



STARS in
WORLD
CINEMA

SCREEN ICONS AND STAR
SYSTEMS ACROSS CULTURES

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Sharon's Noranian Turn: Stardom, Race, and Language in Philippine Cinema

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In Lino Brocka's 1975 film, *Maynila: sa Mga Kuko ng Liwanag* ('Manila in the Claws of Neon'), a work that ushered in the social-realist aesthetic of the Philippine New Cinema, a menial construction worker named Benny dreams of escaping poverty. Given to the cheerful habit of singing on the job, Benny hopes to become a famous singer one day, like his movie star idol Nora Aunor. Benny is killed in a construction accident, dying in mid-song. To evoke the harsh fate of rural migrant workers in Manila, the camera lingers on Benny's broken body and on a star image that immediately voices his unrealised hopes: a songbook cover of Nora Aunor.

The scene powerfully condenses the way in which, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Nora was an immediately legible icon for poor rural and urban media audiences in the Philippines. National Artist for Literature Nick Joaquin calls Nora the 'lowly *morenita* from Iriga', a brown-skinned teenage girl who rose to superstardom from an impoverished provincial childhood (de Manila 1965: 6–7). The allusion to Nora's rags-to-riches mythology in *Manila in the Claws of Neon* underscores the redemptive, if unrealised, horizon of Noranian fandom: a collective yearning for social transformation, for things to be other than they are (Flores 2000b: 79). This is the very horizon of fan reception that an emerging elite-identified *mestiza* star, Sharon Cuneta, Nora's eventual 'successor in popularity' (Cervantes 2000: 20) would attempt to emulate in the 1980s, over a decade after Nora's phenomenal rise.

This chapter seeks to understand the racialised allure of the two most important female stars in Philippine cinema's post-studio era: Nora Aunor and Sharon

Cuneta.¹ Broadly, the argument I present here has three moments. The first section traces decisive shifts in racialised star embodiment in popular Philippine cinema. In the post-studio era, Nora, the first 'brown beauty' of Philippine cinema, forced an unprecedented break with the film industry's reliance on *mestizo/a* stardom, the practice of casting fair-skinned actors with foreign features in leading roles. I suggest that Nora Aunor changed the racial terms of Philippine stardom so profoundly that, by the 1980s, Sharon Cuneta, an elite-identified *mestiza* celebrity, resorted to the appropriation of Nora's biographical mythology in her bid to become the next Filipino superstar. This refashioning, which I call Sharon's 'Norianan turn', points to shifts in language, 'mestizo envy' and 'white love' in Philippine cinema. The second moment of my broader argument situates both stars in the context of the national language debates in the 1960s and 1970s, and the rise of Taglish as the new *lingua franca* of popular culture after the 1980s. A continual code-shifting between the vernacular language of Tagalog and the colonial languages of English and Spanish, Taglish is a linguistic analogue for the racial ambivalence that constitutes *mestizo/a* identity (Rafael 2000: xi–xii, 162–7).

Given the prolific film output of Nora and Sharon (both are still active in the film industry today), it becomes impossible to confine either star to any single period in their career, whether the height of Nora's popularity in the late 1960s to the early 1970s, or Sharon's Noranian turn in her mid-1980s melodramas. In juxtaposing these phases in the careers of two Filipina icons, my aim is not to reduce either star to these decisive moments. Rather, I seek to challenge monolithic conceptions of class-segregated film audiences in the Philippines by retracing the path of two cross-over stars. Accordingly, the third section of this chapter suggests that the disruptive form of star embodiment Nora actualised and Sharon appropriated led to an unexpected convergence between class-stratified audiences in Philippine cinema.

Race and Stardom in the Studio and Post-Studio Eras

The studio era of Philippine filmmaking stretched from roughly 1936 to 1961, with a hiatus from 1941 to 1945 due to World War II. The Philippine studio era saw the rise of large commercial film-production outfits, a durable star system and genre films. The 1950s through to the early 1960s, dominated by the 'Big Three' studios (LVN, Sampaguita and Premiere), have been dubbed the 'Golden Age' of Philippine cinema because of the aesthetic and technical achievements of Filipino filmmaking in this period (Tiongson 1992: 27–9).

By 1965, the dissolution of the studio system was well underway. The mid- to late 1960s ushered in the excesses of post-studio-era filmmaking in the Philippines: quickie filmmaking financed by inexperienced producers; films of poor technical quality and low prestige in comparison with big studio productions; and the unprecedented power of the freelance star (or star-producer), who is able to

command inflated talent fees unheard of in the days of studio contracts (Lacaba 1983b: 176; Celino 1966: 38–9). Arriving on the movie scene from nationwide success on radio and television in 1967, Nora both deviated from and intensified the star system of the studio period that preceded her: she became the first non-*mestizo* star of Philippine cinema and, at the peak of her popularity, the most powerful star in its history.

The daughter of a provincial train porter, the 12-year-old Nora Cabaltera Villamayor won a regional amateur singing contest wearing a second-hand dress her mother had altered. Her destitute family listened on a neighbour's radio as her victory was announced; the prize money she won that first evening was for an older sister's tuition (de Manila 1970: 6–7, 57–9). For her screen name, Nora would adopt 'Aunor', the last name of relatives who helped raise her (Pareja 1994a: 205). In 1967, at the age of 14, Nora won the grand finals of a nationally-televised singing contest, *Tawag Ng Tanghalan* ('Call of the Stage') (de Manila 1970: 7). In the years that followed, Nora emerged as a pop music sensation on radio, television, and film (Figure 13.1).

Nora embarked on a decades-long movie career that began with early teen musicals in the late 1960s, turning to serious prestige projects and commercial melodramas from the mid 1970s to the present. Nora is remembered for her roles as a virtuous but long-suffering woman who puts the needs and wishes of others before her own (Tadiar 2004: 227), as in the film *Atsay* ('Housemaid', 1978) (Figure 13.2).

Nora's work in the 1982 New Cinema film *Himala* ('Miracle') has been hailed as the finest performance of the period, and of Philippine cinema as a whole (David 1995: 58). Still professionally active at the time of this writing, Nora has been called 'the most accomplished transmedia star the Philippines has ever produced, spanning a career of four decades and counting' in music, television, film, and theatre (Flores 2000a: i).

Nora's superstardom is significant because she broke the mould of the *mestizo/a* stardom that preceded her. In the studio era, matinee idols were invariably mixed-race actors whose light skin and European or American features allowed them to be packaged as local approximations of Hollywood stars. As film historians have pointed out, Philippine film studios 'favored mestizas and mestizos for principal roles because they approximated the Caucasian features of American icons' (Tiongson 1992: 24). *Mestizo/a* movie idols embodied a neo-colonial mimicry of Hollywood, prompting Vicente Rafael to characterise Philippine film stardom as a social institution for 'the reproduction of a mestizo/a social order' (Rafael 2000: 189). In Philippine cinema, it is 'race mixture' – the *mestizo/a* star as 'the event of miscegenation' (Sexton 2003: 243) – that, far from unravelling the power of racialised logic by exposing the instability of racial categories, shores up the cachet of whiteness.² More than a name for race mixture, *mestizaje* in Philippine cinema sets off a circuit of spectatorial substitutions: the *mestiza* star is a local

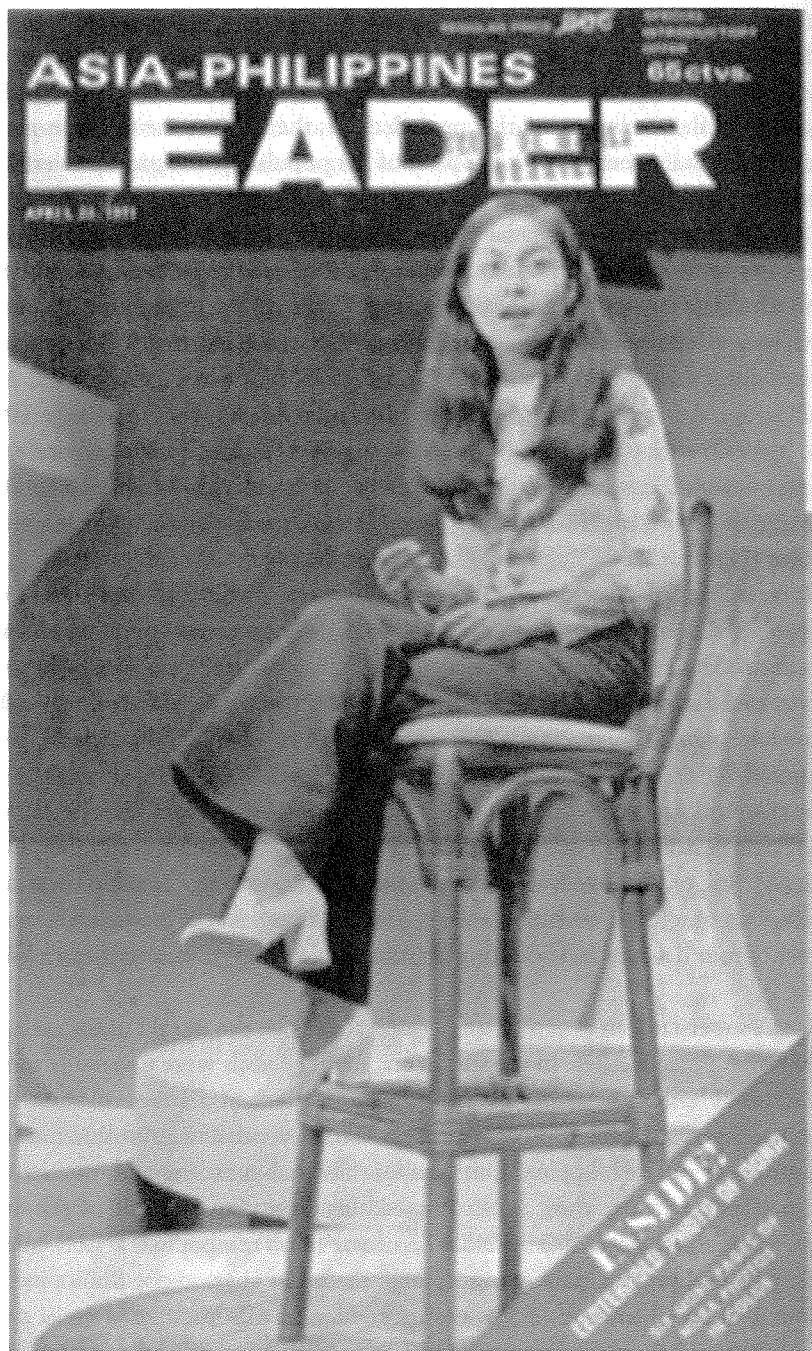


Figure 13.1. In the late 1960s, Nora emerged as the Philippines' first superstar, a pop music sensation who crossed over into television and film. *Source: Asia-Philippines Leader* 1.3 (23 April 1971). Courtesy of the Rizal Library Filipiniana periodicals collection, Ateneo de Manila University.



Figure 13.2. Nora Aunor's iconic role was a maltreated but long-suffering female domestic servant in *Atsay* ('Housemaid', dir. Eddie Garcia, 1978).

placeholder for the 'white' Hollywood star or the elite descendants of Spanish and American colonisers; but at the next moment in the circuit, the *mestiza* star solicits identification from 'brown' lower-income urban audiences who comprise the bulk of the nation's filmgoers. The racially and linguistically hybrid *mestizo/a* star serves as an intermediary between racialised figures of privilege and disenfranchisement (Rafael 2000: 162–6).

In relying on *mestizo/a* stars, film studios had to manage the public's 'love-hate relationship' with the class privilege and colonial dominance such stars personified (Cervantes 2000: 18–19). Most *mestiza* stars were renamed to gentrify and 'indigenise' them. *Mestiza* stars were repackaged with Filipino screen names to erase their foreignness: Sigrid von Giese became Paraluman, Flora Danon was rechristened Rosa Rosal, Dorothy Jones was dubbed Nida Blanca and Susan Reid was renamed Hilda Koronel. In *mestizo/a* stardom, as Nicanor Tiongson has pointed out, the dynamics of indigenisation and imitation are inextricable (2000: 24–6). *Mestizo/a* stars were offered in mimicry of Hollywood: Rudolph Valentino's counterpart was the Philippines' own 'great profile', Leopoldo Salcedo; Elvis's double was Eddie Mesa, and Audrey Hepburn's was Barbara Perez. On the other hand, foreignness was indigenised: *mestizas* were costumed in nativist attire, playing down-to-earth barrio lasses and speaking a florid Tagalog heard only in movies (de Manila 1965: 7).

In the late 1960s, *mestizo/a* stardom was challenged by the ascendancy of Nora, upheld as *kayumangging kaligatan*, a 'smooth-complexioned brown beauty' (Velarde 1980: 8). Nora's defiance of the film industry's axiom 'white is beautiful' (Tiongson 1979: 17) was never to be replicated at such a scale by another Filipino film star. Nora's body defied a racialised politics of casting that enshrined tall, fair-skinned *mestizo/a* performers as the apex of physical beauty and cinematic glamour. In the era of Nora's superstardom, Noranian embodiment was a horizon of corporeal-aesthetic valuation that coalesced around her person, mapped on the axes of racial, class and gender allegiances. The popular valorisation of teen star Nora's diminutive 4 ft 11 in. body and 'coffee-brown skin', 'the color of the skin of the majority of movie fans' (Zapanta 1970: 43), amounted to a disruptive defiance of *mestizo/a* stardom in Philippine cinema. This performative defiance was not only enacted by the star, but also brought into being by her massive Noranian fan following among the urban and rural poor. Behn Cervantes describes the feminist and working-class sympathies of Nora's persona:

The ascendancy of Aunor, the dark and underprivileged Filipina, coincided with the rise of rabid nationalism during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Her struggle against the mestizas was emotionally supported by the anti-imperialist, pro-*masa* [masses] sentiment brewed by activism. Furthermore, her story was cinematic in proportion, being [that of] a genuine Cinderella who rose from rags to riches. She was the Dark *Pinay* [Filipina] who toppled the White *Tisay* [Mestiza].

The Filipino audience was ripe for Nora Aunor. Domestic helpers, *atsays* [housemaids], cigarette vendors, store clerks, and everyone who identified with the diminutive beauty realized that for price of a movie ticket, they could make a difference. They were heard and noticed through Nora. Her smooth brown complexion and dark brown eyes legitimized their own skin and eyes. They became fanatically loyal (Cervantes 2000: 20).

In 1980, 13 years after Nora's sensational emergence, another 14-year-old singing sensation appeared on the pop music scene: Sharon Cuneta. Dubbed the 'jukebox princess', Sharon was, like Nora, a teenage recording star who would successfully cross over to the screen with a slew of profitable teenpics (Pareja 1994b: 225) (Figure 13.3).

In many ways, however, Sharon's path in music and film could not have been more different from Nora's. A child of humble origins, Nora proved her worth in provincial amateur singing contests, slowly inching her way closer to televised triumph in Manila. A child of considerable means, Sharon was a mayor's daughter with relatives in the television and music industries (Celino 1984: 20, 38). Sharon recorded a chart-topping single at the age of 12 and had two gold singles to her credit by the time she was 15. For her first film, a movie studio eager to make films targeting Sharon's emerging audience of educated middle-class teens offered her a



Figure 13.3. Dubbed the 'jukebox princess', Sharon Cuneta was a teenage recording star who began her film career in 1981, starring in a slew of profitable teenpics. Source: *Celebrity* (31 May 1981). Courtesy of the Rizal Library Filipiniana periodicals collection, Ateneo de Manila University.

talent fee rivalling that of top-tier female stars, Nora among them. Sharon entered the movie business in 1981 as 'the highest paid neophyte in Philippine history' (Constantino 1981: 22; Celino 1984: 20). Such crucial differences notwithstanding, parallels between Nora's and Sharon's rise to popularity are also instructive: both performers emerged against the backdrop of sexploitation films by crafting star personae distinguished by youthful wholesomeness and martyr-like suffering (Villanueva 1970: 38; Constantino 1981: 22); both began as adolescent singers who crossed over into film via romantic teenpics; music remained prominent in both their film careers.

Sharon's first two films, the teenpics *P.S. I Love You* (1981) and *Dear Heart* (1981), introduced a new kind of *mestiza* star to be simultaneously hated and loved. Sharon's early teen films focused on parental obstacles to teen romance and the problems of a poor little rich girl who was both enviable and sympathetic. In the early 1980s, Sharon's new brand of *mestiza* stardom was defined by the auditory glamour of her speech, a nonchalant peppering of Spanish, English, and very little Tagalog. This is the Taglish of the *colegiala* – a stereotypically affluent Catholic college girl – whose lilting speech folded English and Tagalog words and syntax together. The figure of the *mestiza colegiala* in the Filipino popular imagination evokes the 'convent-educated young woman' whose 'inability to speak proper Tagalog' results in 'her need to resort to Taglish' (Rafael 2000: 257). Despite being parodied as an emblem of a neo-colonial elite's alienation from national culture, the *colegiala mestiza* elicits popular desire (Rafael 2000: 257). The *colegiala* vivified by Sharon was, in the 1980s, Philippine cinema's most visible embodiment of a subcultural *mestizo* elite.

Though Taglish has since risen to prominence as the *lingua franca* of Manila-based popular culture, it was seldom heard in Philippine movies before Sharon's rise. The brand differentiation of Sharon as a new kind of Filipino teen star was precisely the unmistakable authenticity she brought to her linguistic performance of *colegiala* Taglish – the revelation of the habitus of her class in the auditory flourishes of her linguistically hybrid speech. In a Philippine context in which social stratification corresponds to linguistic hierarchy, the cultural distinction of Taglish – the symbolic profit of sounding like a wealthy, private-school-educated young woman – was also the commodity signature of Sharon and her films. If, since the 1980s, Taglish has become the new *lingua franca* across classes in Metro Manila, permeating even the day-to-day vocabulary of the urban poor, it is partly because a historical association with *mestizaje* underpins its allure.³

What I am calling Sharon Cuneta's 'Norianian turn', a retooling of her star persona through the appropriation of Nora Aunor's populist appeal, began in 1984. Sharon's upper-class teen roles had made her a star, but the teenpic cycle was exhausted, and such roles were now considered too escapist. Some predicted that Sharon would be forced to take on sexually risqué projects in order to preserve her career, while others advised a pronounced shift to realism (Dumaul 1983: 8–9; Torre 1983: 4). By 1984, Sharon had abandoned her *mestiza colegiala* roles. That year and the following one, she starred in the spectacularly profitable *Bukas Luluhod ang Mga Tala* ('Tomorrow the Stars will Kneel', 1984) and *Bituing Walang Ningning* ('Star Without Sparkle', 1985). *Bukas* and *Bituing* are both melodramas of social ascent that track the oppression and eventual vindication of an indigent girl whose beautiful singing voice lifts her into superstardom. These films rehearsed not Sharon's off-screen biography but the instantly recognisable script of Nora's life: the incredible-but-true story of a street vendor rescued from poverty by her own prodigious singing talent. This Noranian turn, a calculated re-imagining of Sharon's



Figure 13.4. *Pati Ba Pintig ng Puso* ('Even the Beating of My Heart', dir. Leroy Salvador, 1985) appropriates and romanticises Nora Aunor's iconography as a long-suffering *atsay* or housemaid who becomes the object of her male employer's sexual advances.

persona via Nora's mythology, is made explicit in a scene in *Bukas*. Sharon's young character wins an amateur singing contest; street kids tell her that she reminds them of Nora. Noranian allusions persisted across other Sharon films in the same decade: the motif of Sharon as a slum-dweller who wins an amateur singing contest is repeated in *Pasan Ko ang Daigdig* ('The World is My Burden', 1987) (Barrios 1989: 2–8) and the Noranian iconography of an *atsay* sexually harassed by her male employer is romanticised in *Pati Ba Pintig ng Puso?* ('Even the Beating of My Heart', 1985) (Figure 13.4). Sharon's Noranian turn was acknowledged in a scene in *Bituing*: poised for her promotional debut as a recording star, Sharon's Dorina receives a makeover while seated under a photographic enlargement of Nora (Figure 13.5). Sharon's appropriation of Noranian mythology proved enormously lucrative. *Bukas* did well at the box office, and was the first of her two most conspicuously Noranian films, the second being the following year's *Bituing*, which set a new box office record (Rapadas 1985: 8, 28). Sharon was declared 'the new movie queen' of 1980s Philippine cinema (Villasana 1986: 7).

In *Bituing Walang Ningning*, Sharon plays Dorina, a street vendor who avidly follows the career of her favorite *mestiza* star, Lavinia (played by Cherie Gil). Dorina



Figure 13.5. In *Bituing Walang Ningning* ('Star Without Sparkle') (dir., Emmanuel Borlaza, 1984), Dorina, played by Sharon Cuneta, is given a makeover in the foreground; a photographic enlargement of Nora Aunor is visible in the upper right corner of the background.

begins as Lavinia's devoted fan; having launched her own successful recording career, however, Dorina ends by usurping and surpassing the *mestiza* star. As *Bituing* demonstrates, Sharon's *mestiza* teenpic persona was reinvented through the prior coordinates of Noranian mythology, transformed through a 'making-indigent' of Sharon's heretofore upper-class screen roles. This translative re-imagining of Sharon as the new Nora distanced Sharon from the wealth and neo-colonial privilege associated with *mestiza* actresses by emphasising an important confluence with the Noranian persona: cinematic success enabled by a prior adolescent career in music.

In Sharon's Noranian turn, the disruption of *mestizo/a* stardom introduced by Nora comes full circle, partly capturing Noranian mythology for an elite-identified star, but also partly reversing the terms of white love. In the post-studio era, two moments ensue, encapsulated by two stars, Nora Aunor and Sharon Cuneta: in the first, a brown-skinned (*kayumanggi*) superstar up-ends the rule of *mestizo/a* stardom. In the second, a decade after Nora's emergence, another star is born: a *mestiza* *colegiala*, Sharon, who mimics Noranian embodiment instead of Hollywood stars. In the crosscurrents of stars who invoke both whiteness and brownness, we glimpse

what Rafael has called the 'characteristic ambivalence of nationalist responses to the call of white love' (Rafael 2000: xii).

Philippine Cinema and the Language Wars

In 1969, the *Philippines Free Press* declared: 'Make no mistake about it: we are in the midst of a language revolution in this country' (Parale 1969: 15). The roots of the Philippine language wars stretched back several decades, to the government's creation of the Institute of National Language (INL) in 1936. Composed of scholars representing several Philippine regional languages (Visayan, Ilocano, Cebuano, Bicol, Moro and Tagalog), the INL selected Tagalog as the basis of the national language (Giron 1965: 15). From the 1940s onward, the Tagalog-based national language, rechristened 'Pilipino', was used as a medium of instruction in schools. The Filipino educational system thus embraced multiple languages: English, instituted in 1916 by American colonisers; Tagalog-based Pilipino, promulgated as a medium of instruction in 1946; and other major vernaculars, adopted as teaching languages in 1957 (Gomez-Rivera 1965; Aguilar 1966: 334–5). Vigorous regionalist objections to 'Tagalog-based Pilipino' in favour of English as the national language persisted for decades to come.

I revisit the language controversies of the 1960s and 1970s in order to sketch the larger cultural context of Nora's ascent and the significance of Taglish in the early career of her successor, Sharon. Since the advent of sound in the 1930s, Tagalog has dominated the Manila-based film industry (del Mundo Jr 1999: 30–1). The colloquial term for popular Philippine cinema, 'Tagalog movies', indexes the homogenising, nation-binding function of film, which helped establish Tagalog as the national language while relegating other vernaculars and regional film movements to off-screen space.

In the hierarchy of languages in the Philippines, English, the legatee of American imperialism, is still accorded the greatest social distinction, while Spanish continues to connote rarefied elite use. Tagalog commands less social distinction than English and Spanish (Rafael 2000: 169), although among Philippine languages, Tagalog is the most prestigious due to its association with Manila and with the Manila-based media industries (Llamzon 1968: 724, 735). In this context, Tagalog's dominance in one arena, movies, drives home the nationalising function of popular Philippine film: the cinema disseminates Tagalog-based Filipino as the *lingua franca* of popular culture, doing more to establish Filipino as a translocal language than state legislation (Tiongson 1992: 24). In the 1970s, Nora was often invoked as positive proof of the nationalising effect of popular cinema. Nora's image was everywhere on theatre marquees and the covers of weekly magazines; to cultural commentators, such popularity proved that Tagalog, the idiom of the movies, bound audiences across the diverse archipelago (Lacaba 1970: 7).

Such nationalist celebrations notwithstanding, other voices lamented the demise of English as Tagalog gained prominence in schools. A familiar motif in the language scene of the postwar period emerged: the long lament, often punctuated by condescending humour, regarding the inadequacy of 'Filipino English', a phrase considered synonymous with 'the deterioration in our spoken English' since the end of American rule in the Philippines (Catbagan 1966: 122–9, 134). Critiques of Filipino English were underwritten by nostalgia for the American colonial era, when Filipinos were taught English by American teachers (Thompson 2003: 21). 'Imperfect' pronunciation and problems with intonation and rhythm in spoken English loomed large in these accounts. Seldom framed as an expected consequence of multilingualism and a language variant in its own right, Filipino English was derided as a species of failure, and the speech clinic was the remedy of choice.

The deracinating logic of the speech clinic is one of helping Filipinos to learn how to sound like Americans (Sibayan 1966: 70–1). In an essay originally published in 1970, Jose Lacaba satirises the social climber who resorts to a speech clinic in order to unlearn her *bakya* (tacky, low-income or provincial) English (1983b: 122). The speech clinic becomes a figure in Lacaba's analysis for the *nouveau riche*'s linguistic re-education in English, the language of the elite. In the mid 1980s, *Bituing Walang Ningning* staged this very fantasy of class rebirth through speech, with Sharon playing a poor singer who, en route to stardom, must first learn to speak English at a speech clinic. This surreal speech clinic scene stands out in the film that turned the tide for Sharon's film career.

The unintentional campness of this scene lies in the fact that the speech clinic instructor requires Sharon's character to recite impossibly complex tongue-twisters in English, which Sharon's Dorina, framed in surreal close shots, enunciates with astonishing facility. The heroine's capacity to speak English like the wealthy do far exceeds what can be motivated by the storyline, and points off-screen to Sharon's elite education, first in St Paul's College, a private Catholic school, and later at the American-run International School. Mindful of the low prestige value of Tagalog, private schools in the Philippines historically resisted the shift to the national language as medium of instruction, thus cementing English as a mark of *colegiala* distinction. The split between public schools, where the primary medium of instruction was Pilipino or Filipino, and private schools, which continued to teach in the prestige language, English, was lived in every Filipino student's linguistic habitus; one could hear the 'social cleavage' in Filipino education in actual speech (Anderson 1968: 57, 62).

In this context, the auditory distinction of Sharon's private school diction – whether in English or Taglish – stood out in sharp relief. It was precisely the sound of *mestizo/a* privilege that such scenes in *Bituing* trumpeted to unwittingly camp effect. On-screen, we witness the transformation of a street urchin into the toast of society, a demonstration of linguistic ability ranging from movie Tagalog

to *colegiala* English; however, this points to the off-screen knowledge that Sharon captivates precisely because of her upper-class habitus. Given this, *Bituing's* speech clinic scene functions almost as an inside joke. For Filipino spectators familiar with her star persona, watching Sharon's character 'learn' how to speak 'proper English' hardly even invites a suspension of disbelief, since what the montage of Dorina's speech clinic classes more actively solicits is an appreciation of Sharon's class-inflected bilingual proficiency. This remarkable scene makes emphatic the ruse that underpins the Sharon films of this period: that of an elite star slumming as a Noranian figure, Sharon in drag.

Star-Crossed Audiences: *Mestiza* Noranians and the 'Bakya Crowd'

In a 1970 article, 'Notes On "Bakya"', poet, journalist and screenwriter Jose Lacaba put forward a groundbreaking, redemptive discussion of *bakya* sensibility in Philippine popular culture, which Nora emblematised. The term 'bakya' originates from 'wooden slippers worn in lieu of shoes by the poor in the barrios', a synecdoche which comes finally, in the late 1960s and 1970s, to denote the 'style of popular culture, the sensibility of... masscult', disparagingly characterised by most as 'cheap, gauche, naive, provincial, and terribly popular' (Lacaba 1983b: 117–23; cf. Rafael 1995: 110–11).

The new configuration of the star system in the post-studio era meant that all other considerations became secondary to the star's power to lure the so-called *bakya* crowd to theatres. Pejoratively referred to as 'darling of the Bakya crowd' (Frades 1970: 20), Nora commanded a fan base of such scale that one critic described her Noranian fans as 'the biggest and most formidable unarmed force in the Philippines' (Guerrero 1971: 10). The affective-political horizon of Nora's spectacular fan following is what Tadiar calls the 'Norianan Imaginary', an exhortation to the feminised poor to believe in their own historical agency. Although the radical dimensions of Nora's star persona were eventually domesticated, 'subsum[ed] by apparatuses of capture' under both the Marcos regime and the government of Corazon Aquino (Tadiar 2004: 237, 259), the redemptive, if unrealised horizon of Noranian fandom remains: a shared yearning for what Patrick Flores describes as 'a virtue of collective action' (2000b: 85).

By 1970, Nora, the *bakya* pop icon, had begun to breach class boundaries, moving beyond lower-income audiences to attract urban, *mestiza colegiala* fans. Magazine coverage describes the superstar as crossing over to middle- and upper-class audiences: 'Nora is not purely bakya stuff. Not anymore' (Kalaw 1971: 27). One writer – coded by her linguistic and middle-class allegiances as a *mestizo/a*-identified audience member – declared her conversion to the virtues of Noranian embodiment: 'I too was hooked' (Mercado 1970: 56). Over a decade later, in 1984, Sharon's popularity with audiences began to cross class borders in the reverse

direction, spreading beyond her middle-class fan base to win over lower-income audiences. One writer calls Sharon an 'English-speaking bourgeois', a persona that hindered broad audience appeal (Agilada 1984: 18–19). Sharon's Noranian turn, however – her embrace of rags-to-riches roles and a more populist persona – successfully transformed her into a crossover star moving in the opposite direction from Nora. Having begun by addressing an elite-identified 'campus crowd' (Calderon 1982: 18–19; Constantino 1981: 22), Sharon eventually managed to win the devotion of the kind of spectator who first loved Nora – moviegoers who decades ago were dubbed *bakya*.

My final point about Sharon's Noranian turn in the mid 1980s, then, is that it points to a broader shift in audience patterns in Filipino popular cinema. At least until the 1970s, Filipino movie audiences had been split along class lines. In industry parlance, 'D and E' audiences – the two lowest-income categories – comprised the majority of audiences for popular Tagalog-language movies. In contrast, 'A and B' middle- and upper-class audiences watched primarily Hollywood movies (Matilac et al. 1994: 99–100).

Sometime between the late 1960s and the early 1980s, film historians tell us, divisions between audiences in terms of class and language started to become more permeable: the poor started to watch both Hollywood movies in English and locally made prestige pictures, while the professional classes started to patronise domestically produced films whose *lingua franca* was first Tagalog, then, increasingly, Taglish. The passing of the torch of superstardom from Nora to Sharon exposes shifts in both audience composition and language in popular Filipino movies. Historically, the majority of audiences for domestically produced films were lower-income filmgoers, the working class and the poor. By the 1980s, however, middle- and upper-class spectators were watching Philippine-made films as well, in part due to the penetration of Tagalog films into formerly English-only movie houses in the entertainment districts of Avenida, Cubao and Makati in the 1960s and 1970s (Matilac et al. 1994: 99–100).

In the early 1970s, Nora's movement from teeny-bopper movies to critically acclaimed social-problem films blurred the borders between *bakya* and quality film, and attracted fans across classes, from domestic workers to their middle-class employers. In the mid 1980s, Sharon's brand of *mestizo/a* stardom invited middle- and upper-class audiences predisposed to English-language Hollywood fare to watch 'Tagalog movies' and embrace a Filipino movie star. At a crucial juncture, Sharon served as bourgeois viewers' point of entry into the popular films they had once considered too *déclassé* to consume. Sharon's Noranian turn involves not only a *mestiza* star's appropriation of her rival's iconography, but also the making-palatable of Noranian embodiment and mythology to a bourgeois spectatorship. In an important lesson about the heterogeneity of audiences, as well as the facility of bourgeois tactics of supplanting, we realise that Sharon was, after all, not the first *mestiza* Noranian.⁴

Notes

1. In what follows, I will refer to Nora Aunor and Sharon Cuneta by their first names, Nora and Sharon, respectively, in accordance with how the movie-going Filipino public commonly refers to both stars. One may read this commonplace usage as signalling several things: first, the iconic stature achieved by both stars, to the point that last names become irrelevant (there is only one Nora); and secondly, the imaginary intimacy cultivated by both their star personae. It is important to note that the other common way both stars are referred to is as "Ate Guy" (for Nora Aunor) or "Ate Shawie" (for Sharon Cuneta). The word "Ate" means "big sister", and is then followed by each star's nickname. This usage, again stressing that the Filipino audience is on a first-name basis with each star, adds an element of familial intimacy.
2. Jared Sexton argues that 'the fundamental insecurity of racist reasoning' is that racial purity does not exist prior to miscegenation. Racialising discourse is always belied by the fact that 'we are all of mixed origin', an incoherence that racial categories strive to hierarchise, to enduringly powerful effect (Sexton 2003: 243–4).
3. For the concepts of habitus and cultural distinction, see Pierre Bourdieu (1984).
4. This is a shorter, revised version of an essay entitled 'Sharon's Noranian Turn: Stardom, Embodiment, and Language in Philippine Cinema', originally published in the journal *Discourse* (2009), Wayne State University Press. Wayne State University Press has generously granted permission to reprint it here. All translations from Tagalog or Taglish to English in this chapter are my own.