium, members of the online community seeking ways to affirm their sense of belonging to their ethnic group engaged in the reciprocal exchange of literary compositions and constructive comments that ascribed a greater importance and appreciation for their language and their online collective. As discussed in Chapter 1, language emancipation is the process of improving the position of an underprivileged language by removing its stigma through political efforts and projects (Huss & Lindgren, 2011). In most cases of

language emancipation, a set of “ideologically motivated and well-educated group” (p. 5) will formally plan for a series of activities to remove the less civilized and vulgar image of the patois. The members of the online community collaboratively created an online dictionary and sponsored of literary writing contests to remove the stigma and revitalize the importance of Kinaray-a. What is noteworthy about these language emancipation projects is that these were unplanned and emerged only during online dialogues.

Kinaray-a.com members were well aware of the stigma attached to their language and how most of the people from their province would code-switch to veil membership to their ethnic group. Thus, as a symbol of paternity and patrimony (Fishman, 1986), Kinaray-a added to the sense of the marginality of their group. Yet, due to the conditions of diaspora, members needed to express themselves using Kinaray-a. As Fishman emphasized, because language is the prime vehicle of an ethnic group’s being and doing, it will be considered just as valuable as their identity.

One of the ways the members ascribed more symbolic value to the language was by taking the same postcolonial stance made by the trained Karay-a literary writers in the 1990s and appropriating their compositions. Influenced by the previous utterances of professional Karay-a literary writers, members redefined their language by setting it against the regional language Hiligaynon. From the *History* section of the website to the comments to forum threads and literary contributions, Kinaray-a was framed as the neglected and inferior language due to the poor economic conditions of Antique. The following comment for the remediated essay

Ang Hegemoniya kang Hiligaynon/The Hegemony of Hiligaynon illustrated how a member described Kinaray-a as marginalized by polemicizing it against Hiligaynon and its neighboring province:

I know that the most town in Iloilo use kinaray-a. In fact kinaray-a is the widely spoken dialect in Panay island as far as I know, but Ilonggos always speak Ilonggo or Hiligaynon when they are out of their province just to be identified as Iloilo City's resident. It has been embedded in their minds that kinaray-a is the language of the *sakada* or Antikinyo. ("*Ang Hegemoniya kang Hiligaynon*", 2006)

Such framing of Kinaray-a as a stigmatized language would motivate members to author and share their own compositions. Most of the members, however, would still need to reacquaint themselves with the language due to their long absence from the province or prolonged use of the state-mandated educational languages Tagalog and English for writing. Compounding this is the fact that up to the end date of my fieldwork, there was still no standard Kinaray-a lexicon and set of grammatical rules that would serve as a reference for individuals who wanted to learn the language. The lack of linguistic references, however, enabled rather than hindered kinaray-a.com members to ascribe more symbolic value to their language. They co-created an online dictionary that both served as a collective exercise for dialogical re-learning and an informal reference to be consulted by members.

The online dictionary is the most viewed Forum entry (479,213 views; 163 replies) in kinaray-a.com. It was started by Amelia, one of the overseas-based elders of the online community, who initiated the thread entitled *Kinaray-a word your CONTRIBUTION is needed* in order to help diasporic members revitalize their 'fading' language:

Ideas that can help those KINARAY-A families that are not able to go home to Antique for a long time and their Kinaray-a word is fading. We can all contribute in whatever kind, tune, and accent. You can contribute it in here so that it could help everyone. Even if it has no meaning if the word will be spoken it could help all who could read it. But if someone will ask for its meaning, then, let us all help in giving it meaning. Thanks very much. I will start.....you continue

Pugdaw, nagatunaw, naga-upod, nagatuktukun, nagarupdag, nagakaradura, nagawad-an, nahubsan, na-upod, ga-ong (“*Tinaga nga Kinaray-a -kinahanglan ang AMOT ninyo*”, 2006)

What is salient in Amelia’s post was the tacit acceptance of the need to re-learn their language and the necessity of collective meaning construction. By recognizing a shared need for expression yet not imposing predetermined meanings, she was able to provide a venue for the emancipation of their language. Members learnt and soon started to share meanings by posting their own list and definitions of Kinaray-a words. In the following post, a male Antique-based member convivially admitted his limited vocabulary to the online community:

...*manang* this is fun, what is the meaning, of *ga-ong*???
My Karay-a is really fading (comment 5).

A Thailand-based member helped Amelia answer the question while also expressing tacit ambivalence on the definition that she provides:

is *ga-ong* similar to *kalong*? we are using this if the can is empty and you put a five centavo, and if you try to shake it, it is *kalong* (comment 16).

Amelia sustained the thread by addressing both comments and encouraging other members to contribute:

the word *ga-ong* – meaning without any content, really nothing. Example: How much did you get in the test? His/Her

is Zero. So, it is really *ga-ong*. *Ga-ong* is the slang word of Zero. Is there anybody else who can give meaning? Come on, help (comment 17).

The thread soon rapidly grew into a convivial exchange of subjective definitions of words and subsequently expanded to include rules of correct usage and requests for translations. Members, including Amelia, admitted their limited Kinaray-a vocabulary yet continued to share meanings and reflexively ask for comments and corrections. Because of the constructive yet informal dialogue among members on the thread, they were able to develop a deep sense of appreciation not only for their language but also for their collective, thereby also strengthening their bonding ties. In the following post, a male member conveyed his appreciation to Amelia and another member and expressed his pride for their language.

*nang*³¹ Amelia and *nang* Riza thanks a lot for your explanation..a lot was added to my vocabulary...Just continue because we keep on gathering those words that is about to be lost because of our being too busy, instead of having spoken those words ... The new generation is too busy in speaking KINALISH (Kinaray-a and English). It is good that you are there, reminding us of the original language so that the next generation would also know... (comment 42).

It should be noted here that what is important is not so much the adherence to formal lexicography but that members composed of ordinary individuals who have no formal linguistic training are able to re-learn their language through collaborative efforts. Further, members were not as concerned in maintaining the purity of Kinaray-a as they were in enabling collectivity. Overseas-based members were asked to give the definitions of words using the language of their current

³¹*Nang* and *Manang* are terms of respect and endearment for older female relatives or friends.

country. Barbara, who is another elder member, was asked by several members to share the Spanish and English translations of everyday Kinaray-a phrases. Other members also asked for the English and Tagalog translations of everyday Kinaray-a terms. The resulting online Kinaray-a dictionary was thus heteroglossic.

Aside from the co-creating an online dictionary, members re-learned the symbolic importance of their language by contributing and exchanging comments in the *Literature* section. All of the entries selected for analysis reflected the members' efforts to either transcend the difficulties of expressing in their native tongue, or to contribute in improving the image of their language. Members who were unable to write in the language contributed by providing encouraging comments to the authors. In the following post entitled *Kinaray-a sa akun pagsurat (revised)*/Kinaray-a in my writing from the *Essay* section, a member who was not born but grew up in Antique conveyed the difficulties of having a limited knowledge of 'deep' Kinaray-a words and his desire to improve:

Learning to speak was not a problem because there were no deep conversations among us, but about household, things and other concepts revolving in everyday conversations at home...But it is in writing that I realized I was limited with words. It is there that I struggled to search for good and deeper words to give essence to what I wanted to write.... I even wish to buy some materials, like a kinaray-a dictionary, if it is available ("*Kinaray-a sa akun pagsurat (revised)*", 2006).

A member encouraged the author to keep on writing while conveying emphatic support:

My praises to the writer of this piece, Mr. Romualdez... I could relate to your situation because it seems that you really lack vocabulary of our language. But this won't be a hindrance to your aspiration to write in Kinaray-a. English is just our secondary language isn't it? But still we can write with it and

the world could understand. Through time, you will get used to writing in Kinaray-a. Just keep writing with vigor and try to speak and love the Kinaray-a language... ("*Kinaray-a sa akun pagsurat (revised)*", 2006, comment 7)

The reciprocal exchange of comments encouraged more contributions to the Literary section and soon resulted in some of the compositions being published in festival souvenir programs in San Jose. Among the published contributions were *Ang Orens na Urang sa Uwang* (The Orange Shrimp in the Well), a short story depicting the changes brought by globalization and mass media to rural life; and *Bagyo sa Kabag-ihun* (Storm in the Night), a poem of love and heartbreak. In addition, two overseas-based members were motivated to create and fund a writing contest entitled *Dungug Kinaray-a* (Pride of Kinaray-a). The contest aimed to carry the newfound appreciation of the online community for the language to the youth in Antique. *Dungug Kinaray-a* started in 2007 and had a theme, cash prize, and judges composed of professional Karay-a literary writers who first gave workshops to contestants (S. Checa, personal communication, February 20, 2011). The 2008 *Dungug Kinaray-a*, for example, chose the Japanese occupation of the country as its theme. The announcement posted in *kinaray-a.com* detailed its aims and prizes:

After the successful and fun "Sugidanun 2007", *Dungug Kinaray-a* will again hold another contest in Writing and Interpretation this year 2008.

The writing part will start on February 1, and will close on June 31, 2008 with the theme "*Mga Sugidanun kang Tiyempo Hapon*" (Stories During the Japanese Times). This is about true events, or life during the Japanese times and Second World War (years 1941-1945). The entry must come from true events that was personally experienced, heard, or observed by the writer.

Those three entries who will receive the highest mark (Overall points in Writing and Interpretation) will be declared winner and will receive the following prize in Philippine Peso (Php):

- a. First place – Php15, 000.00 [\$333] and medal
- b. Second place – Php10, 000.00 [\$222] and medal
- c. Third place – Php7, 000.00 [\$155] and medal (“*Dungug Kinaray-a: Paindis indis 2008!*”, 2006)

Dungug Kinaray-a was only able to hold its literary contests and workshops until 2010 when it ceased due to lack of funding (S. Checa, personal communication, February 20, 2011). While the contest may have had a short duration and a smaller prize compared to national literary contests, it nevertheless helped imbue more symbolic value to the language. Together with the literary contributions, the collaborative creation of the online dictionary, and the postcolonial positioning of their language, *Dungug* Kinaray-a revitalized the importance of their own language. Because of their own efforts, members of the online community were able to reconstruct the image of Kinaray-a into a language that they themselves could proudly identify with. Such pride is explicitly illustrated by the following comment in the *Guestbook* section:

GOOD DAY TO ALL KARAY-AS. *KRUHAY* KINARAY-A *KRUHAY* ANTIQUE, LET US BE PROUD THAT WE ARE ALL KARAY-AS. THAT R-FILLED KINARAY-A IS REALLY OURS!!! (“*Guestbook*”, 2006, comment 78).

4.4.2 Donation to the state hospital

On the 27th of April 2009, kinaray-a.com members donated 155 sets of bedding materials (consisting of a bed cover and 2 pillows with cases) to the only hospital in Antique. This simple act of helping improve the health services in their homeland

started in the *Forum* section when a member initiated a thread entitled '200 Hospital Beds coming to San Jose DB in 2009' (120,073 views; 182 replies) to update members of the infrastructure development in Antique and to criticize the rife and allegedly corrupt politics among the elected leaders of the province. During that time in Antique, the leadership of the province was divided between two rival political parties with the provincial governor heading one political party and the congressman another. Social and infrastructure development was slow because any proposal or resolution sponsored by one party would be strongly opposed by the other.

The initial post announced the establishment of a private hospital in Antique by the end of 2009 and was followed by an update regarding the plans of the provincial government to renovate its Angel Zalazar Memorial General Hospital (ASMGH). The proposal of former governor Salvacion Perez to loan P100 Million (\$2.2 Million) to fund the renovation had been repeatedly opposed by the former congressman Exequiel Javier and the provincial council members belonging to his political party. The post generated a lengthy response from an Antique-based member well aware of the conditions of health services in the province:

... if they continue their obstruction, how can our life prosper or how can the poor Antiqueños go on with their lives if just by the situation of our hospital can they can lose their lives?... come and try to get hospital treatment from ASMGH... hopefully you do not need surgery and somebody is ahead of you at the operating room...if you will be admitted in the free ward you will experience the bats pissing on your wounds and rainwater falling to your bed because the roof is broken... why do you always promise service to the Antiqueños during elections but your voice is different now? ...hopefully you don't have an amnesia.....please dont kill Antiqueños softly...it's just a loan...we even loan for other things after

all...please have pity to the people who provide your salary...
("200 Hospital Beds coming to San Jose DB in 2009", 2006,
comment 3)

The reply posted was directed to their political leaders who were absent addressees in the online community. Nevertheless, it evoked responses from other members of the online community who were directly or through their relatives in Antique also affected by the poor public services in the province:

maybe they were not spared some cents that's why they obstruct the loan?? you're right in what you said roy because my aunt was once admitted there in san jose hehehe instead of getting well her condition worsened...our hospital lack many things... it really is time that it should be upgraded and expanded... ("200 Hospital Beds coming to San Jose DB in 2009", 2006, comment 4)

In this post, an overseas member masked her frustration with humor and ended with a critique of the provincial leaders. Other members posted similar responses, including a call to write a letter to the provincial leaders. One US-based member, however, was cynical with the local leaders and made a suggestion to his fellow kinaray-a.com members instead:

As we wait for the pity, blessing, and awakening of the leaders of our province, I am calling all members (or non-members) of Kinaray-a.com that whoever among you has something extra and can give, shake off, push, dip, etc for any amount that can be used to buy blankets and to be donated to the provincial hospital. Perhaps if every member could donate even just five pesos, we can collect more than thirty thousand pesos based on our list of members... And we could buy many blankets with that, right? Let us show to our leaders what we can do if all of us will cooperate for a certain mission... a mission to help our beloved province and our fellowmen.

I am only asking you for a blanket; a small thing but a big help for the hospital. Please forbid, we do not know if the blanket

we are going to donate, will be used by us or our family members someday... think about it folks. Thank you very much! ... ("200 Hospital Beds coming to San Jose DB in 2009", 2006, comment 8)

The last part of his post was essentially a call for members to mobilize. To further encourage his addressees, he then posted another message stating his intention to contribute financially:

Folks, if you can collect P30,000 here for this project I will give my share of P20,000... for a total of P50,000! Deal or No Deal? ("200 Hospital Beds coming to San Jose DB in 2009", 2006, comment 8)

Members, having developed bonding ties and emphatic support through the sharing of self-narratives, responded to the call for contribution with enthusiasm. The following reply provides a representative example on how the members responded to the call for contribution:

deal *nong*. 500 pesos from me... let's join for the welfare of our province. ("200 Hospital Beds coming to San Jose DB in 2009", 2006, comment 9)

The thread continued with pledges from other members and soon the online community assigned a treasurer to collect the contributions. While waiting to raise the required amount, other members shared their unpleasant experiences with the hospital. The messages eventually turned into a sociopolitical critique of the conditions of their homeland, and the act of donating a form of protest against the inaction of their political leaders. In one of the posts in the thread, a member criticized the indifference of the leaders of the province. The use of flaming in the post reflected a growing discontent with local politicians:

WE WHO WORK HERE ABROAD, WE STRIVE HARD TO BE ABLE TO SEND OUR CHILDREN, NEPHEWS/NIECES TO SCHOOL, TO BUILD OUR OWN HOUSE AND IN ORDER TO SAVE AND MAKE BOTH ENDS MEET, AND HAVE OUR HUMAN RIGHT... WE VOTED YOU POLITICIANS, WE GAVE YOU OUR TRUST TO LOOK FOR GOOD SOLUTIONS FOR OUR PROVINCE, BUT IT SEEMS THAT THERE ARE NO GOOD RESULTS OR PROGRESS... THAT'S WHAT WE EXPECT FROM YOU. GIVE GOOD EXAMPLE IN RETURN FOR THE VOTES YOU GOT. PLEASE GIVE CHANCE TO PROGRESS, HAPPINESS AND PEACE FOR ALL OF US. ("Hospital Beds coming to San Jose DB in 2009", 2006, comment 24)

Other diasporic members responded by asking those based in Antique to monitor and post updates on the social projects in the province. Within three months, the members were able to raise P50,114.00 (\$1,113.00) and bought 155 sets of blankets and pillow cases and donated these to the hospital. The act of donating further affirmed the collectivity of the online community and motivated more members to sponsor small projects in Antique through kinaray-a.com. Among these were the distribution of relief goods after Typhoon Frank devastated two villages in the province, providing P5,000 (\$111) scholarship to five poor students in Antique, and donating school supplies to an orphanage (F. Panaguition, personal communication, December 21, 2010). All of these collective acts to help the homeland were funded by the donations of the members and facilitated by the online dialogues in kinaray-a.com. And despite being a small amount, the online dialogue and the act of donating affirmed the mission and vision of the community and motivated its members to turn their attention to the homeland so that it could help it more:

if the bed sheets are already in use, please let us know here in the forum of K.com because it is our only consolation, to help the needy, and because this is what makes the spiritual and moral aspect of the Karay-as strong. Many thanks. ("200

Hospital Beds coming to San Jose DB in 2009”, 2006, comment 101)

4.4.3 Community outreach in an indigenous village

During my fieldwork in Antique, I was invited by Panaguition to attend the online community’s 4th anniversary celebration. When I arrived in Antique on the 18th of December, I was informed that it was scheduled take place on the 29th of December 2011, at 4:00 PM and at the village of Tina in the municipality of Hamtic. The village is home to the indigenous group Ati, and the members of the online community planned to distribute food and clothing and have a ‘post Christmas party’ in the village.

Celebrating anniversaries in San Jose de Buenavista had been a tradition of kinaray-a.com since its inauguration in 2006. But from my analysis of the Forum posts and videos of the activities of the online community, I could see that this year’s celebration was an austere event. For their first anniversary, the online community sponsored and flew in the mainstream rock band Pupil from Metro Manila to perform in the province while for the second and third anniversaries they sponsored OKM concerts and held raffles and karaoke singing contests among its members. It was the first time that kinaray-a.com would celebrate outside of San Jose de Buenavista and at an indigenous village. The choice of having a simpler event, according to Panaguition, was an issue of the decreasing participation of the members and the fewer donations the online community was receiving. None of the members of the initial core group were active anymore and fewer members were logging into the online community. He attributed it to the presence of Facebook,

which he said was “new and have more interesting features like games and video chat” than kinaray-a.com (F. Panaguition, personal communication, December 24, 2011). Yet for him and the remaining Antique-based members, it was still important to celebrate the anniversary in order to show that kinaray-a.com “is still present”.

In the week leading up to the event, Panaguition’s small video production studio in San Jose de Buenavista served as the planning hub for the activity. With the help of Stephen Checa, the content manager of kinaray-a.com at the time of fieldwork, Panaguition sent solicitation letters to local businesses asking for donations of rice, sardines, instant noodles, and laundry soap to be given to Ati families. They also sent emails asking for monetary donations from members of the online community. Panaguition (personal communication, January 11, 2011) admitted after the event that they were not able to raise the budget of P12,000 (\$266) and so he had to use his own personal finances to come up with the needed amount.

On the day of the event, I went to Panaguition’s studio and was able to assist in the packing of food bags to be distributed for each family in the indigenous community. Together with eight male teenaged members, we prepared bags containing 2 kilograms of rice, two canned sardines, two packets of instant noodles, and a bar of laundry soap. At the village of Tina, we were greeted and given garlands by Ati women whom I noticed were wearing new wrap-around fabrics as costumes. The women led us into a vacant lot which seemed to serve as the meeting area for the community. On the left side of the lot, a portable sound system with four loudspeakers operated by three male teens was playing Columbian pop singer Shakira’s *Waka Waka* while in the middle a bamboo table filled with young coconuts

and boiled bananas and a newly constructed hut were adjacent to each other. Even in this far-flung village, the global and local are in constant interaction. As with its previous anniversaries, kinaray-a.com members prepared a short program for the celebration and allowed the Ati community to perform its rituals for marriage, childbirth, and death using the hut and fire as props during their performances. After their performance, OKM artists Noel Alamis, Bernie Salcedo, and Sammy Rubido performed their songs to the singing and dancing audience. After the performances, each Ati family in the community was called and given one of the bags that we prepared. The representative of the Ati community was thankful for the donations that they received, but more importantly for bringing OKM performances to their community because it is often the case that they are the ones who perform for others.

4.5 Conclusion: Kinaray-a.com: A Finalized Mediation?

The dialogical spaces that were collaboratively constructed by kinaray-a.com members enabled them to share self-narratives of longing for the homeland and experiences of diasporic life, allowing them to further reconstruct and collectively embrace their ethnic group's working class identity. This empowered identity facilitated the formation of bonding ties among the group, which led to the collective mobilization to help their homeland. Taking into account the degree of online and offline activities in kinaray-a.com against the intent stated in its vision and mission, it is safe to say that the online community had been successful in reuniting the Karay-a to help bring progress to Antique. But as a case of vernacular mediation, the online community was influenced by the socioeconomic context of its members and

the type of new media technology it used. While OKM continues to be heard on the local radio and community events, kinaray-a.com closed down in July 2011.

During the period of online ethnography and fieldwork, it was evident that the online community was on the decline. Out of its 12,209 members, only 13 regularly logged on to chat, with most of the time posting greetings and then logging off. There was no new forum topic posted and the Literature contributions from 2010-2011 totaled only four. The latest news about Antique in the index pages was dated December 16, 2010. Malware attacks were also prevalent as the online community went off from August 1-3, 2010; October 19-24, 2010; November 17-19, 2010; January 8-13, 2011; February 12-18; 2011; July 2, 2011, until finally closing down on July 20, 2011. Starting in 2010, the offline activities of its members were becoming more austere, as evidenced by its last anniversary celebration, which I was able to attend. Lievrouw (2011) has pointed out that it is the nature of online communities to be 'perishable,' but in the case of kinaray-a.com, its closing down cannot be simply equated to 'perishing.'

Bruckman and Jensen (2002) in their analysis of the decline of the previously active MediaMOO, an online community of Internet researchers in which they were also members, identified five factors that led to its closure: splintering off of subgroups, technical obsolescence, historical change in the history of the Internet, choice of target audience or population model, and lowered enthusiasm of the leadership. They explained that because of the strong ties that developed among MediaMOO members, some of them broke off and formed other groups and this weakened the online community. Due to the rapid and constant developments in

Internet technology, the technical platform of MediaMOO soon became outdated for its members who went on to look for more advanced website architecture. Also Bruckman, who was the leader of the online community, had more commitments and so was not able to sustain the previous support she had for the online community. In the case of kinaray-a.com, technical obsolescence and decreased enthusiasm and financial insecurity of its members led to the closure of the website.

To analyze the decline in member participation, I included the open-ended question 'what do you don't like about kinaray-a.com?' on the online survey I conducted. Qualitative coding of the responses indicated that technical obsolescence was the prime reason why members were less motivated to participate online. The following response from Respondent 14 summarized the comments on technical obsolescence of kinaray-a.com

I can't post pics :(I mean albums. Like what we can do in Facebook, Flickr or other interactive sites.

While the availability of more interactive and multimodal social networking sites may not suffice to weaken the bonding ties of the online community, fewer updated content resulted in the decrease in the enthusiasm of its members. As I pointed out in the previous discussion of survey results, one of the reasons why members joined the community was because of their material or information seeking needs. With the lack of updated content and an obsolete website, the participation of the members declined. In addition, although the desire to help the homeland is still strong, it should be noted that diasporic members of kinaray-a.com, like most Overseas Filipino Workers, are employed in blue collar positions and thus have limited

income. Panaguiton stated that although the core group had planned more activities to help Antique, asking for donations from members was not as easy as before and became even more difficult during the last global financial crisis where several overseas-based members refrained from making donations. With an old website plagued by malware attacks, lack of updated content, and lesser member contribution that could help conduct more community projects, members of kinaray-a.com participated less. All these led to the closing down of the website.

Despite its inability to innovate and sustain the information needs of its members, kinaray-a.com made enormous contributions to its public. The dialogical spaces it provided fostered belonging and a sense of pride by allowing members to reinvent their previously stereotyped identities. The reciprocal sharing of self-narratives of the difficulties of migrant life as well as the experiences of poverty resulted in small but significant acts of collective mobilization. At this point, I would like to highlight that the donations to the state hospital, indigenous village, typhoon victims, and poor students were made by individuals who are also affected by the poverty in their homeland. This clearly illustrates the potential of new media to create spaces for mobilization. The extent to which participation and mobilization are enabled by online mediation, however, is also affected by changes in technology and the resources of its agents.

As a case of vernacular mediation, kinaray-a.com led to a range of new utterances. Even during the period of its decline, members contributed to the production of the short film *Handum* which critiqued the root cause of the poverty in the homeland as I will discuss in the next chapter. Further, kinaray-a.com led to new online

communities. Aside from having Facebook account, members of the online community built specific pages for their hometowns and other theme-focused pages (tourism, news, politics, religion). It is still early and already beyond the scope of this thesis to analyze the impact of these new online communities, but their presence clearly indicates the active nature of kinaray-a.com as a case of vernacular mediation.

Chapter 5: Vernacular mediation and the questions of aesthetics, ethics, and emancipation: The case of *Handum*

It is still early in the morning but the sweltering heat of the tropical sun has already scorched any remaining moisture from the earth of the dirt road that stretches through the rural village of Binayaan. From a worm's eye view, the ground in this unpaved lane is not only dry and dusty, it is also dotted with potholes that would make transit for those in vehicles strenuous. It is all the more grueling, however, for those without any means of transportation as the road is strewn with rocks and mounds of cow dung. Yet these decrepit conditions are nowhere more harsh than for Toto, a year six student, whose only pair of rubber shoes is almost tattered from walking daily through the unpaved lane to go to school.

These are the establishing shots of *Handum* (Magbanua, 2010), a 30-minute digital short film that critiques the root causes of poverty and mediates the collective dream of the Karay-a for a progressive homeland. From the theoretical lens of Deuze's (2011) media life and Lievrouw's (2011) mediation, *Handum* is a success because its production was enabled by affordable digital video technologies and the collaboration of individuals who voluntarily contributed their economic and cultural capitals. *Handum* was able to critique corruption and nepotism, which are the root causes of poverty identified collectively by members of kinaray-a.com in the previous chapter. *Handum* was also exhibited in local film festivals outside Antique, thereby allowing the ethnic group to demonstrate and assert their cultural identity.

In other words, the short film enabled them to enunciate an empowered collective voice.

But as a case of vernacular mediation, the sociohistorical contexts surrounding *Handum* temper any celebratory pronouncement over the affordances of new media technologies. The reason for this, however, is not because the director, producers, actors, actresses, and crew allowed themselves to be exploited by the interactivity of new media technologies as Andrejevic pointed out. Either dystopic or utopic claims on the affordances of new media will fall short once the complexities of *Handum* as a cultural expression and as a political critique are taken into account. As a cultural expression, *Handum* falls under the genre of Philippine independent films and thus cannot avoid “suturing itself” (Hall, 1991) within the discourse of poverty pornography that surrounds the latter. Is it, after all, merely adding to Hutnyk’s (2004) notion of transmuting poverty into “naïve aesthetics” (p. 81)? As a political critique, its intent is constrained by the uneven or asymmetrical power relations between its co-creators and the subject of their criticisms.

My aim thus in this chapter is to elucidate the extent to which vernacular mediation facilitates social emancipation by identifying and analyzing its enabling and constraining factors. I will first focus my discussion on poverty and its mediation and draw attention to the larger discourses in which the film is articulated. To map these discourses, I will briefly outline the ontology of poverty in studies of global media. I will then focus on Philippine independent films before suggesting a methodology for identifying the presence of poverty pornography in films and analyzing of the theme, production, and circulation of *Handum*. Lastly, I

will argue that the impacts of vernacular mediation do not lie on the act of production, but at the “point of contact between producers, texts, and audiences” (Madianou, 2011, p. 6).

5.1 The Mediation of Poverty in Global Media

Global media have a long history of engagement with the theme of poverty. Studies of globally circulated novels such as Charles Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* and *Hard Times*, Emile Zola’s *Germinal*, and John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* have pointed to the potential of print media to highlight suffering due to poverty. As writer David Morris (1996) emphasized, literature has a salient role to play in the formation of a moral community because suffering, which is the main consequence of poverty, deprives its victims of their voice. He stated that

voice ranks among the most precious human endowments that suffering normally deprives us of, removing far more than a hope that others will understand or assist us. Silence and the loss of voice may eventually constitute or represent for some who suffer a complete shattering of the self (p. 29).

The potential of media to give voice to the poor, however, is being questioned globally in the light of the pervasiveness of neoliberal values (Couldry, 2010) and the ubiquitous use of digital technologies to mediate representations of poverty (Barnett & Weiss, 2008). Images and narratives of suffering and poverty flood television, cinema, and computer screens everyday (Silverstone, 2002) to the point that around the world audiences are prone to becoming used to viewing stark representations of distant poor (Boltanski, 1999). Indeed, photos of slums or *favelas*,

hungry and emaciated children, and overcrowded refugee camps more than ever pervade not only the broadcast media but also print and online texts that promote art, charities, and development projects. Television programs widely disseminate representations of the homeless, disabled, elderly, single parents, immigrants, ethnic groups, rural folks, and other poor minorities. The prevailing discourse on the ontology of the mediation of poverty, however, is largely pessimistic. It generally states that circulating poverty images only result in either the cultivation of “compassion fatigue” (Moeller, 1999, p 2) among those better off and the aestheticization and depoliticization of the suffering of the poor.

The proliferation and ubiquity of mediated poverty images and narratives have raised questions over their significance and ramifications. Within photography scholarship, questions have long been raised over the ethics of taking and circulating arresting pictures of the social condition. Four decades ago John Berger (1980) argued that the horrifying ‘photographs of agony’ by the mainstream newspapers leave readers “filled with either despair or indignation” (p. 38). Their continued mediation eventually leads readers to feel inadequate and respond by ignoring these or performing atonement by donating to charitable organizations. For Berger, either response effectively depoliticizes the causes of the suffering. In a similar argument, Susan Sontag (1977, 2004) stated that while photos of the poor raise awareness of their plight, the repeated mediation of these could breed apathy. She argued that the proliferation of photographed images

does not necessarily strengthen the conscience and the ability to be compassionate. It can also corrupt them. Once one has seen such images, one has started down the road of seeing more. Images transfix. Images anesthetize... after repeated

exposure to images it also becomes less real (Sontag, 1977, p. 20).

Sontag added that photographers or the institutions they work for unfortunately deploy more graphic pictures to overcome the apathy these images help cultivate. By “raising the ante” (p. 19), the public is thus continuously flooded with shocking pictures particularly when political events necessitate them. John Hutnyk (2004) for instance critiqued the preponderant use of photos of children by charitable organizations to solicit public donations particularly in nations that have invaded others in the name of terrorism. According to him, these images of “photogenic poverty,” or the “vast representational compendium” of “cute children” (p. 81) in need only salve American and British guilt over imperialist interventions or, if outside the context of war, silence the calls for social justice. In a similar vein, Charles Quist-Adade and Anita van Wyck (2007) critiqued the practice of American and Canadian international non-profit organizations in circulating mediatized³² images of misery in order to solicit financial aid for Africa. According to them, the profuse circulation of the photos of “naked, emaciated children with protruding

³²As mentioned in Chapter 2, mediation and mediatization are inextricably tied phenomena. Through the continuous circulation of symbolic representations, mediation enables particular versions of reality to normalize. These, in turn, contribute to mediatization, or the process whereby the modes of representation and interaction are “changed as a consequence of the growth of the media’s influence” (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 114). When film studios, television stations, charity organizations, and even ordinary individuals repeat – consciously or not – a dominant framework for representing poverty, they thus mediatize their texts. Such frameworks or ‘media logics’ (Altheide and Snow, 1979) are diverse and dynamic. With regards to poverty, the logic includes, but are not limited to, the oversimplification of the causes, deployment of shocking images of dying children and violent mobs, valorization of the aid worker or donor country, and silencing of the voice of the poor, (Moeller, 1999, pp. 99-108). Because of their repeated deployment, these practices stabilize as aesthetic conventions that shape future mediations. The result thus is the co-constituting processes of mediation and mediatization that has profound impacts on the way a social condition like poverty is defined, deliberated, and acted upon.

eyes, flies feasting in the gaping mouths; frail, half-clad, barefoot mothers barely able to look after their dying children” (p. 68) are a mere continuation of the colonial version of the African story. They add that such practice not only maintains the hegemonic position of the West over Africa, but cultivates among Western audiences ‘development pornography’ or the practice of giving token aid while assuring themselves of their status by viewing the suffering of the economically deprived others.

While photography arguably was the first global medium to facilitate the widespread mediation of poverty, television programs further reinforced its dominant meaning. According to Susan Moeller (1999), the continuous and formulaic coverage of global television networks entrenches the practice of deploying more horrific stories of poverty. Aside from cultivating ‘compassion fatigue’ among the viewing public, this has helped shape welfare and aid policies. Within framing research, the two recurring findings are that television programs blame the poor for their own poverty and attribute the responsibility of finding solutions to the individual instead of government and society (Gould, Stern & Adams, 1981; Iyengar, 1996; Cozzarelli, Wilkinson & Tagler, 2001; Hannah & Cafferty, 2006; Kim, Carvalho & Davis, 2010; Redden, 2011). Since mainstream public opinion influence policy formulation, these representations have been blamed for the decline in welfare and aid funding (Katz, 1989; Stark, 2009).

Nowhere has such decline in public support and funding been so strongly felt than in the humanitarian sector. To engage waning public attention, international aid and charity institutions have turned to celebrity endorsement to encourage

donations (de Waal, 2008; Chouliaraki, 2012). The high-profile marketing approach involving Bono, Bob Geldoff, and Angelina Jolie, however, are potentially destructive to the aim of motivating people to help particularly if the celebrity is perceived to have low credibility. While mediating the pleas of celebrities are effective in raising awareness on the plight of the poor, this does not translate into action because there is strong perception among the public that the former endorse anti-poverty programs for their own self-promotion (Samman, McAuliffe & MacLachlan, 2010).

In addition, also faced with the realization that the traditional fundraising methods of direct mailing, phone marketing, and conducting face-to-face events are no longer as effective, humanitarian institutions are turning to social media to engage the attention of their donating public (Ready, 2011). Currently, there is a drive towards the use of digital storytelling wherein the production of short (usually 120 seconds), highly personal, and visually laden videos is being encouraged to solicit public engagement donor support. The question of whether digital storytelling would lead to the further entrenchment of the dominant meaning of poverty still remains to be answered. But if we follow Silverstone (2002) and Couldry (2010), the repeated use of media frameworks leads to their normalization. It is also worth highlighting the work of Moeller (1999) which emphasized that shorter timeframes and the focus on the personal rather than the political rarely allow ample contextualization of poverty.

In summary, scholarship on global media has highlighted the negative impacts of the accumulative effects of mediating poverty images and stories. The general position among scholarship is that repeated circulation of arresting images of

famine, violence, and misery cultivates apathy. There is also a strong concern that mediating poverty decontextualizes and depoliticizes its root causes.

5.2 Mediation of Poverty in Films

Compared to other visual medium, film permits more time and space for ample contextualization but this does not always happen due prevailing media logic that includes market expectations, genre conventions, and the sociopolitical conditions of production and circulation. Within film studies, this lack of contextualization has been highlighted in the discussions of ‘poverty pornography,’ a concept that has again gained currency after the recognition of *Slumdog Millionaire* (Colson, Boyle & Tandan, 2008) at the 81st Academy Awards. Poverty porn is a term used to describe a pattern of film imagery that aestheticizes the living conditions, misery, violence, and struggles of the poor either for the enjoyment or the assurance of those who are more economically privileged. Journalist Alice Miles (2009) provided a vivid description of what poverty porn is in her critique of *Slumdog Millionaire*: it is the “reveling in violence, degradation and horror” that invites the spectator – a Westerner in this case – “to enjoy it too” (par. 5). Award winning author Arundhati Roy (2009), on the other hand, stated that such aesthetics “disassociates poverty from the poor” and makes “poverty a landscape, like a desert or a mountain range, an exotic beach, god-given, not man-made” (par 7).

The discourse surrounding the mediation of poverty in *Slumdog Millionaire* reveals a polemic tension between those who are concerned with its ramifications for the image of India and those who want to highlight the social inequality in the

nation. Films depicting poverty are not entirely new to India (and elsewhere) but what is interesting is how the opinions on its relevance have changed. Sumita Chakravarty (1989) stated that the deliberate inclusion of realism and the interrogation of poverty in Indian films in the 1950s were expressions of the social anxieties brought by the state's attempt to forge a unified national identity and implement the country's smooth transition from a colony to a democracy. At present, there are more objections toward making movies that depict the country's poverty due to the danger of films becoming just another case of 'poverty porn'.

Film critic Liz Shackleton (2010), referring to *Slumdog Millionaire*, highlighted that the only non-Bollywood films that "portray the India of travel brochures, or the slum-kids genre" (par. 9) are given the chance for global distribution. For film scholar Ajay Gehlawat (2009), the aestheticized images of India's poverty and squalor in *Slumdog* represent the country as a land of backwardness, further exoticizing it and maintaining the First World-Third World hierarchy. It is thus the reification of the impoverished image of India brought by the mediation of poverty in *Slumdog* that Gehlawat was against. His main argument, however, centered on denouncing the "comprador class of critics" (p. 2) or diasporic Indians who praise the film for representing the real-world social context of their homeland and validating it as an authentic representative of Bollywood. His point is similar to the one made by film critic Robert Koehler (2009) who described *Slumdog* as a just another "fresh object of adoration" for the "new middlebrow audience" (p. 75) or Western spectators seeking new cultural fodder to enjoy. One mode of such enjoyment comes in the form of virtual tourism whereby spectators become voyeurs

by engaging in “window shopping” (Mendes, 2010, p. 475) without moving from their seats. Following the arguments of Gehlawat, Koehler, and Mendes, the diverse ways that Indian and Western elites sanctify the film further entrenches the hegemonic meaning of poverty in the media.

But for other scholars and critics, the poverty images in the film are in fact the real representations of India that are often glossed over by the escapist Bollywood movies or what the country’s diasporic and nationalist elites want to hide. *The New York Times* columnist Anand Giridharadas (2009) critiqued the purported comments of Bollywood icon Amitabh Bachchan regarding the representation of India in *Slumdog Millionaire*. He stated that such denouncements reveal more about the sensibilities of the comfortable elite who “dismiss these ways of seeing India as exploitative” (par. 13) and easily label these as “some jealous Westerner’s intervention” (par. 14). He explained that while these comments may taint the reputation of the well to do abroad, they do not erase the fact that “half of Mumbai’s people still live in slums; that half of India’s children are still underfed” (par. 19).

For Anandam Kavoori (2009), the representations in the film help assure spectators that there is hope in the light of economic insecurity. Citing the anxieties of American audiences during the global financial crisis, Kavoori stated that *Slumdog Millionaire* offers a “space for understanding the permanent effects of a global economic downturn and endemic, structural poverty” (p. 261). The film likewise provides an exemplar of cultural hybridity, which allows ethnic groups to talk back to Hollywood, which is “the center of [the] mediated world” that produces the “images, ideas and constructs” that shape everyday lives around the globe (p. 262).

A similar, argument was presented by Slawomir Magala (2010) who stated that although the film has framed and aestheticized the voices of the poor, it enabled them to question the “superiority of the Westernized upper-middle class in India and inferiority of the ‘slumdogs,’ who are victims of the market forces and neoliberal hegemony” (p. 155).

What is thus mainly being contested in both these arguments is the question of who has more right to enunciate a voice *for* the poor. Interestingly, this emphasis on speaking for the poor closely echoes the past discourses on Third Cinema and its precursor *Cinema Novo* wherein poverty has been intentionally aestheticized as a form of subversion. *Cinema Novo* as a genre emerged from Brazil in the late 1950s as a protest of its filmmakers against the dominance of Hollywood movies and later on as a sociopolitical critique of the poverty and hunger experienced by its poor population (Rocha, 1980; Willemen, 1989; Gunaratne, 2003; Stam, 1997). The first *Cinema Novo* films drew on regional folklore, indigenous music and imagery, and national literary classics to parody Hollywood films (Schiff, 1993). The genre soon drew more from Italian neorealist conventions (Vieira & Stam, 1985) and developed what Brazilian filmmaker Glauber Rocha (1965) referred to as an ‘aesthetic of hunger’ to explicitly draw attention to the conditions of the country’s poor. Rocha described this aesthetic as highlighting the

themes of hunger: characters eating dirt, characters eating roots, characters stealing to eat, characters killing to eat, characters fleeing to eat, dirty ugly and starving characters living in dirty ugly dark houses (par. 10).

He added that the genre is directly opposed to “films about rich people, in their houses, in luxury cars” that are basically “happy funny fast films without messages,

films with purely industrial aims” (par. 11). Making a similar manifesto to Rocha’s aesthetics of hunger, Argentinean filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino (1969) wrote *Towards a Third Cinema*. The document described the genre as a cinema of liberation against the imperialist capitalist system and differentiated it from Hollywood films (which it defined as First Cinema) and auteur or independent films (defined as Second Cinema). The genre proposed by Solanas and Getino became a movement after similar manifestos were developed and meetings among countries who aimed to challenge the dominance of commercial and escapist films were conducted (Willemen, 1989; Gunaratne, 2003).

The intentional depiction of poverty and exploitation in Third Cinema was thus a call to “analyze the origins of social inequality and transform the structures that perpetuated it” (Faguet, 2009, p. 7) in the hope of giving voice to the poor. Such desire to construct critical consciousness, however, turned into “*pornomiseria*” (Faguet, 2009, p. 11), a term that Ospina himself helped coin. Because *Cinema Novo* and Third World movies were screened in European film festivals, these cultivated a form of voyeurism from Western audiences who, according to Rocha (1965) treated the mediated hunger “not as a tragic symptom” (par. 1) but rather as a “strange tropical surrealism” (par. 12). The positive reception from international festivals also encouraged the continuous production of poverty and exploitation movies that in turn created “cynical indifference which comes from a saturation and fetishization of this visibility in the absence of proper analysis or even a basic code of ethics” (Faguet, 2009, p. 7). *Pornomiseria* has thus been a problem endemic in Third Cinema in the 1970s but one that “*continues to haunt any discussion* (historical or

contemporary) about the representation of socio-economic hardship” (p. 11, emphasis mine).

One institution that helps shape the meaning of poverty is the international film festival in affluent and usually Western countries. The prestige that these festivals accord help endow the much needed cultural capital particularly for new or non-Western filmmakers. Such ‘Miramaxization’ or “the use of festival exposure, marketing strategies, stars and controversies to promote films” (de Valck, 2007, p. 123) also generates publicity that can be used to attract more financial support. Often, international film festivals function as producers by prescribing a set of criteria that eventually limits the theme and aesthetics of the film they support (Ross, 2011). The Hubert Bals Fund of the International Film Festival Rotterdam, for instance, often supports films that depict “conditions of poverty” and “social structures built upon limited resources” (p. 264). The result is thus a continued proliferation of poverty movies. This, coupled with the limited access of Third World audience to the films shown in these festivals, eventually replicates the “unequal relationships produced between the developed and developing world” (p. 267) and does little in alleviating poverty.

What the experiences of pioneer Third Cinema filmmakers could contribute into the current discourses on poverty representation is to highlight that “even the most well-intentioned attempts to faithfully represent a social problem are always already mediated” (Faguet, 2009, p. 15). Any attempts to produce a film or any mediated text depicting poverty will be articulated into the wider discourses surrounding the theme that will then shape its meaning. As Bakhtin emphasized, the

nature and meaning of an utterance will depend on its contexts, both sociohistorical and discursive. Couldry (2010) also stated that there is an uneven hierarchy among discourses which influences how a theme is discussed and acted on. Presently, the dominant discourse is that the mediation and mediatization of poverty in films and other global media depoliticize the root causes of the social condition, cultivate apathy, and further marginalize the poorer country or group. However, this should not discount the fact that there are marginal groups who are able and still need to enunciate their mediated versions of poverty as part of their search to find solutions to the social condition that directly affects them.

But instead of repeating the same polemic for-or-against views that have been going on for decades, I concur with Lilie Chouliaraki's (2009) argument that we move away from grand theorizings that either "celebrate the role of media in disseminating the values of global citizenship or disapprove of the media because they disempower the spectator" (p. 193). Chouliaraki (2006a) stated that media has an ethical role in ensuring that the public avoids the "narcissistic emotion of modern humanism" and abandoning "the respect for the irreducible value of every human life" (p. 14). Media scholars, however, have a salient role in ensuring that these values are enacted by not making blanket utopic-dystopic judgments. She argued that scholars instead take a perspective of Aristotelian "phronesis" (p. 6) or contextualized analysis for each case of mediation.

There is a need thus to socially and historically situate each case rather than pronouncing blanket *a priori* idyllic or gloom judgments over the mediation of poverty. I argue that as scholars we have to acknowledge that poverty porn happens

and denounce it when it exists, and at the same time recognize when the subversive and political aims of and for the poor are enunciated and act to help achieve these. But carrying these out would require tolerance for conceptual and methodological flexibility especially if the scholarship cited above did not provide any clear meaning of what poverty is or how we can move beyond the polemic debate of whether or not to display the social condition. In spite of the numerous opinions regarding the mediation of poverty in film and global media, not one study has explicitly defined what they meant by the social condition. In all the scholarship cited above, poverty was viewed as a single, monolithic concept that can be solved through its mediation or non-mediation. In addition, opinions were stuck on debating whether to display poverty or not, nor did they identify what possible set of actions an audience can take after viewing a film.

To contextualize my analysis of *Handum*, I will complement Bakhtin's (1990; 1990a; 1990b) concepts of answerability and aesthetics which argue that new media practices have ethical implications with Amartya Sen's (1976; 2005) capability approach in the analysis of poverty in lieu of the absence of a definition of the social condition in global media studies and Luc Boltanski's (1999) politics of pity to identify if there is an action and ethical standpoint being suggested in a film. For its methodology, this chapter will apply a modified approach of Chouliaraki's (2006) analytics of mediation to trace the manifestations by which films cultivate a particular ethical position towards the poor. Chouliaraki's method in analyzing general suffering drew mainly from Boltanski's work to identify the norms of public action mediated in television. Her multimodal analysis of visuals, audio, and textual

elements can be extended in films to analyze poverty as a particular cause of suffering. I modified her approach for the analysis of films by focusing on cinematic conventions, following a specific framework for poverty, and situating the text within socioeconomic contexts of its genre, creators, and subjects. Also, rather than evaluating the texts for their objectivity, I follow Boltanski's postulate closer by treating the films as subjective cultural expressions. His emphasis on the saliency of a person's subjective interpretation concurs with Bakhtin's notion of answerability and aesthetics whereby the speaker and addressee must not lose their individuality when engaging in a dialogue. As such, I regard each film as a subjective expression and the claims of 'representing the reality out there' part of a director's aim to achieve a particular intention.

Like Silverstone (2002) I also argue that audiences, including those living in Third World countries, have an ethical responsibility. In doing so I diverge from the arguments based on historical materialism which claim that mediated meanings create momentary escapism or a fictitious sense of hope for a better future. All too often these arguments on passivity are used as an excuse to argue that majority of the audiences will not appreciate films with political themes. Audiences do not only have the capacity for appreciation of and action after viewing political texts; they also have an ethical responsibility to rework the meanings and create new utterances from these (Bakhtin, 1990). While prevailing structures may prevent them from enacting this role, it does not mean that they do not want to or will never be able to do so. Non-patronage as a form of popular resistance is also a possibility (Sen, 1995). As Silverstone (2002) emphasized, all of us must depart from making

“claims of irresponsibility and dumbing down” and “question our acceptance of such dominant forms of mediation” (p. 772) if we desire not to be complicit in perpetuating oppressive conditions.

As such, both the creator and spectator are responsible for the effects of their mediated utterances. To reiterate the points I made in Chapter 2, aesthetics for Bakhtin goes beyond the Kantian emphasis on the generic conventions of beauty and pleasure derived from art forms. It is instead the consummation or self-sufficiency of a communicative utterance such that it can only start to form an aesthetic value or a complete definition once the addressees act on the meanings mediated by the utterance. It is in this ‘extension of meanings’ that the spectator can enact his or her ethical role, a salient point that most scholars citing Bakhtin ignore. All too often, it is a celebratory reading of a novel’s *heteroglossia*, carnivalistic, polyphony, and intertextuality that is emphasized in the study of films (see Stam, 1997, 2005; Mercer, 2003; Flanagan, 2009). But in explaining the origins of the polyphonic and carnivalistic novel, Bakhtin (1984) emphasized that the “bold and unrestrained use of the fantastic and adventure” within the genre is “internally motivated, justified by, and devoted” to the aim of “provoking and testing a truth” (p. 114).

In other words, the inclusion of the serio-comical, vulgar, syncretic, and profane in an utterance has a political aim, and that is to challenge an existing ‘truth’ or, by extension, a social condition. To emphasize this, I will highlight one of the characteristics of a novel that Bakhtin discussed which is pertinent to this study: slum naturalism. He states that slum naturalism was already present in the

Menippean satire, which is the precursor of dialogic novel. According to Bakhtin (1984), crude slum naturalism as a feature of a polyphonic novel is where

adventures of truth on earth takes place on the high road, in brothels, in the dens of thieves, in taverns, marketplaces, prisons, in the erotic orgies of secret cults, and so forth. The idea here fears no slum, is not afraid of any of life's filth. The man of the idea – the wise man – collides with worldly evil, depravity, baseness, and vulgarity in their most extreme expression (p. 115).

Bakhtin pointed out that the inclusion of these scandalous or even horrific themes have an ethical function, and that is to “contemplate the world on the broadest possible scale” (p. 115) with the aim of “solving ultimate questions” about the fate of mankind (p. 153). A future “social utopia” (p. 118) that is oftentimes visualized through the dreams of characters of the novel is articulated in the deployment of slum naturalism, which, in essence, is a mediation of poverty. The dreaming or imagining of a better future by the characters serves as a questioning of the hegemonic ‘truths,’ established doctrines, and prevailing social conditions. It thus questions why poverty exists to open up “the possibility of a completely different life” (p. 147). Such life is momentarily possible in the carnival, wherein the inequalities of the world are suspended. With these, I argue that without the questioning (explicit or implicit) and testing of a social condition articulated to the envisioning of a better future, a text that mediates images (grotesque or not) and narratives of the poor is thus nothing but poverty pornography.

5.3 Poverty as a Relative and Multidimensional Concept

In the field of sociology, poverty has often been defined as a matter of either subsistence, whereby people are defined as poor if they do not have the financial resources needed to consume basic necessities, or deprivation, whereby people are considered poor if they cannot live in relation to the minimum requirements and expectations of their society (Ringgen, 1988). In the field of philosophy, poverty has been defined as a moral issue or as an inevitable social phenomenon that requires ongoing intervention, compassion, and charity and an injustice caused by unfair actions of the elite (Stark, 2009, pp. 391-411). Each of these definitions make a salient point regarding the root cause and final solution to poverty, yet by themselves fail to address all the complexities involved. What is needed therefore is a conceptualization of poverty that defines it as both an empirical problem and a moral concern. One is political economist and Nobel Peace Prize awardee Amartya Sen's (1975, 2005, 2008) capability approach which combines the notions of deprivation, moral obligation, and social justice.

For Sen, poverty is not a simple question of subsistence or the lack of financial resources and poor living standards. Nor it is an absolute notion. Poverty for him is instead a multidimensional and relative concept that is rooted to equity and social justice. Sen (1975) argued that it has been the practice of economists and states to use income thresholds to conceptualize poverty. Through this subsistence approach, specific income brackets are utilized to define poverty lines, which are then set as criteria to categorize whether an individual is poor or not. Such a blanket approach that uses money as a criterion may be useful in providing an aggregate headcount

measure of the poor, but it presents at least two main shortcomings. Firstly, it gives an absolute definition because it does not take into account the relative deprivation, or the variance of needs among those who were labeled as poor. A person whose income only needs a few dollars to make it above the poverty line is conceptualized to be the same as those who do not have any means of livelihood (1976; 2005). As such, this income-based approach is highly prone to crude generalizations.

Secondly, by using income as a criterion, this approach puts forward the assumption that money is the only cause and solution to poverty. Sen (2005) argued that money is only one of the many factors surrounding the issue:

Whereas income is merely one of the means of good living, we have reason enough to look directly at the quality of life that people are able to lead, and the freedom they enjoy to live the way they would like. If life consists of various things that people are able to do or be (such as being able to live long, to be in good health, to be able to read and write, and so on), then it is the capability to function that has to be put at the center stage of assessment (p. 34).

Sen here was arguing that analysis of poverty should conceptualize it as an issue of social justice and equity rather than a mere question of subsistence and economic resources. He stated that in order to understand what can make human life richer – or consequently, poorer – the analysis should look at the extent by which individuals are free to function and exercise their capabilities. He suggested taking into account both the notions of ‘functionings,’ or what an individual is able to *do*, and ‘capabilities,’ or what an individual is able to *achieve*. Unlike income-based analysis, Sen’s capabilities and functionings approach involves more than being able to fulfill basic needs of an individual because it takes into account the human freedom and

development. More importantly, it highlights the saliency of being able to live the kind of life one values and take pride in participating within the wider community:

The capabilities of relevance are not only those that relate to avoiding premature mortality, being in good health, being schooled and educated, and other such basic concerns, but also various social achievements, including... *being able to appear in public without shame and being able to take part in the life of the community* (p. 35, emphasis mine).

Applying Sen's approach to poverty for this chapter, I will thus define the concept as the relative deprivation of a person's capability to function and participate as an individual and citizen of his or her community. As a type of deprivation, poverty does entail the lack of monetary resources. As a relative condition, this lack of money is not the sole cause of poverty and does not define the person absolutely. It may limit but does not totally take away the capability to fulfill life's basic needs and to function as a responsible and important member of his or her social unit. The poor person – at a particular space and time – will have limited resources and freedom due to past actions or unjust social structures, or even both. But he does not let himself be condemned to a life of misery and shame.

5.4 The Politics of Pity within Mediated Poverty

In order to move beyond the debate on whether to display poverty or not, there is a need to identify what possible ethical standpoints or set of actions an audience can take after viewing a film. To enable this, I will draw from Luke Boltanski's (1999) notion of politics of pity. The French sociologist made a similar observation regarding the proliferation of mediated images and narratives of poverty and

attributed this phenomenon to the politicization of suffering and the need to keep the 'other' distant. He emphasized against turning these mediated utterances into a "spectacle of suffering" (p. 3) whereby those who do not share or experience poverty directly merely observe those who do, and merely regard them as unfortunate rather than taking action.

Boltanski acknowledged that because of distance and other circumstances, most of the time audiences are not able to enact the politics of justice, that is, acting with compassion to restore fairness among at least two socially unequal individuals. Compassion requires face-to-face interaction and immediate action and, compared to pity, is an ideal because it interrogates the root cause of inequality. With compassion, looking for the root cause of inequality is aimed at restoring social justice and involves testing both "great and small" (p. 2) individuals. Thus, in order to restore social balance, a person with compassion is not afraid to also ask if the poor deserve their socioeconomic condition. Pity, on the other hand, may ask what is the main cause but it does not seek to act upon it.

Boltanski defined his notion of politics of pity as the dynamics of taking "hold of suffering in order to make of it a political argument par excellence" (p. 33-34). Like Bakhtin, Boltanski emphasized the ethical role of mediated utterances and their creators but he accorded more responsibility to the audience or spectator. Given the focus on the audience by the arguments on the mediation of poverty, Boltanski's politics of pity is well positioned to help articulate the representations in the film to the moral obligations of those who view it. For him, the person who views the misery of others and "does nothing and fails to act" can be considered an "active

accomplice of those who directly caused the sufferings of the unfortunate” (p. 17). Within Boltanski’s politics of pity, spectators can take four possible standpoints after viewing images of suffering or misery: exit (whereby a person withdraws his or her attention after judging the utterance as uninteresting or indecent), indignation (whereby the person directs the blame to the persecutor of the sufferer), tender-heartedness or benevolence (whereby a person is prompted to seek or become a benefactor of the sufferer), or sublimation (whereby the spectator sympathizes with the creator of the mediated utterance and takes pleasure in the aestheticization of misery).

If exit was not the option taken, Boltanski stated that by viewing the mediated poverty, the distant spectator is presented with “an obligation to give assistance” (p. 20) by responding with either indignation or tender-heartedness. Both of these require the spectator to take a subjective stance towards the suffering subject, which is similar to the point made by Bakhtin regarding maintaining one’s individuality when ascribing an aesthetic value to an utterance. Boltanski, however, elucidated his point on the saliency of being subjective by emphasizing against making disinterested, objective, or realist claims when deciding to help from a distance. On one hand, it is often the case that people repel the realism of “that’s how it is representations” (p. 43). On the other, claims of reality, objectivity, or disinterestedness bring in more ethical questions as they diminish the experience of the suffering individual:

A picture which goes too far in the realistic description of details, one which might be described as repulsive, may actually be denounced as on the one hand *reductive*, inasmuch as the person is entirely defined by their suffering, and on the

other hand as taking the suffering away from the person inflicted by it in order to *exhibit* this suffering to those who do not suffer (p. 33, emphasis in original).

To enable spectators to take the position of indignation and tender-heartedness or benevolence, the mediated image of poverty must thus create a balance between the subjective position of the creator and truth about the theme of suffering. For the former, the presence of a perpetuator is salient as this person will be held liable for the suffering of the unfortunate poor. For the latter, the aim is conjuring a benefactor or person that will assist or give material aid to the poor. This may be the spectator himself or herself, or someone that he or she identifies within or outside the mediated image.

Instead of exit, indignation, or tender-heartedness, however, the spectator may choose to focus his attention in the artistic elements of the mediated suffering and thus construct a sublime image from it. Within the standpoint of sublimation, suffering is treated as an art form and the “terrifying, dreadful, horrible, and painful” (p. 121) experiences of the unfortunate, suffering other is turned “picturesque,” or “trivial, exotic, popular, caricatural, and carnivalesque” (p. 122). As such, the aim of sublimation is to derive pleasure from the critique of the beauty of the mediated image. For Boltanski, a spectator can only do such if he is privileged enough to possess an informed gaze and thus have the ability to see the world around him or her through the eyes of an artist-creator. From the perception of such a spectator, the image of misery is seen as detached or

extracted both from the situation in which it is found and to which it is attached by connections of its use, in order to be

connected to different series which is that of objects already painted (p. 123).

Misery is thus considered as pure art and what Bakhtin (1990) referred to as separate from life. The sublimed image of poverty is thus robbed of its social context and disconnected from the chain of utterances that enabled its creation. More importantly, the poor is turned into an anonymous art object because he or she and his or her experiences of poverty are considered as mere “aesthetic topic[s]” (p. 117). This in turn liberates the spectator from ethical obligations. Sublimation thus is exactly what poverty pornography is as it only seeks to mediate, display, and create pleasure from the image of poverty without aiming to challenge the social issue.

Applying Boltanski’s concepts for analysis, I thus consider poverty porn films as those that turn the misery of the poor into picturesque objects to be gazed at. In these films, the poor are anonymous and without context, and his or her poverty is without a beginning and an end. There is also no perpetuator or benefactor that could allow the spectator to take action by manifesting indignation or benevolence to help the poor. Poverty in these films is thus absolute, and the spectator cannot and therefore does not do anything but gaze at the picturesque poor and their misery. Based on the reading of the film, the answerability of poverty porn films lies mainly with their creator as he or she shaped the mediated utterance. For films that suggest the enactment of indignation or benevolence, the ethical liability mainly rests on the spectator who is prompted to take action. If, after viewing the film, the spectator does not enact indignation or benevolence, or both, then he or she is

answerable for turning an emancipatory utterance into a form of perverse voyeurism.

I acknowledge that this framework for evaluating the aesthetics and ethics of a text can create a polar opposition between an emancipatory versus poverty porn films, creators versus spectators, and answerability versus leisure viewing. As such, there is still the need to analyze the wider discourses and sociohistorical contexts surrounding the mediated utterance. In other words, without contextualization, merely applying this framework would result in another polemic debate regarding the mediation of poverty. To address this, I will situate *Handum* within the discourses surrounding Philippine independent cinema – the genre to which it is articulated – and discuss the impacts of its representation of poverty.

5.5 Philippine Independent Cinema in the Digital Age

Philippine cinema is among the oldest in Asia, having a history that dates back to the late 1800s. Like most media in the country, it is culturally hybrid, having been influenced by Spanish theatre genres; Hollywood, European, and other Asian films; Philippine folklore and literature; and sociopolitical events. It developed as a commercial enterprise and receives minimal incentives from the state. At present, it is composed of two overlapping sectors: the mainstream studios that produce films for commercial purposes and the independent or indie filmmakers who create films for artistic expression. While indie filmmakers in the country create films outside the auspices of mainstream studios, most of them are employed by these same studios and have also directed commercial films. Both sectors are largely based in

Metro Manila and compete against Hollywood and other foreign films for exhibition venues and audience patronage. The main differences between these sectors lie in the funding, themes, and approach used in filmmaking. Like their foreign counterparts, mainstream films put a prime importance on profit while indie films prioritize the auteur's intent and use realism and postmodern approaches (Tolentino, 2007). Compared to the mainstream, indie films are mostly self-financed by the director and produced with low budget and tight shooting schedules, yet are recognized for their artistic qualities (Tioseco, 2007).

Both sectors at present are at a critical juncture. Production of mainstream movies in the Philippines is steadily declining due to poor patronage and diminishing revenues (Virola, 2012), prompting some commentators to declare that Philippine cinema is already on its deathbed, if not yet dead, because its largest sector is contracting. On the other hand, questions of aesthetics and ethics presently surround indie filmmaking due to its focus on poverty themes and the prioritization of international festivals over local exhibition venues. Indie filmmaking – which is considered by scholars, analysts, and critics to be the sector that would save Philippine cinema and facilitate the symbolic reconstruction of the nation – thus stands to lose its growing local support despite its accelerating growth.

In terms of Philippine mainstream cinema, the decline in production and patronage is mainly attributed to its practice of mimicry and rampant recycling of narratives. Analysts and moviegoers alike complain how the audience is 'dumbed down' by the formulaic and predictable 'you see one, you see them all' mainstream films (Lumbera, 1986, 2000; Maslog, 2007; Pasadilla & Lantin, 2005; Reyes, 2011;

Flores, 2011). The other reasons that were identified include minimal government support, rising production and distribution costs, piracy, availability of cable TV and new media, and competition from the continued influx of Hollywood and other foreign films (Pasadilla & Lantin, 2005; Virola, 2012). The cumulative effect of these factors can be seen in the figures released by the National Statistical Coordination Board and the Film Academy of the Philippines. From the 1960s, mainstream film production had decreased from an average of 124 films per year (22% of total films exhibited) in the 1960s down to 38 per year (11% of total films exhibited) in 2005-2011 (Carreon, 2010, 2011; Virola, 2012). In terms of box office revenue, Hollywood and other foreign films have consistently registered more than local mainstream movies. In 2008, only four of the 10 top-grossing films were locally produced and this figure declined to two in subsequent years (Virola, 2012).

In contrast, the production of independent films has increased in the past decade. While there is no official registry in the country that records the exact number, figures from the Film Academy of the Philippines indicate that the number of indie films exhibited in commercial movie houses steadily rose from 1 in 2005 to 44 in 2011 (Carreon, 2011). These are aside from those exhibited in local and international film festivals and private venues, which constitute the majority of indie movies produced. Film scholars and practitioners in the country attribute the increase to two main factors: the development of digital video production technologies and the establishment of film schools that enabled a new generation of filmmakers to learn and develop their own film language (Lumbera, 2000; Tioseco, 2007).

Prior to the development of the more affordable DV and HD cameras and tapes and PC-based video editing programs, filmmakers who worked or wanted to create movies outside mainstream studios had to buy expensive film stock and pay for processing and editing fees (Tioseco, 2007). Aside from making the means of production more accessible, these technologies also allowed greater flexibility and artistic control as filmmakers are able to experiment with and edit their scenes right at the set (R. Red, personal communication, October 15, 2010). Since the introduction of these technologies, more indie films have been produced and gained local and international recognition. Among those that were awarded in international film festivals include Raymond Red's (2000) *Anino/Shadow* which won the Cannes International Film Festival Palme D' Or award; Aureus Solito's *Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros/The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros* (Lee & Solito, 2006) which won various awards in 15 international film festivals; Jeff Jeturian's *Kubrador/Bet Collector* (Alonso, Rayala & Jeturian, 2007) which won at the Moscow International Film Festival; and Brillante Mendoza's *Kinatay/Butchered* (Costet, Nacianceno & Mendoza, 2009) which won the Best Director award at the 2009 Cannes International Film Festival. With the increase and recognition, critics and scholars have optimistically predicted that indie filmmaking would be the sector that would save Philippine cinema due to their quantity, artistic quality, and socially relevant themes that differ from the usual narratives of mainstream films (Estavillo, 2006; Tioseco, 2007; Constantino, 2010; Reyes, 2011).

In the Philippines, there are two main festivals that provide funding and exhibition for indie filmmakers. One is the *Cinemataya* Film Festival launched in

2004 by the state's Cultural Center of the Philippines. The festival is open to individuals who have not directed a commercial film and gives P500,000 (\$11,100) seed money for each of the 10 winning entries (Tioseco, 2007). The other festival is Cinema One Originals started in 2005 by the mainstream television station ABS-CBN. It awards P200,000 (\$4,400) to its ten winning entries. Both festivals are held in the nation's capital and the majority of winners are Metro Manila-based filmmakers. In 2008, the state's National Commission on Culture and the Arts has initiated *Cinema Rehiyon* or Regional Cinema, a non-competition film festival that sponsors the exhibition of indie films made by those based outside Metro Manila. The festival aims to provide exhibition venues for up-and-coming regional filmmakers and encourage the production of vernacular films. Although *Cinema Rehiyon* does not provide prize money like *Cinemataya* and Cinema One Originals, it provides more avenues for exhibition for province-based filmmakers.

5.5.1 *Handum* as an independent film

There are occasions when private organizations sponsor small film festivals or screenings to either commemorate a significant day in the nation's history or to mark an event. One such film festival was *amBisyon* 2010 sponsored by ABS-CBN News Corporation, a subsidiary of the largest media conglomerate in the Philippines. *AmBisyon* 2010 was held before the May 2010 Philippine national elections and invited 20 filmmakers to create short films that represent their own "vision of a future in the context of a country locked in poverty" (de la Cruz & Villaluna; 2010). The festival was announced six months before the elections and offered a P30,000

(\$667) fund for 14 established and six new indie filmmakers to create a 4-8 minute film that tackled the themes: corruption, democracy, economy, education, environment, health, justice and human rights, population, poverty, and security (de la Cruz & Villaluna; 2010; Lopez, 2010).

Handum was conceptualized by its director and screenwriter Manuel Magbanua Jr as an entry to *ambisyon* 2010 (M. Magbanua, personal communication, October 20, 2010). Magbanua finished a degree as an electrical and communications engineer and began working as a sound and lighting technician at ABS-CBN before rising through the ranks and joining the late actor and rap artist Francis Magalona to set up Filipino Pictures, Inc, a small audiovisual production company. Magbanua's employment at ABS-CBN and connection to Magalona enabled him to meet and work in partnership with mainstream directors and producers who also produced indie movies. At present, Magbanua heads Filipino Pictures, which accepts filming contracts and conducts short filmmaking workshops. During my fieldwork, I was invited to attend the sixth filmmaking workshop of Filipino Pictures in its small office in Quezon City, Metro Manila. The workshop included two weeks of lectures by established filmmakers before participants shoot, edit, and exhibit their films. It started on October 18, 2010 but the lectures took more than two weeks to complete because of the frequent cancellation of the lecturers due to their filming commitments. Despite this and the austere set up of Filipino Pictures' office, the workshop attracts ample participants due to its low fees and the participation of established filmmakers as lecturers.

Magbanua narrated that he long wanted to create a film of his own after being years in the business and was encouraged to start on a project after learning about *amBisyon* 2010. When the festival was announced in November 2009, he started working on the concept and script and submitted these as an entry. Motivated further by the script he wrote, Magbanua decided to push through in making the film whether his entry won or not. According to him, he wanted to exhibit the movie in Antique before the May 2010 elections and so it would be too late by the time the festival would announce the winning scripts by February. In addition, another film director advised him not to start shooting with anything less than P100,000 (\$2,222) and so even if his entry won, he would still need to raise funds. Magbanua then started emailing his friends and former classmates to ask support for his project, among them were members of *kinaray-a.com*. After three months of utilizing his 'text and email brigade,' he was able to raise the P100,000 he needed (M. Magbanua, personal communication, October 30, 2010).

Magbanua stated that *Handum* was "inspired by the events in our province" and defined it as a "political film about the present political situation in Antique and the Philippines" (personal communication, October 30, 2010). The short film critiques poverty and shows how the corruption, neglect of public duty, and nepotism that characterize how cacique democracy (Anderson, 1998) in the entire country could perpetuate social problems. He stated that the short film was based on the story of his friend who was a member of the local youth council who approached a high-profile official in Antique to ask for funding for the dilapidated road in their village. Although the villain in the film has a referent in Antique, Magbanua stated that the

film critiques the citizens of the province and the country more because they are the ones who suffer from their own actions by electing corrupt and negligent public officials:

In a way it is also a lesson, hopefully also a lesson to the voters [and] to the people because it is like they are also one of the causes [of poverty] and so we should not always blame the government because we are the ones putting up the government (M. Magbanua, personal communication, October 30, 2010).

Aside from being a political critique, Magbanua also aimed for *Handum* to become a vehicle for promoting Karay-a culture and talent. The short film's Facebook page stated that it aims to

promote the language Kinaray-a and pride of being an Antiqueño. Lastly, may this open another venue for other Antiqueño artists who are into filmmaking to tell our own stories. We enticed the world with our Original Kinaray-a Music. Now is the time to tell the world our own Kinaray-a stories (Magbanua, 2010a, par. 4).

With this, Magbanua casted Karay-a actors by conducting auditions with the help of the cultural non-profit organization *Paranubliun* Antique in which OKM artist Sammy Rubido and his family were members. The main protagonist in the film was played by Rubido's son Samuel Jr, while his wife Maria Lerio played the role of the protagonist's mother. Rubido also composed and performed the short film's official soundtrack *Napulo ka Sugo/Ten Commandments*. Aside from Rubido and his son and wife, members of kinaray-a.com were also casted in the film. The online community's website administrator Fridy Panaguiton played the mayor's driver while members Stephen Checa, Antonio Gay, and Nelson Arriola, Jr played Ed, Tonio,

and Nukis respectively in the short film. This is aside from the fact that Rubido himself is a member of the online community and that Panaguiton produced the 15-minute outtake of the short film. Magbanua stated that *Handum* was a collaborative creation right from the start, wherein his friends and the film's cast and crew shared their time and knowledge in audiovisual production. Its funding came from

friends all over the world, mostly Antiqueños who contributed from 2 hundred pesos up to 20 thousand pesos. Some donated food, eggs, chicken, beer etc., which the cast, staff and crew consumed during the filming and pre-production meetings. Some of the restaurants in Antique sponsored our meal and some establishments provided us transportation services (Magbanua, 2010a, par. 3).

Handum was shot on February 2010 for two days mainly in the small village of Catungan 1 of the municipality of Sibalom. Post-production works took two weeks and so the film was ready for exhibition at the end of the month (M. Magbanua, personal communication, October 30, 2010). Magbanua intended for the film to be "screened in different towns, *barangays*, schools, restaurants in Antique and several places in Manila" (Magbanua, 2010a, par. 4) and serve as a precedent for future Kinaray-a films. But because of its explicit critique of a high-profile politician in the province, the film exhibition plan did not push through. I will discuss *Handum's* exhibition in Antique more at the concluding part of this chapter.

5.5.2 Philippine independent cinema, the problem of exhibition, and the discourse of poverty porn

In an open forum conducted during the workshop of Filipino Pictures, Magbanua and filmmakers Raymond Red, Jon Red, Milo Paz, EJ Salcedo, Ogie Tibayan, Pamela Miras, and Bombi Plata emphasized the importance of funding and exhibition in filmmaking. Despite the ubiquity and affordability of digital film technologies and the steady increase in production, Philippine independent filmmakers still face two huge obstacles in filmmaking. Cannes awardee Raymond Red narrated his experience that before the diffusion of digital technologies in the 1980s, film equipment was unaffordable to film students like him. Presently, however,

with DV films for only P85³³ you can shoot for 60 minutes at least, two hours if the tape is long. Now we have the DSLRs, you can shoot [with it], right? There is no problem anymore. You just keep on erasing your hard disks. Which means that what is exciting now is that the technology allowed for more filmmakers to independently make their films (R. Red, personal communication, October 15, 2010).

With technology helping solve the problem of production, Red and the other filmmakers at the forum agreed that the biggest hurdles right now for Philippine indie filmmakers are funding and exhibition, which are largely, but not entirely, matters of economics. Like most of their counterparts around the world, Philippine indie filmmakers create and self-finance their own film projects. Looking for funds to produce the film is difficult enough even for established filmmakers, and this is the reason why most of them need to work in advertising or mainstream film and

³³A little over than a dollar

television companies. Documentary filmmaker Milo Paz succinctly explained the cycle that most Filipino indie filmmakers go through after making a film that they want. They incur

debts, [which] you don't know if you can pay. And then, so that you can pay for it you will look for other work. You will make any project, it's up to Batman³⁴. So you have to think about it. I mean, in the future can you still go through that kind of cycle? We all get old (M. Paz, personal communication, October 15, 2010).

One of the solutions that the directors in the open forum cited is exhibition in commercial venues. Red, in particular, believed that it is a matter of pragmatics and social responsibility for indie filmmakers to have their films exhibited in movie theaters and other commercial venues. He stated that “cultural institutions” and “film festivals” have always been present for indie filmmakers but these “are not self sustaining” because these rarely help in recuperating the costs they incurred in the production:

What we are fighting for right now, in a small country like the Philippines... is a space in that commercial arena. And this is not because our goal is commercialism, but because we have to bow down to it. As I said, films are expensive [to produce]. I want to at least recuperate the money [spent for the last film] so I can make the next film... I already have lots of ideas but I cannot make the next film (personal communication, October 15, 2010).

Exhibition in commercial venues would not only allow a majority of filmgoers to view the films, but also remove the image of indie films as the crude and rough counterpart to mainstream films. More importantly, it brings the film and its

³⁴*Bahala na si Batman*, or it's up to Batman is a colloquial expression which means it is up to fate.

message to the people who will benefit from it. Red strongly believes that the Philippine audience is ready for the sociopolitical themes and avant-garde approaches of indie films, and that the concept of the 'dumb audience' is only an excuse of mainstream film producers and commercial theater owners to continue with status quo. He also cited his frustration in working for the commercial release of his latest indie film *Himpapawid* (Manila Skies, 2009) despite the recognition it gained from various international film festivals:

The film has been to 16 film festivals but I am sad because that is not my goal. I just used the festivals to generate press promotion. And yet my main goal is to show it to the Filipino because the story is Filipino. This is where the reality of the film is rooted. That is the most important thing for me. Until I have not exhibited my film to the Filipino, I am still a failure, no matter how many awards I received (personal communication, October 15, 2010).

However, until they are able to convince "business people" to "give [their] films a chance" (personal communication, October 15, 2010), it remains that film festivals are the main exhibition venues for indie movies. Currently, the questions on the ethics of mediating the images and narratives of the poor are raised against the entire Philippine indie film sector due to the prevalence and exhibition of 'poverty porn' films in international festivals. Almost all of the international film festival winners have poverty as their theme. The story of *Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros*, for instance, centers on gay teenager Maximo and his family of petty thieves living in a slum area. The opening sequence of the movie starts with panoramic shots of a congested shantytown and gradually shows the squalor of the area by zooming in on the floating rubbish in an open sewer. All these scenes are displayed

while the lyrics “This is my country Philippines, my Philippines” are sung in the background. Jeffrey Jeturian’s *Kubrador* starts with almost the same opening scene by showing how a bet collector is chased by the police through a shantytown. Brillante Mendoza’s *Kinatay* narrates how a young police student living in a slum area finds himself in the company of a gang who unceremoniously rape and dismember a prostitute.

The graphic representation of the squalor, misery, and desperation of slum life have conjured allegations that filmmakers in the sector are exoticizing, exploiting, and reifying the marginality of the poor. Because they were screened mostly in international venues, they have also been accused of exacerbating the stereotypical representation of the Philippines as a Third World country. The debate on poverty porn in the Philippines mirrors the global discourse on the issue. On one hand, there are those who state that films reflect and are a critique of stark social realities. Columnist and filmmaker Pepe Diokno (2010), for instance, argued that indie films play the crucial role of bringing poverty back to the attention of a public who is prone to social amnesia. He stated that demanding that filmmakers stop making films about poverty is like

demanding people to hide their true emotions and paint a smile over a pout. It’s like building a facade of beautiful houses to cover the sight of slum areas — preposterous, but this really happens! Like a scene in *Engkwentro* where when the father beats his child up over missing drugs, a nearby radio starts playing, “*Ang saya saya!*” (“Life’s so happy!”) — a line, believe it or not, that wakes millions of Filipinos up each day so they can forget the dreary lives they inhabit (par. 13).

Film scholar and critic Rolando Tolentino (2007) made a similar argument regarding the need to show the present prevailing conditions in the country. He emphasized that films like *Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros* are in line with the subversive traditions of Philippine Cinema wherein movies like Lino Brocka's *Maynila sa Kuko ng Liwanag/Manila in the Claws of Neon* and *Bayan Ko, Kapit sa Patalim/My Country: Clutching at Blades* (1975, 1985), Ishmael Bernal's *Manila by Night* (1980), Marilou Diaz Abaya's *Karnal/Carnal* (1984); and Mike de Leon's *Sister Stella L* (1984) critiqued the Marcos dictatorship by representing the conditions in country. These and the range of contemporary indie films allow the depiction of the paradox of modernity wherein human beings find it "hard to be human because of systemic poverty" (Tolentino, 2007, par. 7).

On the other hand, there are scholars, critics, and filmmakers who contend that these films present nothing but stereotypical representations of the poor. Urban anthropologist Skilty Labastilla (2007), for instance, acknowledges the role of subversive films that critiqued the nation's period of Martial Law but pointed out that the sociopolitical context in the Philippines has changed since. He states that that the poor person right now is an

empowered person who is more often than not a member of a community organization and integrated into the larger society. Though poverty still exists, poor people now have more voice. There is virtually no informal slum community in the country today that has no community organization (p. 131).

Labastilla also emphasized the implications of claiming to represent 'the reality out there' when in fact these are just 'versions of reality' which some indie film

makers peddle to be 'more interesting.' Among the implications he stated was the reification of Oscar Lewis' 'culture of poverty', which conceptualized it as an inevitable and inescapable condition for some persons. Citing the ethical implications of these poverty porn films, he argued that,

Filmmakers nowadays, in the age of globalization, should realize that their films are not just forms of entertainment but are taken as cultural artifacts. Moviegoers watching the film in Kerala or Montreal or Cairo will never realize that the film does not show the real situation of our urban poor. That is why our filmmakers should exercise responsibility in choosing their subjects and must do research about them (p. 132).

Interestingly the exhibition of films mediating poverty in international film festivals is criticized even within the indie film sector. The directors at the open forum of Filipino Picture's filmmaking workshop discussed the sector's 'festival whores,' or directors who make films on poverty and submit it to international film festivals to increase their prestige without making any effort to exhibit it to the Philippine public. Milo Paz stated that such practice resulted in some filmmakers being stuck in a cycle of repeatedly making poverty films. The practice also delegitimizes the whole indie sector and future films that aim to tackle poverty (M. Paz, personal communication, October 15, 2010). Such displeasure over poverty porn was again highlighted when last year *Ang Babae sa Septic Tank/The Woman in the Septic Tank* (Martinez & Rivera, 2011) won the Best Picture and other top awards at *Cinemataya* and became the country's official entry to the 84th American Film Academy Awards. The film caustically parodies the Philippine indie film sector by presenting a story about three neophyte filmmakers who dream of 'making it to

the Oscars' by creating a movie about a slum-dwelling mother who sells one of her child to a Caucasian pedophile. It shows how 'reality out there' is framed by the protagonists who revel in the beauty of a slum area and its nearby garbage dump while planning their film's sequences. It makes a specific critique of award winning indie films like *Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros* and *Kubrador* by parodying their main characters in a song and dance number.

While *Ang Babae sa Septic Tank* did not make it to the shortlist of films at the Academy Awards, it created a powerful statement against indie filmmakers creating movies about poverty by depicting them as exploitative auteur. Interestingly, its rights were bought by the media conglomerate ABS-CBN, which marketed and helped make it the 'top-grossing indie film of all time' (Sancon, 2011). While the film was effective in highlighting the problem of poverty porn, it makes a blanket statement regarding all indie movies depicting images and narratives of the poor. It is still too early to see how *Ang Babae sa Septic Tank* will ultimately affect the discourse on poverty porn, but based on the reviews and articles regarding the film, the depictions of indie films and filmmakers in the movie are hailed to be the general truth.

To summarize this section, Philippine indie filmmakers have been enabled by cheaper and accessible video production technologies. With the decline in quantity of mainstream films, the sector is regarded to be the redeeming hope of Philippine cinema due to its socially relevant themes, artistic qualities that are recognized overseas, and increasing number. However, indie filmmakers face further constraints. Even when funding for production is available, exhibition remains

uncertain. Further, there is a prevailing discourse that makes a blanket judgment against indie filmmakers mediating poverty.

This is the state of the discourse upon which *Handum* will articulate itself and its aims of emancipation. However, if we analyze the film using the framework discussed above, *Handum* represents poverty not for aestheticization but for the aims of indignation and emancipation.

5.6 *Handum*: Reflexive Indignation at Corruption

Handum takes place in a farming village at a period leading up to the local election. Its story begins with Toto, a son of a farming couple, who is worried about how long his tattered shoes will be able to hold up as he walks to school everyday. Toto does not complain that he has to travel on foot through a kilometer of dirt road each day, but he worries that he may not be able to achieve his *handum* or 'dream' of finishing his studies and become an architect because the only footwear he has and uses to get to school is already disintegrating. The dry dust, rocks, and cow dung in the dilapidated road have chipped off the color from Toto's shoes, whose front soles are wide agape. Aware that they may not yet afford to buy him a new pair, Toto first asks his parents Ladio and Neneng the two questions he will repeat throughout the film: why is their village Binayaan, which literally translates as 'abandoned,' the only one with a dirt road in the entire town and when will it be paved? With the road fixed, Toto thinks that his tattered shoes may get him through in primary school.

It is Toto's constant questioning that sets the narrative in motion. After failing to get an answer from his parents, Toto asks village officials Acay, Ricky, and Kapitan

Teban as he encounters them. Unfortunately, all of them fail to give Toto a clear answer because they themselves cannot understand why their pleas for funding to improve their road and to implement their community projects are continuously ignored by their town mayor Boy Maytuig. Toto then asks for help from his best friend Jinkee whose neighbor Ed works as a driver for the mayor. Jinkee, however, discourages Toto by reminding him of the arrogance of those who are close to those in power.

Determined to get answers, Toto runs up to the mayor when the latter visits his school. The answer Mayor Maytuig gave Toto was more of a condition than a definite reply: In his 20-year career in politics, the people of Binayaan did not vote for him. Thus, if Toto wants a paved road, then he must help him win in the village. This encounter between Toto and Mayor Maytuig is one of the main scenes when the ethical stance of indignation is made manifest in the film.

Given a condition that is impossible for him to fulfill, Toto continues to walk along the derelict road. Fortunately, his parents are finally able to buy him a new pair of shoes. But how long would a new pair be able to stand the road's threadbare conditions is the crucial question posed, or metaphorically, how long should the poor and the wider public tolerate negligent and corrupt officials? The statement '*kung buhay lang si Beloy*' or 'if only Beloy was alive' which refers to Evelio 'Beloy' Javier, the well-loved governor of Antique who was assassinated during the Martial Law, concludes the film.

5.6.1 The meaning of poverty in *Handum*

Amartya Sen's conceptualization of poverty as a relative deprivation of a person's capability to function is represented right from the beginning of *Handum*. Following the low angle shots of the opening sequence that introduces the derelict conditions of the road and Toto's shoes, the camera cuts into a long shot. This image then presents the viewer of Binayaan's relative deprivation, with its lush, green rice field on the left standing as a symbol of the capabilities of its rural people and the arid and potholed road as the difficulties they have to face everyday. These capabilities and difficulties are also embodied in Toto who, in the next scene, is brought closer to the spectator through a mid shot that shows him sweating from walking under the hot sun yet wearing a happy expression as he enters the classroom where his teacher is making an announcement that Mayor Maytuig will visit their school in the coming week.

Handum starts with Toto but its narrative does not entirely center on him. In the following scenes, the spectator or viewer is gradually introduced to the Binayaan community where most of its rural poor are busy with their everyday tasks and fulfilling their responsibilities to their family or community. The entire village, despite its economic marginality and lack of infrastructure, is presented as an orderly community whose members are able to take care of more than their basic needs. Toto's classroom looks run down, dim, and with walls that need repainting, but it is full of tidy, uniformed, and mannerly students listening attentively and responding with respect to their teacher. Even Jinkee, who is implied in the film to

be poorer than Toto and his future object of affection, looks neat and has time to watch a group of students practice a dance number.

Also, the Binayaan officials whom Toto later confronts have specific projects for their village. Acay, for instance, leads a women's group and is preparing for the upcoming village *fiesta*. Councilman Ricky heads the neighborhood watch that patrols the village at night after reports of robbery by an outside gang were made. Except for Mayor Maytuig, the public officials in *Handum* are not corrupt and perform their duty to their village despite the lack of funds for their projects. As with Toto's family, his father Ladio who just retired from working as a private driver earns the family's livelihood as a farmer and mechanic while his mother Nene works late at night taking care of their household's needs and manages their finances. *Handum's* characters are not rich, but they do not resort to crime or violence or stand idle and let poverty turn each other's life miserable. If food is about to run low, they turn to credit as narrated in the scene where Nene sends Toto to Acay's store to borrow ten pesos' (\$0.22) worth of cooking oil. Later the movie implies that Nene pays her debts to Acay after selling a piglet. *Handum* characters are, in other words, relatively deprived but are capable, honest, and able to function through mutual and dignified interdependence.

Visually, poverty in *Handum* is signified through the worm's eye view and long shots of Binayaan's derelict road, the close-ups of Toto's tattered shoes, and the shots within immediate exterior and the interior of their house. Toto and his family live in a cramped, dimly lit, and wooden shack with a floor that is uncemented. The shack has no partitions, and farm implements and sacks of grains and animal feeds

and lay alongside their bare wooden bed, dining table, and bench (Figure 4). Except for these and the images of the road and Toto's shoes, *Handum's* visual elements signify more of a rural rather than a poverty-stricken community. Binayaan is represented as spacious and with wide and clean landscapes. Bright and long shots of the sunset and rice fields where children play among farm and domestic animals are alternately shown. Further, while all characters have characteristics that signify the peasant class such as suntanned skin, absence of make-up, and simple clothing, they appear healthy and kempt. It is in their dialogue, however, wherein we learn about their relative deprivation.

NOTE:

This figure/table/image has been removed to comply with copyright regulations. It is included in the print copy of the thesis held by the University of Adelaide Library.

Figure 4. The interior shot of Toto's home in *Handum*, where the cramped and dimly lit room, uncemented flooring, and bare furniture visually mediate his family's relative deprivation.

In the climax of the movie, Toto and Jinkee talks about their dreams in life. The sequence that introduces this segment uses imagery that highlights rurality: a clean creek, the wooden bridge where the two children sit, open and sunny blue skies, wide natural landscapes, and golden rice fields that have just been harvested. In the scene, Jinkee wears a simple but neat white blouse, denim pants, rubber slippers, a watch, and small dangling earrings. If not for her verbally revealing that she was not able to go to school the previous morning because she had to take care of her siblings, the spectator would not know about her family's economic status. Jinkee's dialogue and image would seem contradictory for a spectator who expects that the poor have no capability to take care of their appearance. There is no contradiction in this montage, however, if we follow Sen's notion that poverty is not absolute.

This is not to state that *Handum* sugarcoats poverty or shows only the positive side of rural people. On the contrary, the central message of the short film lies on critique of the rural public for contributing to their own poverty. One scene that presents this is when Toto was sent by Nene to borrow cooking oil from Acay. In front of the latter's store, the characters Tonio, Duday, and Nukis were drinking bottle after bottle of cheap rum. The scene critiques the habit of some rural people who waste their meager income on alcohol or to show off to their friends. Magbanua also uses the scene to advise the youth against turning idle by showing a series of close-up shots of Tonio, Nukis, and Duday drinking while Acay states her hope that Toto does not turn out like them. Yet even though the short film deploys the three as bad examples, it does not portray them as drunks who lose control and turn violent.

The three are also aware that Mayor Maytuig will visit their village, and in this sense, are portrayed to be connected to their community.

Handum thus represents poverty as a 'relative constraintment' of both Binayaan and its citizens. The village has fertile soil, wide and open landscapes, and even a school but it lacks the crucial road that will link it closer to its outer world. Except for Tonio, Duday and Nukis, who still have redeeming qualities, Binayaan's citizens lead productive and dignified lives. They rely on each other by taking on more than one occupation, borrowing instead of stealing, and persisting instead of giving up. Poverty does not consume them because they are still capable of functioning as a child, student, parent, neighbor, or official in their community. And they do so without shame or fear of reprisal. Toto, the main character in the movie, has poor parents but is able to fulfill his role as student by going to school everyday despite the state of his shoes and the road he walks on. He is also able to enact his role as a citizen by searching for the cause of Binayaan's decrepit conditions. His parents Ladio and Neneng are presented as capable of providing for the needs of six children by working hard as farmers. By selling a piglet, Ladio and Neneng are able to buy Toto's new shoes and pay their debts to Acay. Ricky, Acay, and Kapitan Teban are shown to be active public officers of Binayaan despite the lack of support and funding from their mayor.

The root cause of poverty portrayed in the short film is therefore not the characters' lack of money. It is instead the indifference of the highest public official brought by his vindictiveness and hunger for power. Because of this indifference, Binayaan is constrained from becoming a progressive village and Toto from

achieving his dream of becoming an architect. Acay finds it harder to enact the plans she has for the women's group she leads and Ricky continues to patrol the village at night using only a tricycle. Their poverty is thus a relative constrain that limits the freedom to enact their roles and "to live the way they would like" (Sen, 2005, p. 34).

Despite these relative constraints, the movie allows its protagonist to imagine a progressive future. Toto is driven by his dream to become an architect and wants to be assured that he would be able to fulfill this. His dream is what drives him to question the prevailing social conditions in his village and envision the "possibility of a completely different life" for him and his community (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 147). He also encourages the pessimistic Jinkee to dream by asking her if she has one. Dreaming has also a strong significance for the film's intended addressees. Evelio 'Beloy' Javier appropriated the message of the song *The Impossible Dream* to encourage his fellow Antiqueños and Antiqueñas to envision and collectively build a more progressive province. This *handum ni Beloy*, or dream of Beloy is still widely cited in the province when its citizens are asked to support development programs or political agendas. With Toto's dream of being an architect and the reference to Beloy Javier's exhortation, the film thus presents the possibility of a more progressive community. In other words, the poverty represented in *Handum* is not absolute and perpetual. The short film encourages change rather than condemning people to a life of misery.

5.6.2 Indignation as the ethical positioning of the spectator in *Handum*

In representing poverty as a relative and changeable condition, *Handum* exhorts its spectators to take action. The short film does this by evoking indignation against two specific perpetrators: Mayor Boy Maytuig and, interestingly, its intended addressees. I will first discuss the indignation against Mayor Maytuig, who has a direct referent in Antique, before discussing the role of Antiqueños and Antiqueñas in perpetuating their social condition as manifested in the film.

Indignation as a form of pity is first constructed in the short film through its prevalent use of warm hues and low and eye-level camera angles that allows spectators to feel sympathy towards the characters. Most of the camera shots in *Handum* overly use orange and yellow filters even in exterior scenes, which – intentionally or not – turn the moods of energy and joy usually conveyed by the colors (Coates, 2010) into a sensation of intense dry heat. The prevalent use of warm colors evokes more sympathy to the characters as the heat it conveys further presents them as a long-suffering people. The only scene in the film which featured shots using cool or specifically blue filters was when Mayor Maytuig was talking with Toto to represent the former as an unfeeling and power hungry leader. The short film also made a profuse use of low and eye-level shots, which tries to bring the characters into equal footing with its intended spectators. Most of the shots in *Handum* frame a close-up view that either looks up or is at an eye-level with the character in the scene. This focuses the gaze of the viewer to the character rather than the place or surroundings in which the scene was shot. The focus on the

character is crucial for the short film because as I stated above, poverty is represented more in the dialogue rather than visuals.

Handum gradually builds up indignation against Mayor Maytuig but there are three major scenes that highlight him as a perpetuator who causes the misery in Binayaan and of its people. These are the conversation between Neneng and Acay, the speech of Mayor Maytuig, and sequences of Toto walking along the dirt road on his way to school. The dialogue between Acay and Toto's mother Neneng takes place while the latter is washing by hand a piece of cloth outside their house at night. Acay drops by to confirm Mayor Maytuig will visit Binayaan in the following morning and tells Neneng of her plan to report the robberies in their village as well as ask for funds for the upcoming *fiesta*. The latter, however, discourages Acay by citing how the long-time politician has consistently neglected Binayaan. The following is an excerpt of Nene's reply to Acay:

You think he'll pay attention to us? He's been in that position for more than 20 years... Has anything happened? He hasn't done anything but fight with everyone else. So only he can benefit from everything. Competing for projects, always wanting to be the hero (*Handum*, 2010).

Acay believes that their mayor will listen to her and ignores Nene's advice. Mayor Maytuig's aide, however, cordoned off Acay, implying that the former was not interested in talking to her but only on delivering the grandstanding speech he had for the people of Binayaan. The sequences leading up to the speech scene accomplishes what Bakhtin (1984) referred to as the "*comic decrowning*" (p. 162, emphasis in original) or symbolic stripping of power from those with authority. On the way to the village, the Mayor Maytuig bumps his head against the window of his

SUV as his vehicle runs through a big pothole. He also inadvertently steps into a mound of animal dung on his way to the stage where he will deliver his speech. These scenes mock and allow him to experience the consequences of his neglect of Binayaan. Such stripping of power, however, is only temporary. Mayor Maytuig's speech effectively gives his authority back to him and enables him to brag and make empty promises to the village:

Listen closely. The town has developed because of my projects. The two classrooms I promised, I can give that to you if you vote for me. All that I ask from you is to help me again. So that the projects that benefit the other villages will reach you as well (*Handum*, 2010).

The scene gives flesh to Neneng's description of their mayor whose only concern is to stay in power and thus builds up indignation towards the arrogant character. But it is the scene following the speech that concretely justifies the construction of Mayor Maytuig as the perpetuator of poverty in Binayaan. After giving his speech, he hurriedly goes back to his vehicle to leave the village. Toto follows him and calls out aloud his title. With implied hesitation, Mayor Maytuig draws down the window of his SUV and gives attention to Toto. After introducing himself, Toto asks the question that has been feeding his anxiety: when will Binayaan's road be fixed? In a surprise gesture, Mayor Maytuig lets Toto in the car, shows him the roster of votes he got from the past elections, and points out that he never won in Binayaan. Instead of a clear answer, the corrupt mayor poses the question of why he should help Binayaan. He also creates a condition that would be impossible for someone as young as Toto to achieve, that is, to help him win the next election in the village. This scene constructs Mayor Maytuig as the perpetuator of Toto's and Binayaan's misery.

While a peasant boy asking the highest official of his town may seem unfeasible, the scene vividly depicts how Philippine communities associated with rival parties are deliberately deprived of the public funds due to them.

The sequences of Toto walking along the dirt road on his way to school also anchor Mayor Maytuig as the concrete perpetuator of poverty. The opening sequence of the film wherein the viewer is introduced to the derelict conditions of Binayaan's road and Toto's shoes is repeated twice in *Handum*. At the start of the movie, the worm's eye view of the road frames Toto's approaching feet between a big rock and a mound of cow dung before a speeding car passes by and covers the sweating protagonist with a cloud of dry dust. This scene is repeated the following day when Toto again walks the same road. This time, however, Toto is holding a cold drink contained in a small plastic bag with a straw. A jeepney passes by and accidentally hurls a stone that goes through Toto's drink, splattering his white shirt with the yellow liquid. The scene further builds Toto's distress and enables the spectator to understand more the difficulty of walking everyday through a dirt road. Toto does not only have to make sure that his shoes stay together while he walks to school everyday, he also needs to be mindful of the hard objects that may hurt him along the way. The scene thus helps build sympathy towards him.

But it is in *Handum's* last scene where indignation is most fully enunciated against Mayor Maytuig. Toto, after learning from Mayor Maytuig why Binayaan is the only town with an unpaved road, starts to walk to school wearing a new pair of rubber shoes that Nene bought for him after selling a piglet. The whiteness of the shoes contrasts vividly against the brown dirt upon which Toto walks, and suggests to the

spectator a sense of resolution to the boy's problems. But the new pair of shoes would soon start to wear out after a cargo truck speeds by and runs over a mound of cow dung, spattering it all over Toto's new footwear. The scene graphically represents how the efforts of the poor become easily devalued if structural inequalities are not addressed, and makes Mayor Maytuig more blameworthy. With the main protagonists represented as capable and striving citizens who desire change and progress for their community, and Mayor Maytuig as uncaring and corrupt, indignation to the latter as a perpetuator is clearly communicated.

But aside from Mayor Maytuig, *Handum* constructs its intended addressees as co-perpetuators of poverty in Binayaan. The rural village stands for Antique in *Handum*, and the critique of its tolerant and some self-serving citizens are clearly constructed in the conversation between Acay and Neneng where the latter reminds the viewer how and why politicians like Mayor Maytuig are able to stay in power:

To this day he uses his wealth and his father's name to win elections. *And the people keep playing dumb. They still lack awareness. As long as they're given money, they'll vote for him* (*Handum*, 2010, emphasis mine).

The scene is essentially echoing Magbanua's criticism of vote buying in Antique and represents Antiqueños and Antiqueñas as co-perpetuators of their own poverty. By either accepting money from vote buying politicians or choosing leaders based on their lineage, they impede the progress of their homeland. In this sense, the representation of poverty in *Handum* is a reflexive self-critique of the ethnic group. Mayor Maytuig's monopoly of power has a root cause: his constituents keep on voting for him in spite of his neglect and corrupt practices.

Given all these, while the short film mediates images and narratives of poverty, it is far from being a form of sublimation of suffering or poverty pornography. By representing poverty as a relative deprivation of its hardworking characters, relying on dialogue more than visuals, having clear perpetrators, and using camera techniques that bring the protagonists closer to the spectators, the film enables Boltanski's concept of indignation which, in line with the politics of pity, is an ethical response and a form of action. In *Handum*, tender-heartedness or benevolence by giving material aid to the sufferer does not address the root causes of the misery of the poor. The film asks its intended addressees to act with reflexive indignation towards negligent and corrupt public officials and to stop from electing these to office. This indignation has been manifest in the online dialogues in kinaray-a.com. It is also signified in the OKM song *Napulo ka Sugo/Ten Commandments* (Rubido, 2009, track 12), which served as the official score for the short film:

Here in our province, who really are you?
A person with principle, or a standing garbage
Do you also have fear in God, the creator?
Or are you from the race of Judas, who is a slave to money?

The repeated questioning in *Napulo ka Sugo's* second stanza reinforces the dreaming or visioning of the possibilities of another life in the homeland (Bakhtin, 1984). By referring to religious constructs, the questions also serve to conjure the ethical sensibilities of *Handum's* intended addressees to act according to what is morally right for their homeland. The song's assertive lyrics, which are a departure from the apolitical stance of most OKM songs, effectively remind Antiqueños and Antiqueñas of their responsibility as citizens of their province.

5.7 Conclusion: An On-going quest for Emancipation

As a case of vernacular mediation, *Handum* was enabled through the sharing of cultural capitals and the availability of cheaper and more accessible video production technologies. The digital short film mediated the collective dream of the Karay-a for a progressive homeland by representing what poverty meant for them. In terms of its production and content, it can already be considered a case for celebrating the affordances of ubiquitous new media because it enabled the ethnic group to collectively enunciate their own version of poverty and thus present an alternative to the hegemonic meanings of the social condition. It also allowed them to showcase their cultural identity. Yet the uneven power relations between the co-creators of *Handum* and one of the main subjects of their criticism illustrate that new media practices and texts do not translate right away to emancipation even if it is the explicit aim.

As stated in Chapter 1, almost all elected officials in the country come from a political dynasty. To ensure that they stay in power, politicians capitalize on their family name and use money and violence during campaign periods (Anderson, 1988). In *Handum*, the character of Mayor Boy Maytuig has a specific referent. The name Maytuig is a paronomasia of the words *may* and *tuig*, which when translated to English, mean have and year, respectively. Combined pronunciation of the two English words results in the homonym of Javier, which is the family name of incumbent governor of Antique, Exequiel 'Boy' Javier. Nene's allusion to Mayor Boy Maytuig's 20 years of being a politician and ruining the family name as well as the use of the first name 'Boy' anchors Exequiel Javier as the person being critiqued in

the short film as he had been elected in the position after the assassination of his brother. As I mentioned earlier, Evelio or Beloy was the well-loved governor of Antique who implemented poverty alleviation programs and cultural events such as the *Binirayan* Festival to develop the collectivity of the Karay-a.

Because the character of Mayor Maytuig has a referent that held a high position in the province's public office and whose party won by landslide in the last election, *Handum* was not distributed and exhibited in Antique as widely as intended. Magbanua was only able to screen it once in the town plaza of San Jose de Buenavista prior to the 2010 election and sold a few DVD copies to some of his friends in the province. The allusion in the short film and the assertive lyrics in *Napulo Ka Sugo* did not go unnoticed by the newly elected governor who allegedly sanctioned Rubido by transferring his post from Antique's capital San Jose de Buenavista to Caluya, a remote island town north of the province (Gay, personal communication, October 19, 2010; Rubido, personal communication, January 10, 2011). Rubido played the councilman Ricky in *Handum* and composed and performed *Napulo ka Sugo* while his son and wife played the characters Toto and Neneng, respectively. Because Rubido worked as a government employee under the provincial governor's office and due to his active and highly visible participation in *Handum*, he was perhaps the most vulnerable among the co-creators of the short film. Fortunately through arbitration, Rubido was able to negotiate against his deployment to the remote island (Rubido, personal communication, January 10, 2011).

Given the possible repercussions of exhibition in Antique, *Handum* was mostly exhibited in local film festivals outside the province. These included the 2nd *Pandayang Lino Brocka Political Film and New Media Festival* in 2010 and *Cinemarehiyon 2011 Baguio and Davao* screenings. These enabled *Handum* to demonstrate the talent and cultural capitals of the digital short film's co-creators. Magbanua also conducted private screenings in a restaurant in Metro Manila and still sells DVD copies of the short film. With all these, it can be stated that the co-creators of *Handum* achieved a milestone in producing a film that enunciated the collective aim of their ethnic group for a progressive homeland despite its limited exhibition in Antique.

Yet it is equally important to likewise acknowledge that *Handum* was disrupted in achieving its aim. The film was able to reach only a few of its intended addressees who are being called to reflect on role they play in the continued underdevelopment of their homeland and act. Thus, they were not able to carry out the intent expressed in the digital short film. Because it was exhibited more in film festivals and outside of Antique, there is also a risk that the reflexive indignation it presented could be categorically judged as sublimation or pure slum naturalism. The present discourse on Philippine independent cinema supports the blanket judgment of these films as nothing but perverse voyeurism that takes advantage of the poor. Currently, labels like 'festival whores' and 'purveyors of poverty porn' are being ascribed both to and by indie filmmakers. Indeed, how we talk about poverty and suffering depends on the specific communities in which its discourse is embedded Morris (1996). As

Bakhtin (1986) emphasized, while the creator shapes his utterance, it is the addressee (intended or not) who will determine its meaning and impact.

As an active utterance, however, *Handum* still holds the possibility of achieving its aim in the future through a “superaddressee” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 126) who will one day give that ideal and desired response. To become this superaddressee, the Karay-a will do well to help remove prevailing class structures by pushing for electoral reform, selecting responsible leaders, and challenging corruption and nepotism. These are easier said than done, but are crucial in achieving their aim. As Sen (2000) emphasized, the poor indeed have the capability to address their basic needs, solve some of the problems in their social milieu, and break away from poverty. But unless structural changes occur, inequalities will not go away. For now, even though *Handum* was disrupted in achieving its aim, the Karay-a’s quest for emancipation has not ended and it would be enlightening to see how this is mediated in the future.

Chapter 6: Vernacular Mediation as a Framework

6.1 Summary of Findings and Future Research Questions

Throughout this thesis, I have argued for the need to analyze the dialogical relationships among new media technologies, individual agency, asymmetries in power, and the logics that shape content in explicating the impacts of new media for marginal groups. New media technologies have undergone rapid developments and become ubiquitous yet academic discourse on the subject has not gone much further than the same polemic debate over the utopian versus dystopian claims, production versus consumption processes, and individual agency versus media effects. This is due to the proliferation of concepts that privilege only one aspect of the communicative act, ignore the importance of sociohistorical contexts, or emphasize the engagement with new media as autonomous and closed events.

I have suggested the concept of vernacular mediation – or the dialogical transformation of symbolic meanings through new media technologies – as an analytical framework for analyzing the new media practices of marginal groups. Vernacular mediation acknowledges the ubiquity and pervasiveness of new communication technologies in the everyday life of these groups, but emphasizes the need to investigate each case – whether it is for plain use, co-creation, collective mobilization, or political critique – as highly contextualized utterances that have uneven impacts which cannot be determined *a priori*. Instead of privileging solely the affordances of new media technologies, individual agency, political economy, or

media content, vernacular mediation espouses the integration and analysis of the dynamics of all these aspects.

For this thesis, I followed the cultural studies approach and drew from Roger Silverstone's (1999, 2002, 2005) concept of mediation; Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981, 1984, 1986, 1999a, 1990b) dialogic interaction; and Kent Ono and John Sloop's (1995) concept of the vernacular to investigate the extent to which new media practices enable cultural participation and socioeconomic emancipation of marginal groups. I focused on three cases of new media practices by the Philippine ethnic group Karay-a: the musical subgenre Original Kinaray-a Music (OKM), the online community kinaray-a.com, and the digital short film *Handum*. I approached each case as an utterance with its own set of unique but interconnected sociohistorical contexts. Due to the multiplicity of factors and practices surrounding the production, circulation, reception of these new media, I drew from other research approaches to complement the general methodological framework of the research. The contextualized methodology for each case study enabled me to account for the differences in the discourses to which they were articulated, the conventions they followed, and the impacts they created for their creators, addressees, and the ethnic group as a whole.

In proposing the concept of vernacular mediation, I have argued against viewing new media practices as isolated occurrences made possible only by the affordances of new media technologies or by the sole creativity of individuals. As the last three chapters illustrated, while cheaper technologies enabled the production of OKM, kinaray-a.com, and *Handum*, the development of these vernacular new media was

enabled by institutional and individual arbitrators, past mediations, and the presence of a social issue that needs to be addressed. In OKM, while the digital production technologies enabled Karay-a composers to produce and circulate their own songs, the development of their music was arbitrated by the national and local governments and the non-profit *Paranubliun* Antique. In kinaray-a.com, diasporic Antiqueños and Antiqueñas acted as arbitrators by giving a distinct Karay-a identity to the online community. Film festivals enabled *Handum* to be exhibited after it was implicitly barred from being shown within the province. Without arbitrators, these vernacular new media would not be able to attain acceptance within their current publics. Preceding mediations such as the *Maragtas*, *Binirayan* Festival, and Karay-a literature also enabled OKM, kinaray-a.com, and *Handum* to be articulated to past discourses. These preceding mediations provided the culturally salient symbolic resources that imbued addressivity to these new media and allowed its intended publics to respond. Further, the presence of common social issues such as the stigma attached to their ethnic identity and the poverty in their homeland provided a clear intent that led to the creation of these media.

The impacts of the ethnic group's new media practices lie not only in the creation of cultural texts but in the potential to enable future mediated utterances that would facilitate the achievement of their collective aim. In Chapter 4, I have discussed how reconstructed images of the homeland and ethnic identities in discussed in OKM were further reworked and enabled the forging of social ties that led to small but significant acts of collective mobilization. By sharing self-narratives about longing for their homeland, difficulties of migrant life, poverty, and the importance of their

language, the members of kinaray-a.com discursively reconstructed their ethnic identities and questioned of the root cause of the poverty in their homeland. Although the online community closed down due to the decline in member participation and technical obsolescence, the dialogues it facilitated led to new mediated utterances as these provided renewed symbolic resources for their present needs and ongoing aspiration. One of these is *Handum*, a digital short film that was co-created with the members of kinaray-a.com. As I discussed in Chapter 5, the film enabled the ethnic group to enunciate their own version of poverty and thus present an alternative to the hegemonic meanings of the social condition as well as continue their quest for emancipation.

But as a sociohistorically and discursively situated communicative act, *Handum* was constrained by the asymmetrical power relations between its co-creators, the main subjects, and the prevailing discourses on the mediation of poverty. The case of *Handum* illustrated that new media practices do not directly lead to emancipation even if it is the explicit aim. As such, while it is important to highlight the enabling potentials of new media, it is also equally crucial to acknowledge how uneven power relations, prevalent discourses, and changing technologies constrain a communicative act. Not only these would enable a more balanced analysis and avoid repeating the polemic utopic-dystopic debate regarding the impacts of new media, but more importantly, help pinpoint interventions so that these practices do not reinstate prevailing social hierarchies.

Vernacular mediation does hold the potential to facilitate cultural participation by enabling expressions and meanings to be reshaped and shared. The sharing of

meanings adds to the social and cultural capitals of marginal individuals while bridging and enabling them to forge social ties with one another. These ties can lead to collective acts as we have seen in the case of kinaray-a.com. However, the extent to which these actions challenge prevailing power structures and bring social emancipation depends too on the amount of capitals they possess vis a vis those who hold power in their milieu, the involvement of the majority, and the ability to innovate and adapt to their present needs.

For marginal groups that lack economic capital, it is crucial to extend and strengthen their social ties should they desire to go beyond the production of cultural expressions. As their listening public is limited to their own ethnic group, OKM artists need to overcome competition among themselves and form a collective such as a cooperative that would lobby for and support sustained production and circulation. This would enable them to be more critical as they can be less dependent on grant giving bodies and local officials. For all the creators of three new media, forging social ties with the majority of their ethnic group would also enable a stronger collective that could challenge those who hold power in their social milieu. Most of the addressees of OKM and kinaray-a.com were diasporic Karay-as. For *Handum*, most of the addressees were and film festival goers that are not Karay-a. These new media thus leave those in the province – the majority of their ethnic group – underrepresented and untapped. Lastly, there is also a need to adapt to ensure the continued relevance of their emancipatory aim to their intended publics. This entails not only using the latest new media available but also tackling more political themes and other aspects of Karay-a culture and subjectivity. It is important

to avoid rehashing the same themes and repeating the use of old conventions if the interest of their publics is to be sustained in light of the continued influx of global and national new media texts.

To facilitate these, it is crucial to address questions that emerged during the analysis. Firstly, in light of the diaspora-focused nature of OKM and kinaray-a.com and the exhibition of *Handum* in film festivals, it is equally important to ask what do the reconstructed meanings in these vernacular new media entail for Antique-based Karay-as. In what ways do the reconstructed images of the Karay-a fisher, farmer, and domestic worker in OKM and kinaray-a.com impact their everyday life? Have these empowered representations opened up avenues through which the inequalities in the province might be effectively challenged or are they simply reinstating prevailing structures through the propagation of class unconsciousness (Peterson, 1992)? Also, what mediations are now being practiced both by Antique-based and diasporic Karay-as? New generation technologies and platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and smart phones were already widespread in Antique during the time of fieldwork. Facebook was also cited as one of the reason why their online community closed down. As such, it would be enlightening to see if and how the meanings in these newer media articulate to and continue those shared through OKM, kinaray-a.com, and *Handum*.

6.2 Vernacular Mediation as a Framework

The contextualized approach of vernacular mediation enable the grounded analysis of the extent to which new media practices translate to the emancipation of marginal groups. At a time when media scholarship is still going through the same

polemic made by earlier research on Internet studies, investigating the dynamics of new media technologies, individual agency, political economy, and media content both enable and constrain emancipatory aims are all the more salient. The arguments I made about the importance of contextualizing analysis of new media practices are not novel. Aside from Roger Silverstone, Simon Frith (1998) made a similar point more than a decade ago and noted that what is surprising about the history of contemporary music is how little it has changed despite the enormous developments in recording technology. Within Internet studies, Steve Woolgar (2002) argued for the need to make space for “counter-intuitive findings that run against expectations” (p. 21). In light of the increasingly pervasive new media, a contextualized approach that takes into account the interconnectedness of new media practices can provide more answers rather than those that prescribe *a priori* idyllic or gloom judgments.

By conceptualizing new media practices of marginal as dialogical communicative acts that aim to evoke responses, vernacular mediation allows the analysis to go beyond the collaborative production of new media texts and traces how symbolized meanings are reshaped during the interaction of the creators, their texts, and addressees. It espouses methodological and conceptual flexibility in order to account for the non-linearities, disruptions, and varying impacts of communicative acts without foreclosing their future potentials. This, however, does not entail radical contextualism but recognizing that new media practices are shaped by individuals hold constrained agency. As such, it emphasizes the need to take into

account the dynamics of individual agency, sociohistorical structures, symbolic meanings, and the affordances of new media technologies.

As a framework, vernacular mediation presents several limitations. Firstly, like the other notions of mediation proposed by John Thompson (1995), Jose Martin-Barbero (1993, 2006), and Roger Silverstone (1999, 2002), it is biased towards meanings and thus has a tendency to overemphasize their importance. Secondly, because it attempts to link the production, circulation, reception, and reproduction, a longer time for analysis is required to avoid generalizing a particular set of findings from any of these processes. Lastly, because of its emphasis on contextualization, vernacular mediation also runs the risk of being descriptive and thus falls short in developing a stable set of theory that could be used to explain the wider implications of new media practices.

Nevertheless, the research illustrates how the contextualized analysis of related communicative acts enables us to understand the potentials and limits of ubiquitous new media technologies. The rationale behind the continued analysis of the varying results of mediation is not to critique the communicative practice but to find spaces where we can use media to continue our long search for cultural citizenship, democratic participation, and human emancipation. New media may be ubiquitous, but these aims still have to be realized for the myriad marginal groups in developing countries like the Philippines.

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