

PERFORMING GLOBAL AT *INTELSTAR*: FIGURING THE CALL CENTER ON MANILA STAGE

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Abstract

Set in Makati, the central business district of the National Capital Region, *Welcome to IntelStar* is a monodrama satirizing the call center industry in the Philippines. The performance is an exemplar in positioning a diasporic consequence of globalization vis-à-vis nationalism because it calls on a national sentiment to the extent that the play illustrates resistance to globalization's economic and neoliberal attachments, often perceived as the destructive force of cultural diversity and uniqueness. In relation, the performance used a recurring trope in Philippine culture, which is called in the essay as the Americanization issue: the conception of the Filipino/a as a master mimic of other cultures, particularly the American one. Overall, *Welcome to IntelStar* falls short in its criticism of globalization because it isolated the phenomenon within the politics of the market. But nevertheless, the play allows the Filipino body, through its protagonist Chelsea, to be "visible." With her "expertise" at imitation, Chelsea's visibility destabilizes the global order. Chelsea's mimicry is not simply about wanting to be like those who are imitated, but a strategy to assert a sense of self. This imitative performance implies self-consciousness and intimacy to the one being imitated. In this way, mimicry as self-actualization is a creative strategy and has the potential to overthrow hierarchies of globalization in neo-colonial and neo-imperial orders.

Keywords

contemporary Manila theater, globalization, mimicry, monodrama, problem play, social drama, cosmopolitanism

About the Author

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IN JUNE 2003, I SAW *ALLADEEN*, a large-scale multi-media and semi-documentary performance produced by the Builder's Association of the United States and motiroti of the United Kingdom. Staged at the Victoria Theatre in Singapore during the island-state's annual international arts festival, *Alladeen* is a theatrical spectacle categorized as a "global theatrical experience" by theatre critic and theorist Jon McKenzie. The official website of the *Alladeen* project describes the production as a cross-media performance loosely based on the Aladdin story "taken into the era of global telecommunications and virtual identities." In my reading, *Alladeen* may be considered a good example of global theater for two reasons. First, the production was "globally" produced as it was a collaboration between the United States and the United Kingdom with South Asian actors playing Indian call center agents. Second, the piece featured a sense of the global by affirming what travel writer and commentator Pico Iyer calls the 'global soul' (qtd. in Rae 11), a disposition whose attachment and affiliation are not confined to a singular nation but to the world. In this way, the "global soul" is a cosmopolitan, a citizen-of-the-world. In the official website of the *Alladeen* project, writer and producer Marianne Weems says that the "global soul" belongs to "a kind of migratory tribe, able to see things more clearly than those imprisoned in local concerns."

Mckenzie characterized *Alladeen* as "the disorienting and uncanny play of proximity and distance, presence and absence, familiarity and strangeness, self and other" (28), the features often associated with the 21st century globalization. Like the Aladdin legend, this spectacle dealt with fantasies, instantaneous wish fulfillment and total personal transformation using the call center experiences of Indian agents. *Alladeen* travelled around the globe to various international art and theatre festivals making its categorization of global theatre more categorically explicit.

I felt that the spectacle featured what may be conceived as an optimistic view of a globalized world. This optimism is seen in the production of "human ties" by transnational and multinational corporations based on the accumulation of capital in the global market (i.e., the collaboration between these companies as trans-Atlantic/transnational). This optimism is also manifested in the provocation that the world is becoming boundary-less due to the transnational flows provided by modern telecommunication and technology. The call center industry, in a way, possesses this embodiment of boundary-less due to the transnational flow of smooth communication between call center agents and their clients despite the distance between their locations: call center agents are often located in the Asian region while their clients are commonly located in the United States or in the United Kingdom. As of 2010, Aileen Olimba Salonga and Kenneth Jamandre state that the Philippine island of Cebu in the Visayas is considered the major hub for Business Processing Outsourcing, overtaking offshore offices in Bangalore, India. There are several reasons for the sudden rise of BPOs in the Philippines as explained by Christian Esguerra and Cynthia Balana in their report: higher tax incentives,

provision for infrastructure, high quality of human resources, in particular, the cultural affinity of the Filipino people with the Americans, the neutral accent of the Filipinos, and the ability to speak and understand idioms of the American language. To sum up these reasons, the extravagant ability of the Filipino people to mimic American English provided a grand opportunity for BPO's to invest in the country.

In 2006, Tanghalang Pilipino in the Philippines staged Chris Martinez's *Welcome to IntelStar*, a monodrama on the call center industry. The production was not a global spectacle to the extent that was the *Alladeen* project. Unlike *Alladeen*, the performance did not leave Philippine soil. At the same time, collaboration among multinational or transnational art companies never happened in *Welcome to IntelStar*. Despite these, the monodrama touched the global by, at least, critically representing and interrogating the said phenomenon. In this essay, I use the call center institution as a significant marker of globalization's geography as explored in the theatre, initially scrutinized in *Alladeen*. The call center is used here as a trope linking to the phenomenon of globalization as figured in the Manila stage through Tanghalang Pilipino's production of *Welcome to IntelStar*, the only production in Manila (or in the Philippines) exclusively about the call center institution.

Since the staging of *Welcome to IntelStar*, policies and regulations inside call center institutions have already changed as illustrated by many of Dina Delias's informants in her doctoral thesis. As will be noted later, in the early 2000 (when the play was written and first staged), call center agents did not disclose their actual locations. But today, disclosure of location is no longer a problem. What I intend to do in this essay is to illustrate that despite perspectives on the said industry may have already changed, the perspective that call center industry continues to dislocate and alienate the Filipino individual still lingers in the minds of many Filipinos. This is due to the association of call center agencies with globalization, which in the popular conception of many Filipinos is "evil." Even in popular culture, this purview is exemplified. A good example is the indie film *My Fake American Accent* (2008, dir. Ned Trespeces). In this film, the supervisor welcomes the newly hired agents with the announcement that they (the agents) are finally participating in the global enterprise. But as the film proceeds, we learn that a consequence of being an active participant of the "global," is not only alienation and dislocation but includes heartbreak. Because time is different between the call center world and the outside world of the company, this causes estrangement in the agents' relationships with family and friends.

Maria Rhodora Ancheta critiqued *Welcome to IntelStar* (the drama) using the same paradigm of *globalization as evil* by proposing that the call center industry produces social fragmentation in Philippine society because of its neocolonial status and its origin in the need for an apparent global competitiveness. Nonetheless, this conception of globalization is just one dimension towards understanding the phenomenon holistically. Jagdish Bhagwati asserts, "popular discourse on globalization has tended to blur the line between these different dimensions and

to speak of globalization and its merits and demerits as if it were a homogenous, undifferentiated phenomenon” (443). With this, I intend to expand Ancheta’s textual reading of *Welcome to IntelStar* by problematizing the popular discourse on globalization and highlighting important nuances embodied in the performance of the drama. In Ancheta’s close reading of the drama, she conflates globalization and neo-liberal engagement into one and the same. Generally, neoliberal engagement refers to economic liberalism that favors free trade, privatization, deregulation, and enhancing the role of the private sector in the economic development of modern society. While globalization is implicated in neoliberal engagement, globalization is not entirely about economics alone. Arguably, globalization is also a reference point to discuss affirmations and issues of interdependence in politics, human rights, environment, community, culture, arts, religion and even sports. Drawing from current ethnographic research on the call center industry in the Philippines (especially the projects of Aileen Olimba Salonga and Dina Marie Delias), most of the arguments here are reactions to Ancheta’s incomplete reading of the play. The staging of *Welcome to IntelStar* is significant in the completion of the analysis since there are nuances that may be fleshed out by the actors, the set, the lights, the music and even the reactions of audiences.

Set in Makati, the central business district of the National Capital Region, *Welcome to IntelStar* is a monodrama satirizing the call center industry in the Philippines. With reference to *Alladeen*, I read the performance as an exemplar in positioning a diasporic consequence of globalization vis-à-vis nationalism. First, I will note how the performance calls on a national sentiment (a postcolonial one in the reading of Ancheta) to the extent that it illustrates resistance to globalization’s economic and neoliberal attachments, often perceived as the destructive force of cultural diversity and uniqueness. I will illustrate how globalization is often perceived in nationalist discourse as a “virus” leading to the eradication of identity. As earlier pointed out, this is due to the belief that central to globalization is the expansion of capital and a phenomenon that constructs everything as a homogenized commodity. A useful reference here is *McDonaldization* of society, a term coined by George Ritzer in arguing that globalization is homogenizing the world as a singular commodity in the franchising of the popular fast food chain McDonald’s around the globe.

Second, I will show how the performance used a recurring trope in Philippine culture, which I call the Americanization issue. This issue is related to the conception of the Filipino/a as a master mimic of other cultures, particularly the American one. This mimicry is associated in scholarship and popular writing such as Walden Bello, E. San Juan, Pico Iyer and Maria Rhodora Ancheta as the loss of core of the Filipino individual. Filipino postcolonialists criticize this “Americanization” of Philippine culture as imperialist as it eradicates Philippine identity. I will note, however, that the issue of Americanization in the play is not really about wanting to be like “them” or imitating “them” (the Americans) – but a strategy to assert a sense of self or what

scholarly writings call agency. This imitative performance is a desire to perform a localized version of the global through the playing of the English language and other performative strategies within the call center institutions, not usually highlighted in discourse or representations (such as theatre and film). More importantly, imitating “America” here is similar to what Fenella Cannell asserts as a self-transformative process because mimicry implies self-consciousness and “intimacy” to the one being imitated. Lucy San Pablo Burns explains that such consciousness toys with intimate proximity and overturns the equation of who mimics and who is mimicked. I argue that the protagonist (Chelsea) mimics the way Americans perform the English language as an accomplishment or a typology of inclusion and a way to avoid aversion. Hence, following this logic of argumentation, my take on the play is that *Welcome to IntelStar* implies mimicry as not a simple imitation of something else but a strategy to access power.

Originally staged in 2005 during the Awarding Ceremonies of the Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature at the Manila Peninsula,¹ the performance being scrutinized here is the commercial run at the Studio Theatre (Tanghalang Huseng Batute) of the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) a year after its original staging. Playwright Martinez directed the piece with popular film and television comedian Eugene Domingo performing the role of Chelsea.

Performing Global

The performance space was quite simple and very intimate. There was a desk, an Ergo chair, a wall clock, a laptop, an LCD projector and a white projection screen. The set is a reconfiguration of a training room in a call center institution. The introduction of the written drama states: “Tonight is the night Chelsea welcomes IntelStar’s new batch of call center trainees. For their orientation, she has prepared a PowerPoint slide presentation to illustrate the different points of her speech. From time to time, she clicks on her mouse to change the slides” (Martinez 3). As this introduction suggests, the piece presents an actual training. The audience members are imagined to be her trainees. Therefore, active participation from the members of the audience is required once in a while.

At the beginning of the play, Chelsea welcomes the interns by stating “IntelStar gives one of the best compensation packages in the industry. Aside from regular salaries, bonuses are given to those who perform beyond what is expected of them” (Martinez 4). This remark is indeed seductive to interns who are aware that other employment opportunities in the Philippines cannot provide such compensation. Towards the end of her opening salvo, she exclaims: “*Bongga*, you are now part of the global world, *say niyo? ‘di ba?’*” (“Wonderful! You are now part of the global world! Don’t you feel great?”). This exclamation is nowhere to be found in the published script of Martinez. I believe this line was ad libbed during the night I attended the show. Having seen the performance one more time, this particular line was once

again exclaimed. In my view, there are important points worth reflecting in this additional line alone. First, there is an invocation that the call center experience is a global encounter. Secondly, the interns, once hired, are participants in what Chelsea proclaims as the global world. Finally, connecting the earlier lines (in the published script) with this additional one, the relevance of globalization is seemingly more manifest in the embrace of the market force.

There have been numerous debates about globalization. The most common position is one of resistance as the term is often associated with the demise of the nation-state and the extension of American capitalism, as in the influential discussions of Walden Bello and E. San Juan. In the opening statement of Chelsea, the global experience is seemingly exhibited as a necessary experience of being-in-the-world. The use of *bongga* in this additional line is significant in the assertion of necessity because *bongga* in Filipino slang denotes extravagance. Sometimes, it is an exclamation of grandiosity and even excess. But here, it is a statement of wonder and awe. In this way, working in the call center as a global enterprise is defined by Chelsea to be something necessarily wonderful, extravagant and grand. However, as the play progresses, the whole connection becomes otherwise – a mockery of the call center situation vis-à-vis the place of agents as Filipino citizens.

Chelsea remarks that working in the call center is a great place to avoid the hassle of the metropolis – referring in particular to the annoying traffic along the city's busiest major streets EDSA and Taft Avenue. The context here is of course beyond this reference of avoiding the traffic and the annoying activities of the metropolis. The grim irony is that Chelsea is preparing her interns for alienation, especially from established concepts of daytime and nighttime. This particular experience is affirmed in a blogpost by "Sky" who works as a call center agent: "everyone is on their way home and off to bed, but not me, I actually just got out of the shower, getting ready for work. While everybody else calls it a day, I'm just starting mine." These concepts of day and night are adjusted to the way these are experienced in the West (or in the United States) writes the same blogger. In the play, Chelsea explains that the "day" of the agents begins when everybody else's is ending and even remarks that when your duty ends, your loved ones are already off to their work or school (if the agent has kids). Also, Chelsea comments on how local holidays would be celebrated in the institution, which is never. She explains that the agents should no longer follow Filipino holidays. But as a consolation, she adds that as agents they will be celebrating American holidays, another exclamation of *Bongga, hindi ba?* ("Wonderful, isn't it?").

In the welcome remarks of Chelsea, the global-self is equated with losing a sense of the local self. This loss of the local in the embrace of the global is scrutinized in *Welcome to IntelStar*. While the play acknowledges how these institutions provide economic opportunities, the piece exposes the cultural exploitation experienced in the call center environment. The subtle manifestation of such exploitation is predicated upon working in such an institution. Ancheta is even more explicit in

her reading of such exploitation by positing that the piece reveals the erasure of the Philippine space in a call center institution (8).

There is a stark image at the end of the monodrama, a more blatant claim for exploitation. Chelsea pours some local rum into a Starbucks mug and sips it while cursing her work as a no-way-out. The piece ends by leading its audience to believe that globalization via the transnational context is destroying national sensibilities, as exemplified in the concepts of daytime/nighttime plus which country's holidays are being celebrated. Here is a moment of interrogation as the play criticizes the exploitative nature of transnational network. Ancheta calls this an awakening from deception. She argues that the call center institution deceives the Filipino individual with dreams of a better life but once immersed inside, the self realizes a form of tyranny, a linguistic tyranny and the only way to avert this is going back to the sense of (Filipino) identity.

Following this reading, *Welcome to IntelStar* is making audience members realize that there is an option either to embrace or resist this tyrannical disposition. The play tends to push audiences (who are implicated as Chelsea's trainees) to reflect on a sense of nationalism (read as identity by Ancheta) that perceives globalization as something similar to George Ritzer's *McDonaldization* where local culture is ultimately Americanized. In Ancheta's reading, she insists that in *IntelStar*, "the world, therefore, is one humungous United States" (8). Indeed, the play tells audience members about *McDonaldization* efficiency as standardized according to the standards of the United States. But the piece does not at all equate the call center institution with the United States. As will be explored later, Martinez utilized devices where the sense of "self" is performed and eventually produces an imagined World not necessarily confined within the imagined structure that is the United States.

I share the same sentiment as Ancheta who posits that the play pictures a reduction of the local into a singular force called globalization. At the outset, *Welcome to IntelStar* explores this web of human connectedness via the finance market and global capitalism, the survival of the self is anchored within instrumentality. However, one crucial concern is left unanswered: what alternatives do we have to dismantle this instrumentalization of humanity? In the end, we are bound to realize that regardless of the play's critique, the fact of instrumentalization dictates an overwhelming need to survive economically. Hence, *Welcome to IntelStar* is an interrogation about and against globalization, continuing the debate that the citizens-of-the-world are indeed those from developed countries. As suggested in the play and implied by Ancheta, the call center agents (as representatives of developing countries in this piece) are automatons or robots – as modeled by Chelsea in the final episode of the monodrama. They have the option of resisting but have no way-out and eventually they will return. Audience members are led to question this phenomenon of being-global. Nonetheless, after I left the Studio Theater, I realized the play is not concerned with answers, at least not yet.

In *Welcome to IntelStar*, the geography of globalization is fixed, an end-state, a singular monolithic entity similar to how hyper-globalists see the world today.² Hyper-globalists argue that the world is becoming homogenous. Anti-globalists like Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson propose that hyper-globalists' view of the world is being manipulated by an authoritarian figure commonly linked to the West which is in control. In short, hyper-globalists see the Westernization of the world as global culture (the homogenized world). In local scholarship, this Westernization is equivalent to the Americanization of Philippine cultural, political and economical life. Perhaps this informs Martinez's use of monologue as a device in his writing. In his monologue, it seems that a singular entity is in control. Chelsea's character exemplifies this establishing of an authority especially since she directs audience members to pay attention to what she performs. She is in fact trying to make her interns (audience members) to be like her – to be "American" in order to play their part in this global identity. In terms of the theme, it seems that the monologue is directed towards a point-of-view where the character of Chelsea is inviting her audiences to admit the logic of following the singular route to this idea of the global. In particular, her aura of an English speaking Filipino national invites her audience to follow the path of speaking this language – despite not being fluent – in order to participate actively in this globalizing world. In short, Chelsea is telling audience members that there is no other route to reach this destination of the global if you do not act on her imperative description of English as the language of the global world.

The setting provides an analogy to how globalization is perceived in Philippine society: the setting is a claustrophobic office manifesting the homogeneity associated with globalization. It is a global office that could be found anywhere: computers, LCD projectors, projection screen, desks, conference tables, swivel chairs, and the pervasive English language. In this case, the agent of the office is also the same agent anywhere: proficient in the English language, with corporate disposition, market driven and capable of other forms of instrumentality. As Chelsea enumerates the rules of the institution, the field of instrumentality becomes a fundamental character of transnational capital accumulation:

Number one on the list is the dress code. You are expected to come to work professionally attired. No leggings, no sleeveless tops, no tank tops, no open-toe sandals, no clothes with holes, no T-shirts with offensive, pornographic, alcohol or drug-related prints, and strictly no jeans allowed. . . . Number two on those rules list is this: everybody is required to use only English in any form of communication, verbal or written – that includes E-mail correspondences . . . Third on our list is no eating in your work areas . . . Coffee, which is available freely for all employees, can only be brought to work areas if it's contained in a spill-proof mug (She shows off her mug.) Just like this mug which I got from Starbucks. . . . Fourth on our list may just be

the most important of all, punctuality. (Martinez 12)

Here we see the figure of globalization as authoritarian and homogenized. Chelsea's aura of authority controls the behavior of the interns. She is saying, if you cannot follow these rules, you are not entitled to be part of this institution. On the other hand, Chelsea's agent is contextualized by a sense of being one and the same: the agents are expected to be uniform in playing their role to function in the institution. Ancheta explains, "the Filipino is fighting against both social and personal fragmentation as a result of an economic / cultural / linguistic neocolonial status, born of the need for apparent global competitiveness" (4). The assumption is: because of globalization, the Filipino sense of self is dislodged and fragmented. This is because globalization and neoliberal engagement are equated with each other. At the same time, globalization is seen as the extension of the concept of franchise – where everything becomes homogenized in this "globalized" market world.

Chelsea embodies the instrumentality of the global market system, in which relationships between agents and the customers are defined by artificiality and not by any form of human interconnectedness. While I share David Held's optimism that globalization is about human individuals being unavoidably side by side at moments of catastrophe, in trades and financial markets, in environment and climate changes and in health concerns, not touched by his provocation is this issue of human connectedness. Held's interconnectedness is a proposal of global democracy embodied in his vision of cosmopolitanism. Nevertheless, human connectedness should not be solely conceived and paralleled within the politics of the state and the institutionalization of global democracy. Responsibility and accountability via the relational disposition of individuals are also crucial in the enunciation of human connectedness because the politics imposed by global democracy is also sustained by fields of instrumentality. In a way, global order in global democracy does not surround itself with intimacy, the relational aspect of the human being as a social actor. There can be a transnational connectedness of people led by a conception that the human person is first and foremost an end in itself rather than a means for the cause of a specific corporation or nation. Chelsea's demand that agents act according to instrumentality as an important distinction of performing globally, involves accepting the juxtaposition of the market, production and capital as essential to the global. In the marking of globalization's geography in *Welcome to IntelStar*, the disposition of the individual is tilted towards what Peng Cheah calls the inhuman, attributed to an assumption that these multinational companies mask exploitation as employment opportunities:

[A] finite limit of man, a defective feature of human existence that is not proper to the true end of man but that we have thus far failed to control, for example, the commodification, technology, totalitarian domination, and

the like. We quite properly compare such phenomena to animals or ghosts, associate them with death, and characterize them as subhuman precisely because they are improper to us but also reducible to us and must overcome or transcend if we are to actualize the freedom that is our due. (2-3)

In my reading, the disposition embodied by Chelsea in the play (inked by Martinez in his writing and performed by Domingo in the staging) derives from a belief that the theatre in the Philippines is rooted in social critique. Doreen Fernandez notes that “it is Philippine life that fires our playwrights. They do not need to hear of the latest trends in writing techniques in order to want to write a play in like manner. Instead, their themes invade their craft – and they reach for techniques to fit” (223). Fernandez adds that in the thematic concern of Filipino playwrights and players (directors and actors) “the vitality of theatre is in its urgency” (223). By urgency, Fernandez notes that theatre in the Philippines is used to represent social concerns of the time and therefore provide a commentary on the state of things at that time. If we follow this argument, Fernandez asserts that theatre artists accept a burden of social responsibility.

My assumption is that artists behind the staging of this play work on the same tradition of social activism, which in my view, is a call for resisting globalization as it destroys the sense of local. The play, therefore becomes a social drama. But more than social drama, *Welcome to IntelStar* is a problem play, a genre coined in the 19th century which touches social issues and is realistic in approach. Richard Hornby identifies these plays as “glib and cheap” and easily classified alongside popular television shows because they present topical issues and such issues are editorialized. I am not classifying *Welcome to IntelStar* as cheap, of low value and without any merit. Rather, I take the play to be valuable both in its attempt to critique how the Philippines is currently entangled with the global world via transnational relations, and for what its shortcomings further reveal about these relations. I will argue in the next section, that the production suffers from artists’ failure to appreciate the complexity of their chosen subjects.

Performing Displacement

Ancheta asserts that *Welcome to IntelStar* is a significant Filipino drama because it uses comical language to delineate Filipino identity especially in “the face of an ever-invasive hyper-real intervention in Philippine contemporary life” (4). In this section, I interrogate this conception of identity vis-à-vis the abnegation of local ties and co-ordinates in a call center institution. The piece certainly features several significations of the loss of identity evidenced by the dismissal of the local, agency or subjectivity. For instance, after introducing the mission and vision of the company to the trainees (the audience members), Chelsea focuses her training on the proper way of answering calls from customers:

As you can see, it's very important that we have – what? (Pauses.) Correct! An American-sounding name. Like Chelsea! I mean, what can be more American than Chelsea, right? It is mandatory that we have an American name here at IntelStar. Just imagine if I start all my calls using my real name. It would sound like this: 'Hi this is Ma. Leonora Teresa Grabador-Bayot. City and State please?' (Martinez 6)

And then, Chelsea shifts the attention to someone in the audience:

You! What's your name? Teodoro Albarillo? You can be a Teddy. Or a Ted? No, this is much better: Todd! Todd! That's it! Todd! Not Toad, Todd! (She singles out a girl this time.) You, Miss, what's your name? Jennilyn Grace Humbrado? Jennylyn Grace. To me, Jenny is okay. Lyn is okay. No offense, but when you put them together you sound like a Pinoy taxicab. . . . For you, let's use Grace instead. Is that okay? You like that? Uh-huh! Good for you, Gracie! (She singles out another man from the audience.) You! Please? Ime Isuekpe? Ime Isuekpe? What kind of name is that? I beg your pardon. Oh, you're half-Pinoy, half-Nigerian. Oh, I see. Ime Iseukpe. (Pauses to think.) Boy, this is a tough one, huh? Ime, do you want to be called George? You don't like the name George. (Pause.) Okay, how about, Scott? No, you don't. Well . . . (Pauses.) What about Tyrone? . . . (Martinez 6 – 7)

All call center agents – especially with Filipino sounding names – have to change their names to more American sounding names. For Ancheta, this name changing signifies two accounts. First, it is a strategy done in the name of professional imagery. Second, it is one sign of privileging Western identity.

Thai critic Carina Chotirawe saw the performance at the studio theater and explains “the act of naming and renaming people, structures or places has always been a common practice throughout the history of colonization” (71). She asserts this name changing in the play is an illustration of colonialism, a destruction of identity. More so, she adds that this act of name changing in the performance expresses a blatant destruction of identity because it “functions as a conceptual weapon of destruction, as a kind of wage war or a contest between old and new identity layer. Taking the liberty of naming or renaming someone is tantamount, therefore, to denying them their historical and cultural identity” (71). This reading is suggestive of the call center's neo-imperialist strategy over postcolonial and poor nations (such as the Philippines). At first glance, this assertion is seductively favorable to reading the loss of identity in the play, especially in the context of deglobalization or towards the aim of decolonization. Names are usually linked to cultural identities. This identity marking is also useful in the identification of ethnic origins.

On the other hand, there are some issues raised by this assumption of

“conceptual destruction” in the name changing vis-à-vis the call center institution. First, Chotirawe implies that it is the institution, which changes the name of an agent. But as Chelsea herself announced in the play, “Oh yes, you get to choose your own name” (Martinez 7). On a surface level, this name changing is similar to what popular actors in movies and television call a stage-name or a screen pseudonym. Although of course, the motivation of a stage-name is far different from the Americanized name of the call center agent. Nonetheless, there is a sense of anonymity in these modes of name changing. If Chotiware views this name changing as a weapon of conceptual destruction, within the context of anonymity, it is more likely a conceptual shield. Just like when Chelsea says, “Just imagine if I start all my calls using my real name. It would sound like this: ‘Hi this is Ma. Leonora Teresa Grabador-Bayot’” (Martinez 6), she is calling for protection: in performance, Domingo’s voice was hesitant in stating her entire name, providing the subtext of “do not be idiotic, why would you give your name to your callers who are unknown to you. Worse, why would you give your complete name?!” The name chosen by the agent is also his or her shield against racist slurs, arrogant customers and the like.

Chotirawe provides a picture of identity by implying that a name is the totality of identity. She also implies that the politics of identity has a wide range of dimensions including cultural and historical ones. However, being and becoming are two different modes of identity formation. Subjectivity is a matter of becoming. A name may be assigned to a human person, but their becoming is not locked into the name assigned to them. For instance, in *Welcome to IntelStar*, being Chelsea is different from becoming Chelsea. Becoming Chelsea is part of her task or obligation as a manager in *IntelStar*, but it is not entirely the totality of her being. Besides, Chelsea became Chelsea by her own becoming – by her own subject position. As she points out, the agents choose their own names. Of course, there is a condition: the name should sound American. What options do they have in this situation when the company is in fact an American one? In this instance, changing one’s name is not necessarily the privilege of having a Western identity but it is a necessity that is being asked of the call center agents by the instrumental condition of this global institution. But generally, to state that identity is destroyed by this act of name changing is a misrepresentation if not an over-representation of the call center experience.

Changing local names into something “American” was also featured in *Alladeen*. Ali Zhaidi used the spectacle provided by the mixed-media and the documentary film genre to foreground this name-changing condition. Zhaidi filmed these Indian agents to produce a collage in which way they introduced themselves using their Indian names and then introduced themselves by their American names. It starts with a single agent introducing himself by his Indian name and then using his American name. Afterwards, another Indian agent is introduced, then two agents, until finally a collage of call center agents are seen onscreen introducing

themselves using their Indian names followed by their American names. The screen goes up and the audience sees a call center office in action. In this episode, agents are engaged in sale transactions. Their Indian names are flashed onscreen side by side their photographs. As they pick up calls, they begin conversations by introducing themselves using their American names. In this episode, we are introduced to the importance of name transformation. In *Alladeen*, the interviewed call center agents explain that it is important for agents to have American names in order to avoid instances of racism. The name changing in *Welcome to IntelStar* is also crucial to avoid racism. As Chelsea points “Just imagine if I start all my calls using my real name. It would sound like this: ‘Hi this is Ma. Leonora Teresa Grabador-Bayot. City and State please?’” (Martinez 6). When Domingo (as Chelsea) uttered the phrase “just imagine,” I assumed that the context (or the subtext – the term used in the theatre which refers to underlying circumstances conveyed by the actor in a performance) is a reference to ridicule having a name which is not commonsensical to the sensibility of the clients. In *Alladeen*, one actual call center agent reveals that one rule that they follow is to immediately change his Indian name to an English one. As he sated, this is to avoid being ridiculed for having a very difficult sounding name, which is not familiar to mainly English-speaking clients. Extending Chotirawe’s arguments, the performative environment of the call center – as staged in *Welcome to IntelStar* and *Alladeen* – calls for a simulation of intimacy with strangers from which any self-respecting person would wish to protect themselves, and that an assumed name can provide such protection.

Aileen Olimba Salonga calls this process identity masking, a process in which agents “change their names to Western ones.” This masking of identity, more than the avoidance of racism, is geared towards making customers feel safe and secure so that business can go on as usual (180). Although name changing is practiced in various call center institutions in the Philippines, it is not as common as in India. Salonga explains that this probably is linked to the Filipino people being more attuned to American culture, “having been an American colonial subject, names of Filipinos tend to be already westernized, or at least, western sounding” (180). For instance, the case of Jennylyn in *Welcome to IntelStar* where Chelsea acknowledges the Western provenance of the name of the trainee.

Neutralizing the English accent or “sounding right” (Salonga 181) is another manifestation of the suppression of subjectivity and locality. After Chelsea indicated the name changing policy was an important rule in the institution, she clicked on her mouse and there appeared on the screen the slide: “Accent Neutralization Program.” The changing of names is the first step toward seeming American, and neutralizing the accent is the next part of this becoming as she states: “You see, if you can’t ‘be’ an American, you can always sound like one!” (Martinez 7). Like the name requirement, the accent requirement is a “way of catering to the great majority of US-based and some UK-based customers, and of appeasing whatever negative feelings these customers may have about offshore work and workers” (Salonga 180).

Selma Sonntag sees this as a symptom of linguistic imperialism or “the dominance of English worldwide and efforts to promote the language” (7). In addition, this linguistic imperialism marches “toward global and linguistic homogenization” leading to “linguistic and cultural genocide” (Sonntag 8). In short, this frame of imperialism is equivalent to the Americanization of the world languages.

In *Alladeen*, a similar training on accent neutralization was also performed. After the prologue, audience members are “brought” to a training room where Indian trainees are taught to properly pronounce the 50 states of the United States. Since the device used by Zhaidi was documentary, the episode features a live lecture demonstration and a filmed interview flashed on the large screen featuring the commonly mispronounced English words in India. McKenzie comments that this global performance is particularized for “Indians to assist American callers without the Americans noticing any significant cultural difference. That’s why the workers are trained in American English: to iron out their native accents and the colloquialisms of school-learned British English” (29). Thus, for McKenzie, this neutralization of the accent in speaking English is one way of performing the global. McKenzie’s assertion is no different than that of Ancheta’s since both conflate the global with the West (English-speaking nations).

But sounding American or English is not enough. In *Alladeen*, an actual agent is flashed on screen telling audience members that agents need to familiarize themselves with various local cultures of the different American states like the love of potatoes in the State of Montana. At the end of this interview, the agent exclaims, “we have to feel America without going to America.” Midway through *Welcome to IntelStar*, a map of the USA appears on the screen. There are vertical lines dividing the time zones of the US. Chelsea, upon showing this map points out: “You should know this map by heart” (Martinez 13). Near the end of her piece, Chelsea is asked by a trainee if they should be memorizing the “Star Spangled Banner.” Instead of replying, Chelsea simply laughs at the question indicating stupidity on the part of the trainee. The trainees are also told to watch CNN and read various US newspapers regularly. The trainees, Chelsea requires, “have to memorize the map of the USA and all of its states, identify each state’s location by indicating the right abbreviation” (Martinez 14). In other words,

they should be able to understand English idioms and know how to use them correctly. They should be able to recognize sarcasm and/or humor and respond to it accordingly. They should know about the different states and places in the source countries that they are servicing, and be able to pronounce each one properly. They should know about British or American holidays, current events, sports, and celebrities, and engage their customers in a conversation using these topics. (Salonga 181)

In order to affirm customer agency and attachment to locality, Chelsea declares:

“We never ever give out information about our location. So we should always be ready with a standard answer such as – (She clicks on the mouse. The sentence appears on the screen: the agent answers, “we are centrally located”). *We are centrally located*, always keep this in mind” (Martinez 14, emphasis mine). The agents cannot disclose their actual locality. In a way, call center agents deny their actual geography when working in a call center institution. However, the protocol of proclaiming being centrally located as a location is an important note that should not be dismissed. Skeptics like Paul Hirst, E. San Juan and Walden Bello argue that globalization is the imagination of the Global North (read as the developed world). It is a continuation of an imagined center and periphery. It seems that the performativity of the speech act “we are centrally located” affirms the Global North’s position as the center of globalization’s geography and the Global South (i.e., the Philippines where the offshore call center agency is actually located) remains in the periphery. Here, globalization does not deny the active participations of both geographical imaginations. The center is the master and the periphery, the slave. If we are to subscribe to this spatial construction, then globalization as a spatial category may only be comprehended within a neo-liberal geography. And in comprehending globalization as such, the Global South is thought of as being in captivity. Here, the Global South is perceived as being manipulated by the Global North to accept that economic gain is an important aspect of humanizing the workforce. In this regard, despite exploitation (i.e., long hours of shift, few minutes of break-time) the call center is a necessary tool for survival. But working in a call center institution, therefore, is not a liberating experience even though agents are able to pay their bills. In this case, the space becomes a territory of no exits.

With all these circumstances, the monodrama suggests that absurdity and alienation are necessary consequences of globalization as embodied by the gesture of surrender by Chelsea at the end of the piece. When she exclaims and curses about the kind of life she has been living within the walls of the institution, she is, at the same time, affirming the absurdity of her condition. She curses her work but knows that, in a few hours, she will be doing the same work: the same lecture and training activity. Nonetheless, the absurdity of her condition is worsening because she surrenders instead of defies. To Chelsea the world is no longer grounded. She takes a sip from her Starbucks tumbler filled with local rum as if there is no longer any way out. Chelsea complains even as she is talking in English. She asks herself why she is not resting when everyone else around her is supposed to be resting. She is distanced from her geography: “just when everybody’s going home, that’s the time you’ll be going to work. While everybody is sleeping or spending time with family and friends, you’ll be working on the floor. And when you get home ready to hit the sack, everybody else is up and about, ready to start the day” (Martinez 12). In the manuscript, Chelsea is supposed to giggle. But in the performance at the studio theatre of CCP, Eugene Domingo (as Chelsea) pauses and looks at the wall clock before continuing: “But looking on the bright side, at least you don’t get stuck

in stupid Metro Manila traffic, right?” (Martinez 12).

In *Alladeen*, this was even more blatant as an interviewed agent comments: “When you wake up, everything is so silent. You become one with the night.” These experiences of absurdity and alienation are more strongly felt in an episode about call center agents in Josefina Estrella’s production of *Sepharad: Voces de Exilo*, which I witnessed in 2004 at the Carlos P. Romulo Auditorium in Makati City. The novel on which this play was based presents Diasporic Hispanic Jews whose lives crisscross. In the adaptation, Capinding and Estrella looked for parallels in Filipino society and used the call center experience. In this piece, agents are working the night before Christmas, a very important occasion for many Filipinos, particularly Catholics. Incidentally, all the agents in Estrella’s piece are Catholics eager to celebrate Christmas. Normally, in the Philippines, the official Christmas holiday starts on the 23rd or the 22nd. But since the call center institution caters to American clients, the office has to be synced with how Americans celebrate the season which means working on the 23rd, 24th and even on the 25th itself. The day before Christmas is also a very special occasion for many Filipino people. The nighttime is what Filipino Catholics call *bisperas* (Christmas Eve) when the traditional *noche buena* (Midnight Meal) is shared by family members. But since agents have to act or perform as if they are in the United States, they are unable to join their families in the traditional *noche buena*.

Borrowing from Hannah Arendt, the call center episode in Estrella’s *Sepharad* and Chelsea’s gestures in *Welcome to IntelStar* are what Paul Rae calls an experience of worldliness in another context. Rae explains “humankind is at a loss to act in upon the world in a meaningful way” (15). Here, the individual has to find her own ways of relating to the world in order to resolve her existential difficulties. Chelsea surrenders to an office and training activity which act as metaphors for an imposed, homogenized, singular state and alienating global world. The office, with its walls, borders, and bounded proximity, registers isolation and suffocation. The training per se exemplifies singularity – the start of Americanization – molding the trainees to act in accordance with an imposed and homogenized system.

But are these agents really alienated? Moreover, do they feel alienated at all? Are these agents really in captivity? In the same blog by Sky, she comments: “[I] couldn’t find any exact word to describe what a call center life is: it’s *liberating, challenging, toxic, hilarious and at times luxurious*” (Sky “Definitely Filipino,” emphasis mine). Sky’s description of her work at a call center contradicts the mockery of the play. Sky’s narration is also a testimony to comfort in her job in opposition to Ancheta’s perception of the call center in her reading of the written text. Is the account in this blogpost only a sugarcoated narrative about the experience, to convince oneself (Sky) that it is better to be enslaved in this call center instead of doing nothing and contributing nothing to the financial needs of her family? Does the narrative only pertain to a sense of economic satisfaction that anti-globalists normally associate directly with globalization and neoliberal politics?

Dina Marie Delias interviewed more than 150 call center agents in the Philippines who worked between 2000 and 2010. She also observed their work and socialization experiences. In her study, she argues that the social construct of the call center as a place of exploitation is based on a superficial view of the institution. In short, her immersion and the narratives of these agents provide crucial points to counter the claim that these Filipinos were losing their local identity. More so, she also relates (through the narratives of agents) that, contrary to the popular conception that agents continuously desire an imagined “America,” agents maintain a sense of pride about being someone who is not from the US. One example is this narrative:

We cater to the underserved segment of America. These are the people who will beg because their electricity will be cut off, they have a baby and they don't have money for diapers. I really feel bad for them. Their situation is really pitiful, and I start to realize that it's not really that good in America, that people say that is their dream country. My perception about America changed a lot. Before I worked in a call center I would say “Wow, a white person! He must be ‘sosyal’ (‘extravagant’) because the typical things they have there are only for the rich people in the Philippines. Then when I started working in my account and I encountered customers pleading because they were in the middle of nowhere and they have no gas, they're in a gasoline station and they have no money to buy gas. So sometimes they beg because their electricity is about to be cut. There are some who say they have no money to buy diapers. The way I saw them changed, I never imagined that there would be this kind of poverty (in America), poverty which is worse than here, at least here in Baguio. (Delias 35 – 36)

Despite the popular conception that in the Global World, members of the Global North are favored and privileged, call center agents in Delias's report feel more fortunate to be in the Global South, although perceived as underprivileged. In this regard, there is a surprising disparity between the representation of misery in the play and the actual experience of some Filipino call center agents.

In the next section of this essay, I will look into some devices in the play where the negotiated characters working in a call center institution identified by Sky earlier are presented. Ancheta's reading of these episodes in the play is a reverberation of the postcolonial conception of resistance. In as much as resistance is a given entity in Martinez's drama, I suggest that he could have unintentionally pictured globalization where the Global South is in dialogue and not necessarily hostile to the Global North.

From Displacement to the Retrieval of the Local

If we subscribe uncritically to the thesis of linguistic imperialism, it seems that

language does not move forward or does not evolve. However, language as a cultural structure is not in itself monolithic, but a product of negotiations, subversions, resistances and performances. Using another frame of linguistic performance and development, Sonntag presents a cosmopolitan disposition where, “the agency of the individual is emphasized, indeed celebrated, in transnational, cross-cultural interactions” (15). She continues that, “language is created dialogically. Linguistic cosmopolitanism embraces a fragmentation of English, a diversity of Englishes” (15). Salonga, on the other hand, explains that following this disposition is placing too much emphasis on agency and disregarding structural inequalities among language users. In the case of the call center, we cannot deny the privileged position of American English over the kind of English spoken by agents situated in the imagined periphery of the Global North and Global South divide. Nonetheless, amidst this imposition of privileging over the Global North, power should never be treated as a total absolute. Salonga comments,

while it is true that imperialist cultural and linguistic practices exist, it should not be assumed that they are perfect and complete and that those on the ground would simply embrace and accept them, and be transformed by them, as the linguistic imperialist framework would suggest. At the same time, it is not right to assume that such practices will be resisted or subverted totally and completely, as the linguistic hybridity framework would imply. (191)

What is being advocated here is a linguistic framework which interrogates performatives of acceptance, resistance, appropriation and subversion of individuals (or communities), in the same way that globalization under the neoliberal paradigm also problematizes its performativities of acceptance, resistance, appropriation and subversion as embodied by the social actors. The geography of globalization should be seen as not fixed and determined as perceived by pessimists and skeptics, and by the performance of *Welcome to IntelStar*. Agency or subjectivity and locality are not really dismissed in a call center office because as Delias points out, agents can have varieties of performing acceptance, resistance, subversion and affirmation on globalization.

Perhaps, what Ancheta subscribed to in reading Martinez’s drama is the *surface reality* of a call center institution. This conception has a strong link to anti-globalization sentiments because of its association with the neoliberal engagement of the state with other nations. These sentiments may be perceived as an illustration of ambient fear, not of globalization per se, but of the foreign. Up to now, the rhetoric of nationalist claims follows a strong dictum of forging the West as a continuing enemy. One crucial explanation that is exposed here might be the long colonial history of the Philippines. But the more probable explanation is the positing of the neocolonial and neoimperialist relationship of the archipelago with the West, particularly the United States. In the eyes of anti-globalists, the United States is the

ultimate architect of the destruction of a national cultural identity. Extending this to cultural production, representations of the West (i.e., the United States) have always been notoriously linked to this destruction of the local. Hence, Ancheta's affirmation of *Welcome to IntelStar* is not something unusual. At the outset, the play exposes this Western domination and exploitation of the poor citizens of the Philippines who have opted to work as call center agents in order to uplift their families at least economically. But all of these are presentations of the surface. As I dig down into surface of both the call center institution and the play, I argue that this conception of exploitation is a product of the imagined consciousness of a nationalist project of opposition to US foreign and economic policies.

The monodrama presents varieties of performing aspects of receiving the global. During the accent neutralization program, Chelsea clicks on her mouse and a slide with a table of words appears on screen:

Did he?	Didee?
Does he?	Duzzy?
Was he?	Wuzzy?
Has he?	Hazzy?
Is he?	Izzy?
Would he?	Woody?
Wouldn't you?	Wooden chew?
Hasn't he?	Has a knee?
Don't you?	Done chew?
Can't you?	Can chew?
Could you?	Cujoo?
Would you?	Wujoo?

And then Chelsea tells audience members: "on the left side is how it's spelled normally and on the right side is how it must be pronounced in a neutral American accent" (Martinez 9). There followed two other slides with more tables of words for the purpose of instructing trainees (audience members) on neutralizing the accent. She asks the trainees to read the next slides – to encounter the neutralized accent themselves. An example is this:

T + Y =	CH	What's your name?	Wachername?
D + Y =	J	How did you like it?	Howja like it?
S + Y =	SH	Bless you	Bleshoo!
Z + Y =	ZH	Where's your mom?	Werzher mom?

Chelsea's training is a localized game plan for participating in the neoliberal frame of globalization by asserting one's way of performing the English language

and is not bounded by a singular script following a homogenized and imperialist picture of globalization. Overall, Chelsea developed some creative strategies to deploy agency and the local. In the presentation, Chelsea provides her personal yet practical techniques in acquainting with the way Americans speak the English language. On the other hand, the training is also a deployment of locality as Chelsea's personal strategy is coming from her own positionality. Doing this strategy is not a simple wit but involves artistic intelligence in order to negotiate the specificity of American English with techniques coming from a Filipino body and a Filipino consciousness. However, Chelsea does not deny that part of embracing the global is to embrace the English language. Chelsea does not negate the neoliberal frame of globalization, especially that part of embracing the space of the global as an embrace of the imagined Global North. Nevertheless, the performance of embracing the imagined Global North is not oblivious to locality and agency because some key features in the play present the local as continuously negotiating with the global. A very good example is this playing with words.

This is made more manifest in Domingo's performance as Chelsea. In an online review of the play by Resty Odon, he remarks, "Eugene not only 'normalizes' her accent like the real thing, she also delivers a tour de force as she 'shape-shifts' herself from a nattily attired corporate woman to one vocalizing the stereotype of an irate 'nigger'-caller. Eugene really does this gender-bending act unbelievably well" ("Reviews"). Odon suggests that the character of Chelsea fits Domingo really well. This perhaps is due to her effectivity as one of the most outstanding veteran theater actors in the metropolis today. In these training sessions, Domingo delivers the pronunciation and enunciation of the common English terms in an exaggerated manner transforming the auditorium into a chamber of histrionic laughter. Without the audience realizing, the creative strategies proposed by Chelsea (and the delivery of Domingo) are not only meant for laughter but in actuality, these performances are actual techniques useful in call center institutions and perhaps, even in an encounter with an American citizen. In my reading, the strategy points out that there is no other place in the world who could mimic the enunciation and accent of mostly Americans using "puns" as an alternative manual. Overall, these "puns," delivered by Domingo are not only meant to provide humor in the theatre but at the same time suggestive of performing agency, locality and even subversion. Other key features of these performances include putting the clients on hold or dropping their call, name-changing, and playing along with the accent.

One criticism of neoliberalism is the accusation that the Global North is becoming more powerful and wealthier while the Global South is becoming poorer, despite resources which she provides the master. In *Welcome to IntelStar*, Chelsea introduces some strategies on how to play with and even resist this neoliberal engagement by playing with the English language in line with new scholarship on call center industries in the Philippines which reveals that agents do not just passively perform the English language or passively cater to the satisfaction of

their clients in the United States. For instance, there are agents who drop the call or put their customers on hold even when prohibited by company policy, as in an episode in Estrella's *Sepharad*. One agent pretends not to hear his customer while the customer continuously curses him for not being able to find a location he was requesting. As the agent comically exclaimed, "I am sorry, sir, the signal is jammed" pretending he does not hear what the client is saying. In *Welcome to IntelStar*, Chelsea relates that once she put her client on hold because of some racist remarks. This performance of agency also manifests in the task of "Westernizing" or "Americanizing" agents' names. This is also a creative strategy because Western names are not really imposed on the agents as earlier discussed.

In Salonga's ethnographic study, it was noted that the neutralization program is not after all imposed or dictated as policy. While it is true that many call center agencies in the Philippines do have an accent neutralizing program, when trainees are hired, their English accents are not actually neutralized. Their accents cross borders as explained by an agent in Salonga's study: "[Y]ou can speak with people with thick British accents, Welsh accents, with Arabic accents, with Indian accents, so we adjust to that particular aspect. If you talk to a non-native English speaker, we adjust our registers, we adjust our jargon. We speak slowly, and then we use very simple terms. The pace is changed and we have to rephrase a lot" (226).

Concluding Reflections

Paul Rae argues, the spectacle in *Alladeen* is "emblematic of the kind of stories the First World is telling itself about globalization" (11). Rae's criticism of *Alladeen* is situated within this paradigmatic embrace and affirmation of globalization without interrogating its political dimension. The problem with *Alladeen* is the elision of identity, relations and history:

Mimicking only the anonymous (and therefore lacking interest) and the ahistorical (and therefore lacking a political edge), it is nevertheless the relational aspect of theater that is most sorely missed in *Alladeen*. It is here that I identify the source of my resentment towards the performance for not being everything the theme and the calibre of the artists suggested it could have been. "I don't care," the performance seemed to say. (13)

This mimicry of the anonymous is also reflected in popular conceptions of globalization in social and cultural scholarship in the Philippines. Bello is explicit in exposing globalization as the continuation of imperialism, particularly American imperialism eradicating national identity. Bello implies that the only interest of the imperial power is capital accumulation and consequently exploitation is a necessary tool to pursue the agenda of finance. For Bello, the only way to assert subjectivity and elude the grasp of imperialism is deglobalization, an institutional strategy of

removing support from international institutions such as International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organization (WTO) because these agencies are only substituting the imperialist agenda of the United States. These institutions typically perform a disposition of “*I don’t care*” towards the particularity of poor nations since what these institutions do *care about* is the accumulation of wealth from these developing countries.

The failure of *Alladeen*, according to Rae, is “a failure of the imagination that has nothing to do with whitewashing the drab functionality of the actual call-center environments, and everything to do with a failure to identify the extent to which they produce the dehumanising process they house” (12). The success of *Welcome to IntelStar*, on the other hand, is this exposure of instrumentality and the attempt to humanize this instrumentality. With regard to the close-reading of Ancheta of the drama whose take on it is framed within a strong political critique of neoliberalism, her reading fails to recognize that the call center agent is in fact free to insert her local character into the training program. More importantly, Ancheta’s reading fails to expose episodes that might account for acts of personal agency among workers.

Overall, *Welcome to IntelStar* may also be read as resisting the global, despite immersion. But nevertheless, *Welcome to IntelStar* falls short in its criticism of globalization because it isolated the phenomenon within the politics of the market. As I earlier noted, globalization is not entirely synonymous with neoliberal politics and transnational business enterprise. In accordance with the skepticism of film critic Michael Davidson, it shows the possibility of an interconnected world, that “whatever promises globalization proffers increased communication and intersection are . . . lost in a confusion of tongues and temporalities” (116). Davidson allegorizes Times Square as the geography of globalization. In the same way, *Welcome to IntelStar* also directs us to Times Square as globalization’s geography. This reductive analogy to an interconnected reality, or as David Held suggests the “side by side” reality, delimits the expansiveness and hospitality of the world. Thus, *Welcome to IntelStar* fails to address the promise of cosmopolitanism as an alternative way of assessing and addressing globalization. For instance, the crossing of borders of the English language provides a glimpse into the cosmopolitan vis-à-vis the globalized world. With globalization reduced to homogeneity and the market system, the play fails to notice how developing countries participate actively in the world-wide interconnectivity. As globalization is bracketed within the neo-liberal frame, the postcolonial subject position is presented as helpless and powerless where power, its unequal distribution, is not absolute.

In discussing this play, I also emphasized the importance of mimicry vis-à-vis the issue of Americanization. In particular, I illustrated how the imitation of “America” by Chelsea (and the call center agents) is enacted as empowerment and is not merely the performance of a silenced and degraded self. Here, I focused on how mimicry is used as the strategy to participate in the cosmopolitan world. In

particular, the Filipino performing body (via Chelsea) presents, at the same time, a moment of sameness and difference via this mimicking performance. And in this performance, Chelsea performs her mastery of mimicking the way the Americans speak the English language but her playful use of it manifests a sort of approximation and intimacy with the imagined United States (and the imagined global world).

Anthropologist Fenella Cannell does not see the mimicry as pathetic but as a subtle and ironic means of accessing power of the imagined American world. She states that mimicry can “constitute a self-transformative process” (224). Looking at the *bakla* (gay men) in gay beauty pageants and local singers in amateur singing competitions who mimic American singers in the Bicol region of the Philippines, she asserted that these performances “use idioms thought of as American” (255). Cannell adds that these “move towards the pleasure of empowerment” coming from “knowing the words of a text and making it one’s own” (255). Finally, she observes that in this imitation of American popular singers, contestants transform “in which what is distant, powerful, and oppressive is brought closer and made more equal” (255). Centered on this disposition of power and intimacy, mimicry becomes a creative strategy to access power over the imagined Global North. Mimicry is not simply about wanting to be like those who are imitated, but a strategy to assert a sense of self. This imitative performance implies self-consciousness and intimacy to the one being imitated.

Chelsea’s mimicry brings the United States (and the global world) closer to her and in this regard, it is as if her performing body as a Filipino national manifests a sort of equality with the US. The Philippines and the United States may not stand on the same ground in terms of economic terrain but, as Chelsea plays with speaking the English language, there is a glimpse of accomplishment in her subtle and implicit proclamation that “I am more capable of performing you yet you have no power of doing the same with my language.” This equalizes if not inverts even if it does not equalize the power balance normally attributed to the neocolonial and neoimperial relations of the two countries.

Finally, Chelsea’s mimicry in the play also paves the way for her inclusion in this global world. The play allows the Filipino body (through Chelsea), accused of eradicating subjectivities of the Global South, to be visible. With her “expertise” at imitation, Chelsea’s visibility destabilizes the global order. This “Americanization” as imitation may not only be read “as colonial context, process, and narrative” but also as an act which interrupts “the original / copy dichotomy and proffers a more supplementary form of analyzing acts of, and at times those read as imitation” (Burns 13). In this way, imitation as self-actualization is a creative strategy and has the potential to overthrow hierarchies of globalization in neo-colonial and neo-imperial orders.

Notes

1. The Carlos Palanca Memorial Award is an award for literary works in the Philippines which include short stories, poetry, non-fiction (essay), one-act play, full-length play, screenplay and novel in both the local languages and English. In 2005, Chris Martinez received the third prize for one-act play for his *Welcome to IntelStar*. The Carlos Palanca Foundation chose Martinez's play as the performance highlight during the awarding ceremonies. Under the direction of Alexander Cortez, TV comedian Michael V performed the role of Chelsea. After its staging at the Manila Intercontinental in 2005, the monodrama was performed in Cebu City under Little Boy Production before its commercial debut at the Studio Theatre of the Cultural Center of the Philippines in Manila in 2006. Two other productions were staged after 2006: one in Angeles City under Tony Mabesa's direction which also featured Eugene Domingo as Chelsea and a restaging by Little Boy Production in Cebu City with local TV personality Jude Becalso as Chelsea.
2. For details of the hyper-globalist view of globalization, see Luke Martell's "The Third Wave of Globalization Theory."

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