Introductory Notes on Philippine Music Hybridity

A people's social experience of inequality in colonial and neocolonial settings provides a background by which different forms and processes of cultural hybridity spring. Because Philippine cultures have had these long histories of contacts and engagements with Spanish and American colonial projects (the latter continuing to be felt, in part, as the global modern "here and now"), it is imperative to look closely into some of the basic cultural processes that have induced Philippine cultures to change. By doing so, one begins to understand and empathize with Filipino social experience.

In cultural anthropology's literature, these social processes of modern moments are theorized under various terms, such as accommodation or assimilation, hegemony and cooptation (rearticulation of dominant ideology), including the myriad concepts behind resistant discourses and practices that resist cultural domination and imperialism such as nativism, various guises of nationalism, the reinventions of tradition, the myriad assertions of authenticity, and the quixotic searches for the "pure" or origins. These ideological practices constitute the faces of modernity and Westernization which colonialism usually assumes.

In postcolonial theory, these responses are subsumed under the rubric of hybridity, a catch-all term that not only encapsulates the more specific cultural processes above, but one which also denotes, more importantly, the *domestication and translation of modern cultural signs and differences*, i.e., especially in the context of cross-cultural, normatively unequal, engagements. Thus, lying at the heart of social experience, hybridity is about modernity, but to unpack the complexity that this concept brings about will be skirted by the issue as it is daunting indeed. Cultural hybridity is not simply about syncretism or mixing of different cultural forms and traits, as this seems to have been the grand, albeit naive, metanarrative about its nature, but is actually about *social meanings, performative ones,* which gain more intelligibility when situated within highly-specific local historical contexts or within particular nodes of relationship that bind the local to the global or vice versa.

This special issue of *Humanities Diliman* presents six selected cases of Philippine music making processes which neatly illustrate cultural hybridity. Unlike the conventional perspective of representing Philippine music as a reified cultural product, i.e., as produced by homogenous communities living within clearly bounded sites (still the dominant mode of writing or representing Philippine music as this has been produced, disseminated and legitimated by formal institutions and apparatuses of the state and the market), each author in the volume offers a snapshot of Philippine music hybridity. Each problematizes the essentialist meaning of Philippine music for,

as it shall be shown, this is now "mobile," traversing political boundaries, exchanging cultures in the process. Thus, the music hybridities that the issue deals with cannot be understood outside of the inevitable global flows of money, people, ideas, material culture and images, for such music hybridities are symptomatic of the deeper, more real, current that underwrites them, i.e., crosscultural, intercultural, if not transcultural exchanges.

A common emphasis that runs through the six articles in the issue is the concern for music in everyday life. However, as it will be shown in each of the exploration, this does not preclude the influence of formal power structures that—continuing to exercise their neocolonial thrust, via corporatization, for profit and exploitation—are separate from, yet connected to, day-to-day lives of Filipinos in the Philippines and elsewhere. For example, this statement is manifest in the musical performances of Charice Pempengco and Arnel Pineda whose recent successes in the transnational sphere began with the interactive Internet media YouTube. Thanks to the thousands of users—who acted like midwives—of that media, Pempengco and Pineda were drastically ushered into the global spotlights. Christi-Anne Castro describes, in great detail, the "dynamic milieu culture" of internet media, supporting the visibility of these most recent Filipino pop music icons in the transnational stages. In short, Internet users (separate from corporate control) have actively participated in the construction of Pempenco's and Pineda's hybrid subjectivities, appropriating the power of technology for their own ends and, in the process, have confounded essentialisms.

The nonmateriality of Internet media is totally opposite the materiality of media in Agusan Manobo possession ritual, which is the topic of my own contribution to this issue. Hyperreal representations do not symbolize real substantial things of the world. In contrast, Agusan Manobo ritual performances, being face-to-face interactions, are literally embodied. The spirit medium and a myriad of ritual objects are the means by which participants indicate their copresences with one another and to the contemporary hybrid world that Manobos now live in. In my article, I explore the mixing of speech (heteroglossia) and objects in ritual performances, even incarnating the spirit of the Visayan settlers in the Manobo medium as a form of mimicry that accepts Visayan cultural domination.

Thus, given the two examples of hybridity that belong to two different social worlds above, there will be no attempt to provide a reductive, systematic explanation as to why hybridities have taken the forms that they do in various sites. That will violently erase the uniqueness of each specific hybridity. Instead, each author phenomenologically describes context-sensitive meanings of hybridity, each of which embodies a particular moment of "global modern" social experience. Thus, concepts like subjectivity, historically specific authenticities, relationships to the modern world, and agency take center stage. For example, Lee Watkins builds a compelling case of fluid hybridity of Filipino musicians in Hong Kong. He argues that racial color of

"brown-ness" (akin to "blackness," which racial color is associated with musicianship in the USA) is exemplary of agency that Filipino musicians realize, as they utilize their Chinese hosts' stereotypical perception of them in terms of class-based racial color. By enacting that stereotype, the musicians acquire the material benefit they need and want as forced migrants in a diasporic space that is obviously hybrid (i.e., populated with "white, yellow and brown races"). There is some kind of irony in Watkins's reading of Filipino musicians as subjects. While we would assume the Filipino musicians' enactment of their status—being the marginalized Other—is a form of servitude (i.e., since this is particularly given by dominant "yellow" society, once subaltern themselves in relation to their former colonial "white" masters), Watkins observes that the Filipino musicians' mastery and proficiency of music performances originating from their American colonial masters, problematize and undo the stereotype.

In addition, other articles in the issue reveal more forms of ironies, disjunctions and ambiguities. Pamela Costes-Onishi discusses the transnational movement of an indigenous Philippine music tradition, the Moslem *kulintangan*, to the USA. Onishi finds out that the authenticity of this tradition has been transformed and must not be considered as "fixed," but again fluid in relation to a changed historical and cultural context, i.e., the immigrant lives of Filipinos in the USA. She furthers that the concept of authenticity must be understood in relation to the need of these new bearers of *kulitangan* tradition as they locate their identity in that newfound home.

The travel of music as material culture, therefore, does not foretell what will happen to them when they meet local cultures, for the historical contexts of such music hybridities are what really matter in the first instance. These contexts are so distinct from each other or contingent that they resist abstract, speculative and scientistic generalizations. In Mary Talusan's article, the Moslem rebel's encounter with modern, colonial music (i.e., the music industry's American folk, country and rock ballads) is a perfect illustration of how unpredictable the life and reception history of music expression can be. In Bangsamoro rebel songs, the lyrics containing the grassroots sentiments (that were felt by rank-and-file supporters of the separatist war in Mindanao) transmogrified into the officializing ideology of Bangsamoro in the decade following its emergence. Yet the American music code, in which these lyrics were set, was basically kept intact or maintained. Talusan asserts that this had to do with the aim of broadcasting the political messages to a wide audience. Similarly, in Northern Philippines, another genre gives us a glimpse into how whimsical the appropriation of American music has been or can be. In Michiyo Yoneno-Reyes's research, the genre *salidummay*, while thought to be "indigenous" or "traditional," is, in fact, a genre influenced by American musical practices at the turn of the last century, i.e., "congregational singing" or hymn singing in American Protestant churches and in songs whose melody is sung in group unison by youths and, later, teachers in American-instituted public schools. Today, the acculturated, hybrid *salidummay* genre is polyvalent. It is sung collectively as entertainment in village gatherings, a genre that culture

bearers themselves do not recognize as "authentically" theirs. Yet, it has been ironically used as a symbol of solidarity in the contemporary Pan-Cordilleran ethnic movement.

All in all, the snapshots of Philippine music hybridity in this issue offer us a sense of how music makings by diverse kinds of Filipinos—living within and without the Philippines—grapple with their experiences of the global modern. The articles thus correct the idealizing tendency to define Philippine music in terms of static or ahistorical essences. Rather than represent Philippine music as isolated pure musical expressions, the articles portray expressive culture as embedded within local historical processes, i.e., as performative creations that had or have been imbued with social meanings, having been emergent to on-the-ground social material processes of interacting with peoples and their cultures beyond the political borders of Philippine state. As Filipinos move away from the homeland in search of work, so do their music and its meanings. Or even if some do not or cannot actually travel due to poverty (i.e., as global development is uneven), chances are that these same people will still encounter modern practices and images that their many media channelize in distant places. By exploring music hybridity as consequent to inevitable cross-cultural global exchanges, one then gets a richer picture of Filipino responses to a world that, since the advent of air travel and telecommunications, has been highly and intensely mobile indeed.

José S. Buenconsejo
Special Issue Editor