

BROWN, BLACK, YELLOW, WHITE: FILIPINO MUSICIANSHIP IN HONG KONG AND THEIR HYBRIDIZED SOCIABILITY

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the issue of hybridity as one manifested in the everyday experiences of migrant Filipino musicians in Hong Kong, with a particular emphasis on their differences in a dialectic of the self and other as mobilised in performance, and, as a continuum woven into their racial colour and various social statuses. Where hybridity in music is the concern, most studies focus on hybridity as a matter of aesthetics, while in nonmusical areas, hybridity is addressed in the context of the relationship between colonized and colonizer during western imperialism, and between migrant and host in the contemporary age. This article combines these two areas: it will briefly include, but also move beyond the concern with aesthetics and propose hybridity through the cultural analysis of musical performance more as a form of social action resulting from colonialism, neocolonialism and transnationalism.

Keywords: *Colour, Hong Kong, imperialism, musicianship, transnationalism*

HYBRIDITY, MUSICIANSHIP AND RACIAL COLOUR ON THE TRANSNATIONAL STAGE

When clients wanting bands, who want jazz, and so on, say, “We don’t want Filipino musicians.” That already is a big racial slur. What I think they’re really saying is, the Filipino musicians playing out here, a lot of them may not look at the music for music’s sake anymore. They treat it more as a way of making a living. So consequently, their hearts are not into it. It’s going to come out in

the playing. Because if you treat it as a job, like anything else, it's going to become bland. I hear a lot of comments like that, and I think what they're really talking about is just the attitude that a lot of musicians here have developed over the years (Skip, interviewed, April 23, 2002).

Hybridity is proposed partly as a consequence of the migrant Filipino musician's ongoing attachment to Anglophonic popular music, jazz and Latin American music, and the mediation of this music on the diasporic stage in Hong Kong.¹ I will refer to this repertoire as western popular music. Western popular music is the medium through which competence and intimacy are achieved in this diasporic community. This practice in their musicianship transpires in the Philippines and in Hong Kong. The attachment to this repertoire emerged during colonialism, from 1521 to 1896 by the Spanish; and from 1898 to 1946, by the USA.² Since the late 1800s up to the present this repertoire has motivated musicians in their mobility around the South China Sea. The music they had learnt from their colonial masters in the Philippines enabled them to participate and contribute to the music cultures of Shanghai, Macau and Hong Kong (Cheng 1958, Davidson-Houston 1962, Da Veiga Jardim 2003, Watkins 2005, 2009). This music represents but one aspect to their subjectivity, even as it is the core of their livelihood in Hong Kong. This predilection in their music taste indirectly signifies relationships across wide ranging trajectories; from those experienced in their immediate social world during colonialism and after, to a period of contact and exchange with the global economy in the present.

Like many "developing" countries, the Philippines is caught up in the throes of economic hardship and political instability. As a result, the relationship between the Philippines and its former colonial master, the USA, is based on subservience, and its relationship with its prosperous neighbours in Southeast Asia, such as Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia, is based on the exchange and circulation of the Philippines' primary commodity—its people. Filipinos have been transformed into commodities and circulate the globe in search of work and other opportunities not afforded at home. Presently, there are around fourteen and a half million Filipinos working in overseas countries and remittances for 2007 amounted to USD 14 449 928. The latest statistics for 2007 reveal that 59169 Filipinos migrated to Hong Kong in that year. Among them were 113 newly

hired entertainers (POEA 2007). Most of these migrants are in the service industries of host countries while others fall into the category of “entertainer”. Migrants need to carve out their space on the diasporic stage and in the migrant Filipino musician’s world, cross-allegiances therefore unfold temporally and strategically. These allegiances and their differences, even the attachment to a certain music repertoire not of their own, are related to the processes described above.

For a while now, hybridity has fueled the interest of music scholars who have invoked it mainly to discuss its attributes in relation to music style. A result of this interest is the large volume of publications on the subject of music and hybridity. There are too many to mention, even in passing, but I have selected a few. These are Biddle and Knights’ (2007) volume on the hybridity of various popular music styles such as Afropop, tango and rai. In this volume, Holzinger goes as far as identifying various types of hybridities from a musicological point of view. O’Connor (2002) claims an ethnographic study of hybridity in the punk music of various cities in the USA, but falls short of its goals; and Lee’s (1996) book includes a chapter on music in relation to hybridity and nationalism in China. Joseph and Fink’s (1999) book is of primary interest. It does not focus on music as such, but it does invoke hybridity as an experience that is performed, not only in artistic expression and carnival but also in the processes of everyday life. Several chapters in this volume, such as those by Ampka and Moten, who focus on racial matters, have bearing on the discussion in this article. This book has in common with my undertaking in this article the belief that hybridity is not an arbitrary practice, but one that is performed through musical and social action. In cultural terms, hybridity is goal-driven and flows in cyclical fashion between colonizer, colonized or visitor and host in the migrant setting. The migrant Filipino musician has to perform in such a manner as to create through processes as diffusion, appropriation, invention, learning, cultural assimilation and construction (Stross 264), in the period of colonialism and after, his or her own cultural hybridity.³ These qualities in the culturally hybrid are further contextualized in racial colour on the neocolonial stage.

Why focus on racial colour as opposed to any other identification? Racial colour is a dominant trope in guest-host relations. For many migrants in Hong Kong, speech around colour is usually in pursuit of justice; for many local Chinese people, the

racial colour of whiteness, to the point of “transparency” if the numerous beauty spots in town may be believed, is a means to achieving aesthetic ends. At the same time, however, speech around colour, national background and class, in the contexts of musical performance and guest-host relations opens up a space for the recognition of difference. The Filipino musician represents the blending of traits from diverse cultures or traditions. He or she is heterogeneous in origin and composition, and the task of this paper is to reveal further the discursiveness, not only of the concept of hybridity but also the heterogeneity of perceptions of musicianship. Of particular interest here is how the differences in a heterogeneous figure are mobilized on the diasporic stage.

The experiences of both Chinese and Filipinos, as subjects previously colonised by western countries; and, the emphasis on racial colour among Filipinos and the Chinese, point to the fact that racial colour is more important than race itself. As leading Chinese musician and producer, Skip, infers above, racial colour stands out as a measure of their value to the host and themselves. Racial colour also alerts both host and guest to their difference. Racial colour is enlivened by the social interaction between host and visitor, between Filipinos and their former colonizers, and between the researcher and researched. Let me explain. My lineage is African, European and Chinese. Like many Filipinos and Chinese people, I am similarly of “mixed racial origin” and in numerous interactions with musicians, my brownness, in relation to a Chinese name, fueled discussion around commonality and difference. In these practices of labeling and marking points in a war of positions, the cross-identifications carried, in its scope, narratives of unequal relationships between individuals and social groups. Migrancy has as its fundamental concern the negotiation of spatial boundaries. Since social action among Filipino musicians emerges from strategic movement, and since it results in spatial orientation, colour consciousness is inevitably insinuated in spaces where host and visitor are coeval.

Since racial colour in Hong Kong is invested with meanings that are spatial and imaginary, I believe that reducing racial division to colour offers another possibility of investigating relations of class, gender and power in Hong Kong. Above all, there is musicianship. Thus, by framing racial colour as a spatial feature marking its difference, and as an element of desire and derision among both host and visitor, it reconstitutes the potential for

recognising racial difference as a fixed and fluid form of mediation. Since it is further embedded within musicianship, historical processes, social identifications and cultural differences, the type of difference racial colour brings to attention is indeterminate: it is a difference articulated as a consequence of maneuvering through and in space, it is concealed, private and public. The difference is moreover compounded in the contemporary world by a hybrid sensibility inhabiting the space, where the self is determined by anticipated actions. The performance of Western popular music is tied up with the act of looking forward and toward achieving personal goals in the future. This sensibility comes to life in a continuum from stasis to mobility.

This article focuses on hybridity, racial colour and, especially, musical performance. In this regard, it takes its cues from the work of music scholars, such as Aparicio (et al. 2003), Back (2000), Born and Hesmondhalgh (2000), Radano and Bohlman (2000), who have undertaken the rather contentious journey into the study of ethnicity and hybridity, especially in the contexts of migration and neocolonialism. Their work is invaluable but, at this point, I draw on theories of hybridity as offered by leading critical scientists, such as Bakhtin and Bhabha, since they as well have bearing on the situation under discussion.

When it comes to what hybridity is supposed to mean or imply in the arts, then Bakhtin's interpretation of hybridity provides a worthy point of departure for this discussion. He has a sociolinguistic interpretation of hybridity, and describes it as a mixture of (only) two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, where one voice ironises and unmaskes the other within the same utterance. Hybridity is an encounter within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, separated from one another by an epoch and by social differentiation, among other factors (qtd. in Young 20). To circumvent an abstract reading, it is necessary to ground Bakhtin's theory of hybridity in a study of the social lives of people who may be considered hybridizing agents. The study of the social lives of Filipino musicians in relation to the subject of hybridity reveals the confluence of two or more different streams of actions or social languages for that matter, which I would posit as repertoires of words or actions with specific intents. Through their actions and speech, one is able to obtain a detailed reading of how their space is organized in the context of their relationship

with their hosts, and, in turn, their hosts' relationship with them. Filipino musicians draw on a repertoire of specific utterances to account for musicality and kinship among musicians and their relationship with their hosts; they perform a specific repertoire of gestures to encourage audiences and mark their presence, and they need to employ a repertoire of critical tools when dealing with their various relationships in the community and with their hosts.⁴ Bearing in mind their heterogeneity, these repertoires may be construed as different social languages emanating from one source—the migrant Filipino musician.

Bakhtin elaborates further and believes that hybridity works in two ways. The first is “organically,” where hybridity is hegemonising, creating new spaces, structures, scenes; and the second way is “intentionally,” which has to do with hybridity as diasporising, intervening as a form of subversion, of which carnival is a likely demonstration, translation and transformation (quoted in Young 25). Werbner (1997, 12) insists on organic hybridity in the case of transnational groups, but, if one is to respect the binary of organic and intentional hybridity, then, at the risk of reduction, it can be argued that migrant Filipino musicians are active in both forms of hybridizing. Cultures do change as a matter of fact, as is the implication of organic hybridity, but when it changes as a result of colonial dominance, then transformation can hardly be “organic.” My argument is that musicians had acquired the musical taste of the colonial other as a result of interest and at the time they were exposed to this music as a result of colonial dominance. They have inverted the obsequiousness of this experience, and are utilizing this interest in the music of the colonizing other as a means to progress on the transnational and neocolonised stage. I am thus particularly interested in the transformative capacity of the musicians' agency, as this has an impact on matters relating to transgression, assimilation and the creation of new spaces; in addition to learning how each aspect to their lives is evoked in the production of their differences. The degrees to which these processes are organic and/or intentional seem to unfold as circumstances allow. Furthermore, Bakhtin organizes hybridity in binarial terms, which is a position I am at odds with, because it creates a potential for the consideration of a hierarchy of hybridities. On the other hand, Bakhtin provides a valid point of departure for this discussion but it needs amplification by others, such as Bhabha (1990) who has written extensively on mimicry and hybridity in the colonial encounter; and Kompridis

(2005) whose insightful postulations on hybridity and colonialism are, perhaps, more appropriate, especially if one were to embark on an exploration of musical performance and racial matters in colonial and neocolonial terms.

Through movements and musical sounds, musicians negotiate the spaces of their hosts with the intention of gaining substance from them. The successful negotiation of these spaces requires an acute awareness of their circumstances. The specific diasporic and neocolonial space inhabited by migrant Filipino musicians and their hosts, then, emerges as a form of hybrid space characterised primarily by boundary-subversion, transgression and the invocation of hybridity as critical tool. These aptitudes are not permanent aspects to their transience.

Since my argument is partly informed by the outcomes of the colonial encounter, the discussion now turns to one of the key thinkers of the colonial encounter. Although this explanation of hybridity is vague in terms of its implication for the migrant's everyday or neocolonial life, it does hold value when trying to understand one aspect of the ramifications of the colonial encounter. Bhabha defines hybridity as “a problematic of colonial representation...that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other ‘denied’ knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority” (156). Speaking in the context of the position of the migrant, what does hybridity have to do with representation? In the migrant musician's everyday life, there are different forms of identifications entering and leaving, which are present and elusive, all passing in and out of otherness, thereby constituting his or her hybrid identifications and heterogeneity. It is necessary then to understand how migrant Filipino musicians enter and depart from the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority. As described below, the reality is that the “basis of authority” has now been transformed through their agency and the excess of their musicianship. Bhabha understands hybridity as the moment in which the discourse of colonial authority loses its grip on meaning, and finds itself open to the trace of the language of the other, enabling the critic to trace complex movements of disarming otherness in the colonial text (156). In Hong Kong, it can be argued that the power and the authority of the colonial presence has now been subsumed by the Hong Kong Chinese, meaning that the colonial authority of the past had now shifted into the possession

of those who were previously colonized. A new metaphorical space had emerged in which the colonized experiences of two vastly different social groups and ethnic groups, for that matter, are inextricably linked in a rather small physical space.

In these limited spaces, musicians have carved out new scenes, reflecting their responses to hegemonic practices emanating from the domain of the hosts. They have organized spaces where diasporic meanings flourish. One such space is the office of the Hong Kong Musicians Union, where diasporic intimacy among one another comes to life, and, it is an autonomous space respected by the hosts and the Philippine consulate in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Musicians Union is a social club, and has been in existence since 1935. For many years now, it collaborates with the Department of Leisure and Cultural Services and the Philippine consulate in Hong Kong in staging public events for migrant Filipinos.⁵

There emerges now a question as to how the migrant Filipino musician fits into prevailing discourses of hybridity, and how he or she fits in among his or her peers and the world of their hosts. How does their musicianship reflect on their numerous statuses in the margin and the public domain in Hong Kong?

Their spaces are hybrid not only in terms of their habitus, but also in the manner by which musical performance announces and perpetuates the musicians' hybridity. Bear in mind though that the hybridity of musician A is not exactly the same as the hybridity of musician B. The musician is Filipino and performs mainly Western popular music in the space owned by their Chinese hosts. Their audiences include the local Chinese, expatriates from the West and Filipinos.

Musical behaviour informed by colonial contact and the strategic gaze, at home in the Philippines and in the diaspora, articulates an understanding of how members of former colonised peoples, such as migrant Filipino musicians, organise their musical faculties for adaptation to a changing world and a space of difference. Through their musical choices, migrant Filipino musicians perform their musical journeys past and present, thereby either demonstrating an illusion of intimacy with their former colonizer or their mastery in the music of the other may be a subversive act, as musicians excel in copying a seemingly original performance model and songs emanating from the West. They represent the

copy of a model with an excess of staged authenticity, such that one may be convinced one is in the presence of the original artist. Copying provides them the power to move, make practical and aesthetic decisions and achieve competence as performers and social actors. Through the act of copying, Filipino musicians reproduce what they have consumed, and pass this on to another consumer, their Chinese hosts, who have already consumed the musical artefact through various other media. The copy is readily consumed by their largely Hong Kong Chinese audience. The propensity toward imitation in many areas including music is prolific but also redolent of their subaltern status, to the point where their colonial masters and many contemporary insiders and outsiders consider Filipinos excellent mimics in music and everyday life (Constantino 1978).

Hybridity in their case unfolds on various levels—from the basis on which purity in music and race is presumed and contested, through their various social statuses to which a study of racial colour and musicianship in Hong Kong seem to indicate novel directions. These two elements overlap, compete and accede, resulting in the schizophrenia of transnational life.

Their transnational status is not one of mere subjectivity; rather, for Filipino musicians, their transnationalism is articulated in moral actions which build cultural intimacy and contest the possibility of a settled self. Musicians share their resources and knowledge, not only of music but also the everyday. Relations among them are animated as a result of reflection and project toward the future, since musicians need to have support for their actions and decisions. Structures such as the various music bands and the Hong Kong Musicians Union, for instance, provide musicians with companionship and the rekindling of postnational ties. Musicians have come to know their position in Hong Kong society, and their status as members of a minority group motivate them to act in the interests of the self but also consistently in relation to one another.

In Hong Kong, it is important to consider the notion of hybridity within the confluence of multiple specificities, such as racial colour, class, gender, migration and musicianship. As in Bakhtin, Bhabha's "hybridity" does not make sense of the complex environment emerging, where a migrant has only his position as a former colonized agent in common with the host. The situation where two former colonized peoples seem at odds with one another, and the implication for musicianship, configures the domain

of interest occupied by a hybrid sensibility. The implication for hybridity in music and musicianship takes Bakhtin's and Bhabha's attempts at explaining hybridity to an unprecedented level. The migrant Filipino's racial colour, brown, his social class, which ranks among the lowest in Hong Kong, and a repertoire of the other, provide a perception of hybridity which Bakhtin and Bhabha do not make adequate provision for. How, for instance, would one interpret a situation where racial colour underpins relations in what may be construed as the privileged, yellow space of their hosts in Hong Kong, and as that space where the Filipino had received and is creatively hybridizing the western coloniser's (presumably white) influence through musical performance?

As far as racial colour is concerned, I intend not promoting the fantasy of racial purity or the dilemmas of racial miscegenation. In this regard, there is an alternative, such as the idea of creolisation, which is marginally applied particularly to cultural analysis in the port cities of Indian Ocean islands (Boswell 2006) and the circum-Atlantic world (Roach 1996). Kapchan observes that Creole languages facilitate the transfer of goods and symbolic, aesthetic or economic capital. Creolisation of body, culture and language is a process of exchange, reflecting more on difference than similarity, and it is mediated as a locus of power relations. She believes further that, as a linguistic model, creolisation holds the potential for the elucidation of cultural creativity and the examination of the power relations which imbue such innovations and exchanges (241). Given their experiences on this side of the globe, it is possible to conceive of the Filipino musician as a member of a creolized people. Creolisation in their world transpires more clearly on the diasporic stage.

I am interested in a form of social hybridity which integrates the study of musical performance with that of the agency of creolised musicians who, by and large, are brown. On the other hand, the article demonstrates that migrant Filipino musicians strategically and enchantingly represent themselves as agents who have internalized the music and performance aesthetics of their former colonizers. The proficiency and their mastery at imitating performance models and music styles of the West provide an overarching conceptualization for interpreting their roles and participation in the music culture of Hong Kong.

HYBRIDITY AS A SOCIAL FORM BECOMING OF BROWNESS

While the notion of hybridity has detoured from the biological sciences and been used with increasing regularity to interpret the experiences of the subaltern in colonial and neocolonial times, particularly in the context of mimicry, subalternity and agency (Bhabha 1984, 1990, Papastergiadis 2000, Werbner 1997, 2001), the situation of migrant Filipino musicians in Hong Kong brings to attention an additional understanding of the term. As a result of the colonisation of their country, Filipinos have been the recipients and translators of the effects, nefarious and often brutally direct, of the various cultural artefacts of their colonisers. The discursive relationship between coloniser and colonised is manifested in musical performance and music taste, such that many Filipino musicians in Hong Kong not only treasure their musical intimacy with their respective colonisers; moreover, there is a distinct articulation of the discursive Black racial attributes particularly in the USA, and their relationship with the musicality and musicianship of Filipinos.

Many musicians are custodial about their nationality, which occasionally is imbricated with racial colour, that is, being brown or a lighter shade of black, and the quality of their musicianship, which is attributed to their blood being Filipino more than anything else. This metaphorical undertaking to explain the impalpable is a frequent Filipino response to questions around musicianship. Insiders and outsiders situate the musicality of Filipinos on par with that of black people especially in the USA. Blackness has become a conceptual metaphor which brings two distant domains, that of musicianship and racial background, into correspondence with one another. This correspondence assists an understanding of the imaginary in terms of the real (Kövecses 4).

The issue of racial colour merits discussion because unequal relations between guest and host, and, more seriously, the consequences of this encounter, are implied in musicianship. In their relationship, it is the issue of racial colour and its association with the commodification of people, which informs the host's construction of the migrant, and the migrant's construction of self. This situation is innately concerned with their status as forced migrants. They represent a surplus of brown people short-changed for their human value, since musicians observe that employers in Hong Kong prefer the original white and black performers of the music, but instead they settle for the brown Filipino musician, a

naturally abundant and troubling resource from the developing world who is inexpensive and available for exploitation. As a result of their expendability, many musicians claim they are treated like slaves, and that the local Chinese have little respect for them. The contracts of many musicians, for instance, are subject to the whims of club owners and managers, who sometimes terminate contracts without notice of intent. Musicians also complain about being let in through the backdoors of their workplaces, especially in upmarket venues. The matter of respect for musicians seems a problem of global importance, but, in our case, the issue of the value of most musicians in the popular music industry of Southeast Asia requires urgent attention in music scholarship. Hopefully this matter can be addressed elsewhere.

At the risk of perpetuating the dubious claim of excellence in musicianship through signifiers, such as national background and ethnicity, many outsiders are keen to observe that the performances of Filipino musicians surpass, by far, the performances of the original artists (Iyer 1988). The musical excess of this illusion, in combination with an innate and internalized sense of musicality, is subject to evaluation and rationality by them and outsiders. Part of the evaluation process is regimented by the Philippine government who issues an Artist's Record Book to musicians deemed ready for working overseas from where they will remit part of their salaries for the maintenance of their families in the Philippines. Another aspect to the evaluation is the competitive nature of their musicianship, where musicians demonstrate their improvisatory skills for the purposes of outperforming peers and winning accolades.

The performance of Western popular music and the simulation of Western performance styles dominate performances; they are acts convincing the observer of the magic of transnational musicianship and staged authenticity. Performances of the other's music are convincing to the extent that I had come to view the Western popular song and its performance as invested with mimetic meanings. In this context, the mimetic provides a continuum with musicians in different parts of the globe and another epoch. Radano and Bohlman observe that, in times past, the "Europeans identified 'Negro music' as a kind of mimetic genius, despite their intellectual shortcomings; and that black people produced imitations of European singing that seem to exceed the value of the 'original' " (18). This observation resonates with that shared by many in Hong Kong. It is a result of contact within a transforming world, that

host-guest interaction and intervention had produced the processes of racial difference and encoded them in music and language (Lott 15). One may think here of a hybrid aesthetic, not immediately related to music but to racial othering. An observation made in my fieldwork is that their interpretations of their musicianship are ambivalently and interstitially poised between the perceived musicality of Black people in general, and, specifically, white colonial rule in the homeland. As far as the latter is concerned, many musicians associate the advent of colonialism in the Philippines as the dawn of musical sophistication, and they often have little or no knowledge of the rich and diverse indigenous music cultures of the Philippines.

At the risk of reinforcing the stereotyping of the other, as a colonial self in the process of becoming and the subject of research, how does the dominant racial colour of Filipino musicians, brown, offer the reader of their experience yet another possibility of hybridity? In the Hong Kong landscape, brownness is different; it relates obstinately to a racial colour inhabiting the space between the whiteness of their colonizers and the yellowness of their hosts in Hong Kong. Their transnational identities are now formed by the new space they inhabit. This new space is a hybridized one where they represent the music culture of the other, and project this by way of the self into the space of another other. Brownness, indeed, especially when placed in contrast to their Chinese hosts in Hong Kong, is an apt yet fluid observation of the migrant Filipino musician's ethnic background and transience. In their situation, brownness indicates, moreover, that the notion of hybridity has not as yet been sufficiently addressed, particularly in the context of one of modern Southeast Asia's more dynamic social processes—that of forced migration.

In as far as I am keen on presenting a very specific form of hybridity, one that is discursive and multilingual, as opposed to Bakhtin's "two social languages" (when is language not social?), I am equally keen on presenting hybridity in the context of the unfolding of various identifications over time and space. At times, these identifications may be observed synchronically and, at other times, diachronically. As such, the notion of ipseity, offered by Ricoeur, is prescient of the experience by which migrant agents negotiate the trajectories of a parallel modernity in Southeast Asia. Ricoeur regards the human being as not only a settled self. The human being undertakes initiatives and novel enterprises. He or she projects into the future through promises and commitments. At

this level, which he identifies as “ipseity,” the self consists in remaining truthful to a given word or act (qtd. in van der Hengel 84). This experience is visible in the migrant musician’s case, where the self is determined by anticipated actions. In these projected actions, their identities are not substantive, but in the process of becoming. The idea of “becoming” is suggestive of the restless hybrid as a figure not limited to singularity.

RACIALISED EXPERIENCES OF MUSICIANS IN HONG KONG

Being of darker hue seems to have little value in spaces where performances occur. Indeed, performance is one area in which spatial boundaries are porous, and where social difference is rendered imaginary. In many performances, the hierarchy of power and authority is turned upside down, thereby resembling a carnival where the dominant culture is contested but only for those few moments. Like their peers elsewhere, they are able for a few moments to present many of their performances as carnivals where contact, creativity and the invocation of the aesthetics of a performance model from the West reflect on the performer’s authority.

Filipino musicians have been active in Hong Kong since the early 1900s, and since the 1980s they have had to compete with karaoke bars and musicians from other nationalities and local Chinese musicians. Up to the third quarter of the twentieth century, Chinese musicians and composers preferred Filipino musicians because of their musical prowess and skills in arranging and composing. In recent times, however, many employers specify they do not want to employ Filipino musicians. They would rather employ Black and white musicians who are regarded as the original creators of the music, says one of the musicians named Jessie (interviewed 29 April 2002). This musician’s point about having to compete with musicians of other nationalities and ethnic backgrounds makes the idea of hybridity in their social space ever more discursive and fluid. In their situation, the binarial of intentional and organic hybridity, as proposed by Bakhtin, does not count for much. The appropriateness of Bakhtin’s theory is measured in how far one’s imagination can be stretched to have this theory apply to discursive practices such as that discernible in the nexus of transnational musical practices, the intensification of migration and the contention with neocolonialism. One shortcoming in Bakhtin’s argument, on the one hand, is that it is Eurocentric, and does not account for relations in the colonized world of his time and after.

Nor does the argument accommodate the complexity of diasporic life or neocolonial agency in Southeast Asia. While I am on the subject, neither does Bhabha's synecdochal approach to hybridity offer much assistance to the specificity of hybridity in the neocolonial context presented here.

Back to the point, there are venues where members of the staff are reluctant to serve Filipinos. On the surface, the abrasiveness seems a result of class difference. Although class difference is one rigidly enforced, even among the Chinese themselves, the unwillingness to provide good service in the hospitality industry is a reaction to the colour and class of Filipino musicians. Musicianship is disturbingly an element in this relationship, as it does not serve the interests of the market-based economy in Hong Kong. Based on encounters and friendships with local Chinese people, my observation is that discrimination based on colour may not be applied to everyone else, since not all Chinese are racists. Skip shared this observation about Teresa Carpio, a member of a prominent family of musicians in Hong Kong, and a highly popular musician who calls herself the Queen of Asian Song (Carpio 2009). Skip says Teresa was an exception, as her national background and skin colour did not make a difference. She speaks Cantonese and is a successful performer in the Philippine and Chinese diasporas as far as the USA.

On the other hand, faced with a continuous influx of migrants, the Chinese population in Hong Kong has reason to feel threatened and encroached upon by migrants from the developing world. The "developing world" is emphasized here, since these migrants differ vastly from most migrants or cosmopolitans from the developed world. Filipino migrants represent a world of the unknowable and the allure of the undesirable. Not that the social fabric of Hong Kong is close to ideal, Filipino migrants nevertheless bring to their hosts distant noises of political instability and poverty. These remind the Hong Kong Chinese how fragile their safety and routine existence is. In this context, one cannot always be sure if the experiences of Filipinos in Hong Kong are consistently evidence of racism, since racism does not always have an easily identifiable shape and size. I am satisfied though that, in many instances, discrimination emerges partly from the frustration in having to share a paranoid space with outsiders (Burgin 1990), for while Hong Kong is home to the Chinese people, it was at the same time, a space where the British ruled for much of its existence.

HYBRIDISING FROM THE BOTTOM UP

Like many of their hosts, many migrant Filipino musicians exercise racial discrimination. Again, bearing in mind the discursiveness of hybridity, especially as far as colour consciousness is concerned, a form of hybridity recognising social differences is an experience the musician is both the recipient and agent. On one of my visits in 2001 to the office of the Hong Kong Musicians Union, I met a senior musician who shared with me his knowledge of Africa. He talked about Rhodesia and corrected himself, for the name is Zimbabwe. He did not understand why “Negritos” were expelling white farmers because they do not have the skills to run a farm.

Being from South Africa, where race talk to the point of weariness fills the realism of the everyday, I had hoped this observation around race and colour were incidental, but it emerged again somewhere else. At a Filipino celebration called Santo Niño, in honour of the baby Jesus, at Saint Joseph’s Catholic Church on Garden Road, Central, there were about ten senior musicians along with staff members of the union. They were running through a few tunes and discussing the arrangements on the scores. I started a conversation with a union staff member. On hearing my name, her first observation was that I am too dark to be Chinese. Deng, the chairman of the union at the time, suggested that if someone asks the same question again, then I should say I am Filipino.

I would like to point out that my colour, as Deng humoured, enables me to pass for Filipino. In the context of my own hybridity, passing allows me to manufacture my differences and to invoke or shed them as the opportunity requires. Given their aptitude for the music of the other, it may be claimed that the music allows musicians to pass as the original artists. Where this music is not their own compositions or Filipino, passing through musical performance also reflects briefly on their ability to pass for an ethnic other, be it white or Black. Within the very act of passing, there lies the opportunity for the mobilization of a hybridising self which further challenges a binary of the organic and intentional.

The conversations above occurred immediately after having met the senior musician and the staff member. The musician’s comments are ironical as many Filipinos consider blackness a sign of superb musicianship, while he associates it with a lack of skills to

farm and govern. In their case, the idea of raising the issue of colour and origin is significant, because it arises from their own experiences as people whose skins are too dark in a society where whiteness is desirable. The consciousness of a darker racial colour is projected onto others who are even darker. On a few occasions during visits to the union office, for instance, I overheard derogatory comments about the Black occupants of the Chung King Mansions on Nathan Road, Tsim Sha Tsui. This block of residential flats and traders is notorious, and, probably, one of the more interesting buildings in Hong Kong. It is infamously associated with Black and South Asian migrants of a certain class and disposition.

In Hong Kong I have been made aware that colour consciousness is an aspect of the cultural identities of both host and visitor. The questions I have around colour in this part of the world reveal deep-lying contingencies that are indeed about losing face, since a darker colour is considered a source of embarrassment. There may be cultural lags in other areas but colour consciousness nevertheless provides host and visitor with the assurance of a common sociality. It is one also around which both host and visitor are mobilised. There is a large industry to this end, in Hong Kong, which feeds on the desire of both host and visitor to achieve and maintain relative degrees of whiteness, at all costs, literally. Through both groups aspiring for whiteness and even transparency, there is not only commonality but also a sense of wishing away their hybridity.

THE MUSICAL BROWNS, STEREOTYPE AND HIERARCHY

For musicians, the performance space and the urban spaces they pass through are where musicianship is symbolic of class and race relations. The musicians are, by and large, known for their musical gift. Filipinos are stereotypically associated with music making only. Other aptitudes are not taken into account, and they are judged on their colour, their profession and national origin. Much like their creolized peers in other corners of the globe, they are darker than their hosts and they are entertainers. The two are synonymous with each other, especially when the gaze of the host falls upon them.

Their repertoire further determines the extent to which colour and class are significant in their lives. The adherence to Western popular music underpins the nature of class relations between host and visitor in Hong Kong. While not suggesting the impermeability of any “culture,” Filipino musicians have the onerous task of

perpetuating Euro-American culture, by way of its music, and maintaining the strong appeal of this music. It is no fault of their own as successful adaptation in their new home is partly determined by fulfilling the physical pleasures of others, but they also stand to gain out of this arrangement since they are in turn able to meet their immediate material needs.

Since they have a better command than their hosts of Western popular music, their behaviour can be seen to observe those insidious relations between East and West as one worth maintaining. In this way, Filipino musicians remain fixed within certain networks of power not entirely of their own making. On the other hand, by means of identification, their repertoire enables musicians to complete those effects lacking in their lives. By identifying with a master signifier, American culture, Western popular music is guaranteed a place in their world, but it is also through maintaining their relationship with the music of the other that their hybridity is significantly produced and permissive of authoritative power.

In contrast to the West, where issues of race and colour have received widespread attention in the interest of human progress, racial colour in Hong Kong is a mechanism around which relations between groups of people with diverse origins are manipulated for ideological purposes. This applies to other groups of Chinese people on the mainland as well, who share a common nationality but who are strictly divided along perceptions of their otherness. Language, music and dance are often used as key markers of their otherness (Rees 2000). In China, there are many taboos, which may not be discussed in public. Centuries of authoritarianism under feudalism, communism and colonialism, had encouraged the development of a culture, where there is an emphasis on maintaining various hierarchies and silence. Thus, attention to race relations and perceptions of colour do not warrant a need for interrogating such hierarchies. Rather, this unspoken fiat in the Hong Kong Chinese worldview makes it easier for the local Chinese to practice discrimination toward others. Racial colour remains a useful device for maintaining dominance not only of the host but also their former colonisers, even after the handover of Hong Kong to China. In addition to its historical continuity, the adherence to discriminatory practices based upon differences in racial colour is a tacit acknowledgement and homage to the ongoing and spectral authority of the former colonizer in the Philippines and Hong Kong.

The Filipino musician and his repertoire of Western popular music and Latin American music sustain the dominance of the host, but the repertoire also reflects on his own social standing by way of his relationship with American imperialism. Filipino musicians continue to measure musical competence by way of Western or American popular music. On the other hand, the repertoire is a hindrance to Filipino musicians and they object to the lack of musical diversity as required by their hosts. Objection is carried through in performance, where, on many occasions, musicians perform merely out of duty and not passion. At the same time, Filipino musicians carry the weight of comments concerning their lack of “originality.” A critique of their musicality is in fact a critique of their colour and hybridity, and their status as forced migrants. On the other hand, given the excess of their musical authenticity in most performances, I would, however, argue that, through the quality of their musicianship, they not only stand apart from their hosts but also subvert the basis of authority of both host and their former colonizer.

Through musicianship, and in recognizing their differences, the local Chinese have enclosed Filipino migrants in the bondage of stereotype. This kind of stereotyping is a feature of this “world class city” in which there is little room for diversity and plurality. It is therefore ironic that hybridity offers them the freedom to mobilise their differences, but that movements are subject to a constrained space and executed under surveillance.

Given the connotation of “black,” as in people who are disadvantaged and the musical stereotyping associated along with it, it may be proposed that Filipino musicians are, indeed, black or as hip hop ideology suggests, a lighter shade of black. Blackness is not only a colour of victimization but also a colour and space of mobilization and achievement. Filipino musicians are active in building their awareness about their hosts, and are aware of their position in the global economy. As migrant workers, they have made considerable political and financial gains because they exploit the opportunities provided by their hosts. For better or worse, it makes sense to situate the struggles and victories of this marginalised group from the mis-developed world within the paradigm of blackness. In the context of hybridity, blackness may be redefined so as to include other ethnic realities.

Hybridity has come a long way from its roots in the biological sciences through its association with bastardisation, and, now, as a means to understanding difference through musical performance on the diasporic stage. On the subject of stereotyping, it has, however, become the moment to ask if hybridity is only of consequence to the study of brown and black peoples' experiences and cultural expressions. The other lacuna in studies of musical hybridity is that of gender relations. In Southeast Asia, the ramifications inherent in colour consciousness and a hierarchy of colour, which may be construed as reactionary, are multiple. In order to develop a theory around the issue of racial colour in Southeast Asia, my postulation, concerning colour and space within the context of sound and the production of hybridity, holds the potential for further debate. The challenge is to use the performance of Western popular music as a text through which those elements that will facilitate a reading of the situation are organised. What does the adherence to a repertoire of largely Western popular music reveal about the musician and his identifications in terms of colour? What does the repertoire reveal about their relationship with their host and the rest of the world?

CONCLUSION

In order to help release the concept from its colonial and evolutionary shackles, this article has glossed over racial hybridity and has instead presumed the flexibility of the term, hybridity, as a socially viable experience on the neocolonial stage. At the risk of forcing the argument, I have emphasized that, in terms of conceptualization, hybridity is rather discursive territory which does not accommodate a binarial of the organic and the intentional.

As a state of sociomusical consciousness and agency, hybridity is a continuum allowing for the flexibility and agency of the visitor, and of the responses of both host and visitor to change in the local and on the transnational stage. In the case of the musicians, the continuum comes to life as a result of musical performance, and, at the other extreme, a musical gift. Musicians interpret their reality in differing ways and their utterances reveal that discrimination can never be complete or homogeneous. The lack of uniformity of expression renders discrimination itself an experience that is marked with difference and, as such, there are conflicting messages conveyed in the public domain. The government, according to one of the musicians, Jerry (interviewed 17 April 2002), projects itself as being

just but discrimination remains. Where it occurs, it would seem that discrimination in Hong Kong is veiled or blatantly overt, and is focused on certain nationalities whose peoples are more likely dark-skinned. Racial discrimination is an hegemonic practice and, judging by its poor reception, the antiracism law of 10 July 2008 is not necessarily going to improve matters (Tharoor 2008).

Discrimination is not only racial but also musical. Filipino musicians excel at imitating the music of the other, and the lack of a repertoire with original music is attributed to the demands of management and the perceived desires of audiences. On the other hand, apart from its entertainment value, the musicianship of Filipino migrants does not hold much value in a society, where there is an emphasis on social status, materialism and consumption. It is not always the case, but a recent visit to a night club frequented only by Chinese people revealed disdain for the Filipino band who was trying their utmost in having the patrons at least show a little interest, even if they were not moved to dancing. Patrons were sitting at tables with their backs turned to the band, and the frustration on the faces of the band members was palpable.

Migrant Filipino musicians are poised, under the gaze of the host, on the margins of everyday life where there seemingly is little agency, only difference. While this state of affairs may be attributed to their being a minority, and minorities are often overlooked whether or not there is a diaspora involved, the margin in Hong Kong should not be regarded as a space of indifference and apathy. Rather, if anything, this article has already demonstrated the workings of agency in a diasporic, hybrid space. In this regard, the marginal space of the migrant Filipino musician emerges as an interstitial place, where cultural differences contingently and conflictually touch (Bhabha 2007).

In view of these circumstances, focusing on colour, as opposed to race, is based on a certain reality as many Chinese behave toward Filipinos in ways, which reflect and perpetuate the hegemonic ideology of subordination and the patterns of inequality in their daily lives. These are in turn justified and explained by assumed theories of cultural shortcomings and material want. The two groups project these internalised levels of consciousness onto one another, and, as a result of colonialism and other preexisting views of the world, whiteness remains the central focus around which a hierarchy of colour and basis for interaction are legitimised. These relations

unfold in what I have been proposing as a hybrid space. That musicianship and musical performance should provide further means of understanding the exchanges engendered by the processes described in this article means that the notion of hybridity offers rather exciting challenges in music scholarship.

ENDNOTES

¹This article is based on a part of my doctoral fieldwork undertaken from 2001 to 2005 under the supervision of Manolete Mora at the University of Hong Kong. I wish to thank the musicians who offered their time.

²In the article I use the term “colonialism” to refer to the period when the Philippines and Hong Kong were under colonial administration and also to the critical study of this period. “Neocolonialism” is understood as the period after the withdrawal of the colonial powers, but with the recognition that there is never a complete withdrawal and that traces of colonial rule continue to have a presence.

³Most of the musicians are male and instrumentalists while the few women performers are mostly singers. Most of my interactions were with male musicians and, as such, I frame much of the discussion in this article using the masculine pronoun.

⁴Musicians frequently mentioned that they are members of the same family whose commonality is their national background, and, that they share the same blood, that is, Filipino blood. Many musicians also claimed that their musicianship may be attributed to the fact that they have the blood of black people somewhere in their veins. These utterances had taken the form of a repertoire of utterances invoked each time I asked about the nature of relationship building and the claims made by many as to the nature of their musicianship. This repertoire I had considered a means of protecting the boundaries of their migrant position in Hong Kong.

⁵There is more detail on the history and relationships in the Hong Kong Musicians Union in an unpublished manuscript I am presently working on and in my dissertation.

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