DISCOURSE

JOURNAL FOR THEORETICAL STUDIES IN MEDIA AND CULTURE

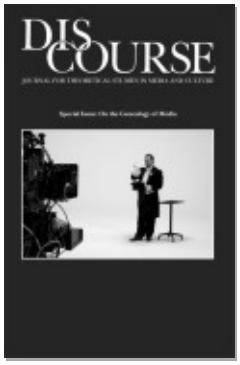
Special Issue: Translation and Embodiment in National and Transnational Asian Film and Media




Project MUSE®
Today's Research. Tomorrow's Inspiration.

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

Bliss Cua Lim



Discourse, Volume 31, Number 3, Fall 2009, pp. 318-358 (Article)

Published by Wayne State University Press

For additional information about this article
http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/dis/summary/v031/31.3.lim01.html

Access Provided by University of California @ Irvine at 11/09/10 7:10PM GMT

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

Bliss Cua Lim

Writing in 1965 under the pseudonym Quijano de Manila, National Artist Nick Joaquin vividly describes an era when the decline of the great Philippine film studios spawned an unbridled "star system still in apogee." In the 1960s, star worship fuels the popular cinema and feeds "the avarice of the independent producer." The middle-class lament that mainstream Filipino movies are hardly "quality" pictures, Joaquin writes impatiently, misses the point: "The movie fans crowd to a local movie not because they expect a sensible story or expert acting or even good entertainment"; instead, they go to the movies to see the stars they adore—action film kings Fernando Poe Jr. and Joseph Estrada, glamour goddesses Amalia Fuentes and Susan Roces. "Our movie idols remain idolized, whatever the quality of their vehicles, as long as they remain impossibly young, impossibly glamorous, impossibly beautiful"[1] (figure 1). This is a form of star worship that, in its emphasis on an unrealizable world, ends by preventing audience identification. The spectatorial pleasures offered by the star system of the early to mid-1960s, Joaquin argues, are not driven by identification but by wonder, idolatry practiced from afar.

In many ways, the superstardom of Nora Aunor represents both a departure from and an intensification of the star system of that decade. Arriving on the movie scene from nationwide success

Discourse, 31.3, Fall 2009, pp. 318–358.
Copyright © 2010 Wayne State University Press, Detroit, Michigan 48201-1309. ISSN 1522-5321.



Figure 1. Movie star Susan Roces embodied the "impossible glamour" of mestiza stardom in the 1960s. From *Sunday Times Magazine,* 17 April 1965, 43. Courtesy of the Rizal Library Filipiniana periodicals collection, Ateneo de Manila University.

on radio and television as an amateur singer in 1967, Nora Aunor was emblematic of the limit-point of the star system in the post–studio era. Film historian Nicanor Tiongson remarks, "[M]ovies then made money simply because they had superstar Nora Aunor" in them.[2] Nora Aunor solicited a new horizon of spectatorial devotion from legions of devoted followers—her Noranian fans—by embodying a new kind of non-impossible stardom.

Joaquin calls her the "lowly morenita from Iriga," a little brown-skinned girl who rose to superstardom from an impoverished provincial childhood. The daughter of a *cargador* (train porter) in the Bicol Express, the twelve-year-old Nora Cabaltera Villamayor won a regional amateur singing contest while wearing a secondhand dress her mother had altered. Her destitute family listened on a neighbor's radio as her victory was announced; the twenty pesos in prize money she won that first evening was for an older sister's tuition.[3] In 1967, at the age of fourteen, Nora Aunor won the grand finals of the nationally televised singing contest, *Tawag Ng Tanghalan* (Call of the Stage), holding her own against other contenders in a twelve-week victory run. In the years that followed, Nora emerged as a pop-music sensation on radio, television, and film (figure 2). Nora Aunor's

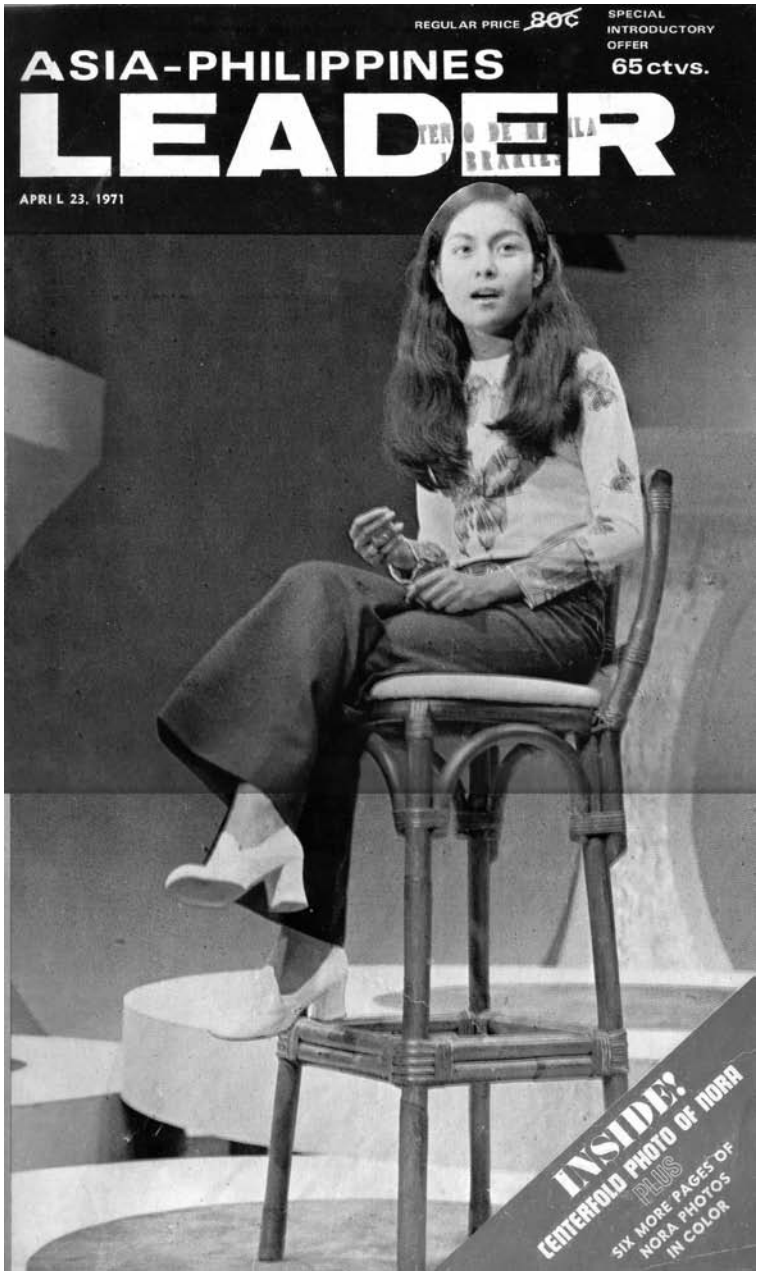


Figure 2. In the late 1960s, Nora Aunor emerged as the Philippines' first superstar, a pop-music sensation who crossed over into television and film. From *Asia-Philippines Leader* 1, no. 3 (1971). Courtesy of the Rizal Library Filipiniana periodicals collection, Ateneo de Manila University.



Figure 3. Nora Aunor's iconic role as a maltreated but long-suffering female domestic servant in *Atsay* (Housemaid, dir. Eddie Garcia, 1978).

string of enormously profitable record albums "changed the history of the [Philippine] recording industry" by proving that local music artists—not just foreign acts like the Beatles and the Everly Brothers—could make money.[4] 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. Her work in the 1982 New Cinema film *Himala* has been justly hailed as the finest performance of the period and of Philippine cinema itself.[5]

It is axiomatic for cultural critics that Nora's biographical mythology as "Cinderella Superstar" is inseparable from her most memorable onscreen characters.[6] Nora is the female martyr (*babaeng martir*), a maltreated but long-suffering female servant who puts the needs and wishes of others before her own, as in her eponymous role in *Atsay* (Housemaid, 1978) (figure 3).[7] Nora's diegetic characters have largely confirmed the durable melodramatic convention that oppression is a state of virtuousness (*mabuti ang inaapi*), a conceit that, for Tiongson, exhorts Filipino audiences to adopt a masochistic political passivity toward social injustice.[8]

When, in the late 1960s, she was offered her first film roles by Sampaguita Pictures, Nora's slightly incredulous response spoke

volumes: "Nora wondered if this was a joke." A self-proclaimed fan of Susan Roces films, Nora knew that she looked nothing like the fair-skinned mestiza stars on Philippine screens. Having been taunted in childhood as "Nora Negra," Nora's response to the chance at a film career, as related by Joaquin, mingles bemusement with curiosity: "[S]he also wondered how she would look in the movies. Nobody her type had yet been tapped for glamour roles or sweetheart parts."[9] Skin flicks were dethroned by the phenomenon of Nora Aunor in 1969, dubbed "The Year of the Bomba" (sexploitation film).[10] By 1970, Nora had been crowned as the muse of Sampaguita Studios, at once the successor to movie queens like Susan Roces and Amalia Fuentes and a harbinger of the end for the mestiza glamour they represented.[11]

Vicente Rafael has incisively characterized Philippine popular cinema as a social institution that reproduces the power of the *mestizo/a* social order. For Rafael, the social location of the mestizo/a in the Philippines is imagined as proximate to the white privilege of Spanish and American colonizers, the postcolonial elite, and the physical appearance of Hollywood stars.[12] More than a figure of race mixture, then, the mestizo/a star in Filipino cinema is situated between the "whiteness" of the Hollywood star or of the colonial and postcolonial elite and the "brownness" of lower-income urban audiences who comprise the bulk of the nation's filmgoers. Nora's superstardom is film-historically significant not only because she embodied the spectacular excesses of star power in the post–studio era but also because Nora accomplished an unprecedented break with Philippine cinema's reliance on mestizo/a stardom.

This essay seeks to understand the racialized allure of the two most important female stars in Philippine cinema's post–studio era: Nora Aunor and Sharon Cuneta. Broadly, the argument I present here has three moments.

The first moment traces crucial shifts in racialized star embodiment in popular Philippine cinema, a story told in two parts. Since the studio era, matinee idols were invariably mixed-race actors whose light skin and European features allowed them to be packaged as local approximations of Hollywood stars. In the post–studio era, Nora Aunor introduces a decisive break in the regime of mestizo/a stardom. "Noranian embodiment" is my way of referring to a film-historically significant, oppositional form of valuation that coalesced around the star persona of Nora Aunor in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Nora's body defied a racialized 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 Aunor's emergence into superstardom, I suggest, Noranian

embodiment is the sensational fascination with her a/typical star body on the part of media commentators and fans. (Her countenance was remarkably atypical of matinee idols but unexceptionally typical of the ordinary moviegoer.) Likewise, Noranian embodiment was an oppositional horizon of corporeal-aesthetic valuation that coalesced around her person, mapped on the axes of racial, classed, and gendered allegiances. Noranian devotees, in loving their star, were also explicitly championing a heretofore devalorized external appearance or countenance (*itsura*). The "coffee-brown skin" of one teen star's diminutive 4-foot 11-inch body, widely synecdochized as "the color of the skin of the majority of movie fans,"[13] was valorized by a frankly oppositional, explosively popular taste culture as the exemplar of the *kayumangging kaligatan* (the smooth-complexioned brown beauty). In the late sixties and early seventies, Noranian embodiment amounted to a disruptive defiance of the long-institutionalized practice of mestiza stardom in Philippine cinema. This performative defiance was not only enacted by the star Nora Aunor but also brought into being by her massive fan following among the urban and rural poor, derisively labeled by middlebrow commentators as *bakya,* a pejorative term for a supposedly lower-income, tacky, and provincial mass audience.

In this essay, I juxtapose the affective resonance of Nora Aunor's rags-to-riches mythology and the aesthetic-political charge of Noranian embodiment with the attempt of her mestiza successor of the 1980s, Sharon Cuneta, to retool her image of mestiza glamour in light of Nora's populist, *kayumanggi*-identified appeal. I argue that Nora Aunor initiated a change in the racialized, classed terms of Philippine stardom so profound that Sharon Cuneta, another elite-identified mestiza star, resorted to an appropriation of Nora Aunor's biographical mythology in her bid to become the next Filipino superstar. This translative refashioning, which I call Sharon Cuneta's "Noranian turn," points to important shifts in the logics of "mestizo envy" and "white love" in Philippine cinema, as well as transforming the nationalizing function of popular Filipino film, a nationalizing function grounded in language.[14]

The second moment of my broader argument contextualizes both stars in relation to the Philippines' conflicted linguistic landscape. In the early sound period, Filipino cinema was credited with an overt nation-binding effect, since it disseminated Tagalog-based Pilipino as the lingua franca of popular culture. In the sixties and seventies, proponents of the Tagalog-based national language invoked Nora Aunor as a figure for the impending decline of English in the Philippines. In ensuing decades, however, Philippine

popular culture has increasingly privileged Manila-based Taglish. 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 mestiza identity.[15] Though Taglish is now omnipresent in Philippine media, this was not always the case. Its once-rarefied presence in Philippine popular culture was first linked to the prestige of the educated mestizo elite and embodied in Filipino film stardom. In the early eighties, Sharon Cuneta was Filipino cinema's most visible figuration of a subcultural, Taglish-speaking mestizo elite. As an auditory cue for *mestizaje* in Philippine cinema, Taglish also indexes the vexed debates on national language and American imperialism in the Marcos era during an important period of emergence for Philippine film criticism.

Given the prolific film output of Nora Aunor and Sharon Cuneta (both are still active in the film industry), it becomes impossible to confine either star to any one moment of their career, whether it be the height of Nora Aunor's popularity in the late 1960s to the early 1970s or Sharon Cuneta's Noranian turn in her mid-1980s melodramas. In juxtaposing these two junctures in the history of Filipino female stardom, my aim is not to reduce the career of 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 crossover stars. Accordingly, the third section of this essay suggests that the disruptive form of star embodiment that Nora Aunor actualized and Sharon Cuneta appropriated led to an unexpected convergence of class-stratified bakya and mestiza audiences.

Stardom and Racialized Embodiment

As film historians have pointed out, Filipino film producers in the studio period "favored mestizas and mestizos for principal roles because they approximated the Caucasian features of American icons."[16] Behn Cervantes notes, "Local versions of Hollywood films became the bread and butter of Filipino productions. . . . An eager public was thrilled to see mestizas on the screen looking so much like their American counterparts."[17] The dominance of mestiza movie idols as neocolonial mimicry of Hollywood models confirms Rafael's analysis of popular Filipino cinema as a means of upholding mestizo/a power. In Philippine cinema, it is race mixture—the mestizo star as miscegenation event—that, far from unraveling the power of racialized logic, shores up the cachet of whiteness.[18] In

particular, Rafael conceives of the Filipino spectator's relationship to movie stars as a mode of mestiza envy:

> To understand the logic of this envy of and for mestizaness, it is useful to recall that in the Filipino historical imagination, the mestizo/a has enjoyed a privileged position associated with economic wealth, political influence, and cultural hegemony. Unlike the United States, but more like Latin America, mestizoness in the Philippines has implied, at least since the nineteenth century, a certain proximity to the sources of colonial power. To occupy the position of mestizo/a is to invoke the legacy of the *ilustrados,* the generation of mostly mixed-race, Spanish-speaking, university-educated nationalists from the Chinese mestizo Jose Rizal to the Spanish mestizo Manuel Quezon—both credited with founding the dominant fictions of Filipino nationhood.[19]

Mestizo embodiment, then, from the late nineteenth century onward, corporealizes "the transition from the colonial to the national," a transition that even now has not been fully accomplished. In the Philippine context, mestizaje as a historical, sociopolitical, and affective position is shot through with equivocation, capable of colluding with the colonial rulers "above" as well as articulating the radicalism of the masses "below." The racially and linguistically hybrid mestizo/a star, Rafael suggests, serves as an intermediary between racialized figures of privilege and disenfranchisement.[20] In Filipino cinema, I argue, mestizaje as a structure of stardom and spectatorship sets off a "circuit of substitutions," to borrow Rafael's suggestive phrase: in the first instance, the mestiza star is the domestic film industry's placeholder for the white Hollywood star, as well as for the elite descendants of Spanish and American colonizers; at the next moment in the circuit, the mestiza performer solicits identification and pleasure from the lower-income urban audiences who comprise the bulk of the nation's filmgoers.

The mestizo/a's proximity to the colonizer is apprehended as an immediate, fundamental appearing, an epidermalization of likeness to white colonial power that can be seen in the eyes, on the skin, in the bridge of the nose. A logic of racial and cultural substitution comes into play: mestizo/a physiognomy (an outward aspect believed to reveal innate proximity to colonial privilege) becomes a widely recognized form of cultural capital, one repackaged in Filipino films that indigenized the Hollywood film via imitation, in part by proffering mestizo/a versions of Hollywood stars.

For film studios, the only major problem with the commodification of the mestiza as screen idol was the persistent conflation, in the public mind, of mestizo/as with social illegitimacy. Rumors of their having been born out of wedlock preserve a "memory trace

of the desire of a masculinized foreigner for a feminized native" in the colonial era[21] and feed into racist stereotypes concerning the mestiza's supposed proclivity for sexual licentiousness as opposed to "traditional" notions of femininity.[22] Beneath or alongside the desire for mestiza physiognomy hums a corrosive resentment.

Studios managed what Behn Cervantes calls a "love-hate relationship between mestiza stars and their audiences" in two ways, both of which have to do with the powers of translation: first, via language; and, second, via mise-en-scène. Most mestiza stars were renamed, a renaming that managed to gentrify and indigenize the stars with a single stroke of the promotional pen, giving mestizo stars the surnames of the Philippine elite and containing their foreignness through this partial erasure: Siegfried von Geise becomes Paraluman, Flora Danon is rechristened as Rosa Rosal, Dorothy Jones is Nida Blanca, and Susan Reid is repackaged as Hilda Koronel. In mestiza stardom, as Nicanor Tiongson has pointed out, the dynamics of indigenization and imitation are inextricable. Mestizo/a stars are offered in mimicry of Hollywood: Rudolph Valentino's counterpart is the Philippine's own "great profile," Leopoldo Salcedo, Elvis is Eddie Mesa, and Audrey Hepburn is Barbara Perez. On the other hand, foreignness is dissimulated by mise-en-scène and dialogue: mestizas are consistently costumed in nativist attire, playing down-to-earth barrio lasses and speaking, not Spanish or English, but a purist, florid Tagalog quite unlike the lingua franca spoken by the movies' urban spectators, "fantasy Filipinos speaking fantasy Pilipino," as Joaquin dryly observed.[23]

In a groundbreaking 1979 essay, "Four Values in Philippine Drama and Film," Nicanor Tiongson offers a biting ideological analysis of forms of political and cultural subjectivation rooted in colonial theatrical forms and perpetuated by popular Philippine cinema. The colonial aesthetic common to both Philippine stage and screen boils down to a simple maxim undergirding a racialized politics of casting: *maganda ang maputi* (white is beautiful). In that classic essay, Nora Aunor is mentioned as the sole exception to the rule of mestiza stardom in contemporary Philippine cinema.[24] Noranian embodiment broke the mold of mestizo stardom. Cervantes exultantly recounts,

> 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 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.[25]

Nora's feat of effectively thumbing her nose at the industry adage that beauty is whiteness would never again be replicated at such a scale by another Filipino film star. Cervantes's trope of the upstart, the impoverished female servant who unseats the señoritas, encapsulates the feminist and working-class sympathies of Nora's persona, and it is these aspects of her star text that are so dearly prized, and so clearly demarcated, by her cult following.

The exceptional pull of Noranian embodiment, as extolled and enacted by her rabid working-class fans, consists in the singularity of her ordinariness. One fan letter from 1970 reads, "Tiny and kayumanggi, Nora would be lost to sight in a crowd of faces at Quiapo," the densely populated district located in the geographic center of Manila. Her unexceptional body would be nearly anonymous in an urban Philippine throng, this fan suggests, yet we know implicitly that if Nora were present then that throng in 1970 could be nothing but a sea of devotees drawn to her, a crowd occasioned by her own bodily presence. Her body is not impossible in the older sense of unattainability evoked by Joaquin's portrait of mestizo/a stars. Noranian embodiment is non-impossible and nonexceptional but incongruous nonetheless. "It's her voice," the fan letter continues, "that has caught fire among tv and movie fans, that has carried them away." The Aunor voice, described by the unnamed fan as "deep but full and mellow, accompanied by a sadness that gets in your throat,"[26] produces sounds at odds with her countenance: too low and ripe and full of experience for a seventeen-year-old, too large and deep and womanly for a girl not even five feet tall.[27]

Over a decade later, another adolescent singing sensation appeared on the pop-music scene: fourteen-year-old Sharon Cuneta, Nora's eventual "successor in popularity."[28] Dubbed the "jukebox princess," Sharon was, like Nora, a teenage recording star who would successfully crossover to the screen with a slew of profitable teenpics[29] (figure 4). In many ways, however, Sharon Cuneta's path in music and film could not have been more different from Nora Aunor'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 the daughter of the Pasay City mayor



Figure 4. 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. From *Celebrity,* 31 May 1981. Courtesy of the Rizal Library Filipiniana periodicals collection, Ateneo de Manila University.

and the niece of a television personality and music executive; she made her first recording, "Tawag ng Pag-Ibig" (Call of love), with the parent company for which her uncle worked.[30] In 1978, the twelve-year-old Sharon recorded a chart-topping single, "Mr. DJ." At fifteen, Sharon had two gold singles to her credit. Her father Pablo Cuneta's stubborn resistance to a film career for his daughter paid off richly: a movie studio eager to make films that would target Sharon's emerging audience of educated middle-class teens offered her 200,000 pesos for her first film, a talent fee rivaling that of top-tier female stars, Nora Aunor among them. Her father relented, and Sharon entered the movie business in 1981 as "the highest paid neophyte in Philippine history."[31]

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 (the *bomba* cycle in Nora's day; "bold films" for Sharon's generation) by crafting star personae distinguished by youthful wholesomeness and martyrlike suffering.[32] Both began as child stars in the music industry who crossed over into film via romantic teenpics; music remained prominent in both their film careers. To the degree that Nora can be credited with ushering in a new era in the Philippine music industry by breaking the stranglehold of imported music on Philippine pop charts, Nora's music career can be understood as an enabling condition for Sharon's career and for the Original Pilipino Music (OPM) movement in general. In a local music market favorable to domestic talent, Sharon did not have to begin, as Nora did, with amateur singing contests but could hit the ground running as a recording artist assured of a lucrative, preconstituted audience for Filipino popular music.

Sharon's first two films, the teenpics *P.S. I Love You* (1981) and *Dear Heart* (1981), introduced a new brand of mestizo stardom, a new kind of mestiza 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 whose wealth makes her enviable while her problems and good-naturedness (*magandang ugali*) make her sympathetic. Sharon's roles allude to her own upper-class origins as the daughter of a powerful politician father and a beautiful mestiza mother. More importantly, two elements define the new allure of mestiza stardom that Sharon brought to the screen. First, her films foregrounded a metonymic logic of place: the sprawling haciendas of the agricultural elite or the great suburban mansions and playgrounds of the rich. The films were shot on location at the Canlubang Sugar Plantation, the Cuneta home in Baguio, the Manila Yacht Club, and the Manila Polo Club in Forbes Park. Nick Joaquin has written about sixties mestiza stardom as grounded in an impossible diegetic world: "It would be preposterous to argue that Amalia and Susan are the common tao's idea of the girl next door; they are, rather, his idea of the impossible beauties that inhabit Forbes Park or San Lorenzo Village or some such Never Never Land."[33] The impossible glamour of the mestiza movie queen in the sixties is, then, not only physiognomic but also place specific. The mestiza star moves in a diegetic world whose mise-en-scène encompasses the actual but unreachable suburbs of Makati: plush enclaves like Forbes Park, Dasmariñas, Urdaneta, Bel Air, and San Lorenzo villages, the most expensive residential real estate in the national capital region. Sharon, nicknamed *Princesa*

ng Dasma (Princess of Dasmariñas) in Tagalog weeklies,[34] would, by the mid-1980s, successfully combine the impossibility signified by the elite suburban spaces of Makati with the crowd scenes of Quiapo; that is, with the street-level identification offered by Noranian embodiment.

The second defining aspect of Sharon's brand of mestiza stardom in the early eighties inhered to her use of Taglish. The glamour of the mise-en-scène was a visual analogue to the auditory glamour of a world whose affluence was signaled by a nonchalant, spontaneous peppering of Spanish, English, and very little Tagalog. This is the Taglish of the *colegiala,* a stereotypical Catholic schoolgirl whose lilting speech folded English and Tagalog words and syntax together. The figure of the mestiza colegiala in the Filipino popular imagination refers to the "convent-educated young woman" whose "inability to speak proper Tagalog" results in "her need to resort to Taglish."[35] Sharon's early films vivified mestizo Taglish as a form of cultural capital, an index of belonging to the latter-day Spanish mestizo elite as a self-designated ersatz aristocracy, a landed quasi gentry who predate the American colonial period. The mestiza colegiala was popularly parodied as an emblem of a neocolonial elite's alienation from national culture, yet even ridicule of this figure is charged with eros, as Rafael points out: "[E]nvy for precisely the class privileges associated with her speech . . . gives the colegiala Taglish a certain erotic allure."[36] The colegiala was Filipino cinema's most conspicuous embodiment of a subcultural mestizo elite whose linguistic distinction was paired with a kind of a metonymic logic of place, so that the look of space and the sound of language were both visual and auditory analogues for cultural distinction.

Sharon's brand of mestiza stardom introduced a new pattern of speech to the cinema—colegiala Taglish—a new auditory kind of glamour to be envied by parvenus and derided by the intelligentsia. What I am suggesting is that 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 simultaneously her form of product differentiation, the commodity signature of the star and her films. If, since the eighties, Taglish has become the new lingua franca across classes in Manila, permeating even the day-to-day vocabulary of the urban poor, it is

partly because a historical association with mestizoness underpins its allure. This is particularly marked in the affected Taglish of the movie starlet, the mark of the parvenu.[37]

What I am calling Sharon Cuneta's Noranian turn, a pronounced retooling of her star persona that sought to capture the populist appeal embodied by Nora Aunor, began in 1984. The teenpic cycle had been exhausted, and sex films were once again in upswing. Sharon's screen heroines in *Dear Heart* and *P.S. I Love You*—cheerful, virginal girls whose lives were a bittersweet cocktail of affluence and heartbreak—had made her a star, but such roles were now considered too escapist for a market that had in recent years become saturated with adolescent romances. Some predicted that Sharon would be forced to take on sexually risqué projects in order to preserve her career, while others advised an abandonment of her unattainable diegetic worlds in favor of a pronounced shift to realism.[38] Sharon had already tried and failed to retool her image once. *To Love Again* (1983), intended as the young star's "transition film" from escapist teen fantasies to serious young adult roles, had been a box office disappointment. Movie columnist Nestor U. Torre argued that Sharon "did not go far enough" and called for a more aggressive reinvention of Sharon's screen persona: Sharon must "tackle another role that really presents her as a modern young woman experiencing adult emotions and discovering her independence, not in the never-never land of mansions and bowers of flowers, but in the real Manila, circa 1983."[39]

It appears the young actress saw the writing on the wall. By 1984, Sharon Cuneta had abandoned her mestiza colegiala roles. That year and the following, she starred in *Bukas Luluhod ang Mga Tala* (Tomorrow the Stars Will Kneel, 1984) and *Bituing Walang Ningning* (Star without Sparkle, 1985), two backstage melodramas that proved spectacularly profitable. Melodramas of social ascent, *Bukas Luluhod ang Mga Tala* and *Bituing Walang Ningning* both track the oppression and eventual vindication of an indigent girl whose beautiful singing voice, honed in amateur singing contests and on television variety shows, succeeds in lifting her into overnight superstardom. These films rehearsed, not Sharon's offscreen biography, but the instantly recognizable 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 reimagining of Sharon's persona via Nora's mythology, is made explicit in a scene in *Bukas Luluhod ang Mga Tala*. Sharon's prepubescent character wins an amateur singing contest; young street urchins tell her that she reminds them of Nora Aunor (figure 5). Noranian allusions persisted across other Sharon Cuneta films





Figures 5. Unmistakable allusions to Nora Aunor's rise to fame in *Bukas Luluhod ang Mga Tala* (Tomorrow the Stars Will Kneel, dir. Emmanuel H. Borlaza, 1984). As a child, Sharon Cuneta's character Rebecca (played here by child actress Janet Elisa Giron) wins an amateur singing contest. Following her victory, other street children tell her that she reminds them of Nora Aunor.



Figure 6. In *Pasan Ko ang Daigdig* (The World Is My Burden, dir. Lino Brocka, 1987), Sharon plays an impoverished girl who wins an amateur singing contest, another reference to Nora's biographical mythology as the "Cinderella Superstar."

in the same decade: the motif of Sharon as a slum dweller whose victory in an amateur singing contest begins her path to material and professional success is repeated in *Pasan Ko ang Daigdig* (The World Is My Burden, 1987), a Lino Brocka–directed melodrama with strong social realist elements[40] (figure 6). In addition, *Pati Ba Pintig ng Puso* (Even the Beating of My Heart, dir. Leroy Salvador, 1985), appropriates and romanticizes Nora Aunor's iconography as a long-suffering *atsay* (housemaid) who becomes the object of her male employer's sexual advances (figure 7), while also overlaying it with the literary figure of the *bayad-utang,* the child who works to repay a parent's prior debt to her employer.[41]

Sharon Cuneta's comments prior to the release of *Bukas* index her awareness of the extreme change in her iconography and of the distance these new roles represented from her own star persona both on screen and off screen. In an interview with Tagalog weekly magazine *Liwayway,* the actress highlights, in her signature Taglish, the career-changing direction of her new film:

> *I'm very excited* sa *new movie* ko dahil *in the past* lagi nang *role* ng isang mayaman ang pino-*portray* ko. *Now* naman ay isang galing sa mahirap na



Figure 7. *Pati Ba Pintig ng Puso* (Even the Beating of My Heart, dir. Leroy Salvador, 1985) appropriates and romanticizes Nora Aunor's iconography as a long-suffering *atsay* (housemaid) who becomes the object of her male employer's sexual advances.

> pamilya ang naka-*assign* sa akin. Maglalaba ako rito. Magluluto. *I'm taking my career seriously.* Mas gusto ko pag may *challenge.* [I'm very excited about my new movie because in the past I was always portraying wealthy roles. Now I am assigned the role of someone from a poor family. (In this film,) I will launder. I will cook. I'm taking my career seriously. I like being challenged.][42]

In another interview, conducted shortly after *Bukas Luluhod ang mga Tala* had finished shooting, Sharon defends her ability to play the role of a young girl from the slums of Manila. Sharon insists that she can be believable in impoverished roles; after all, the actress protests, she likes to cook and washes her own handkerchiefs at home.[43] Such inadvertently funny responses indicate the degree to which the actor and her handlers acknowledged that the reinvention of her star persona represented a drastic change, one that might be rejected by audiences since they ran too contrary to the star's offscreen biography, as well as to her prior iconography.[44]

Sharon's appropriation of Noranian mythology proved enormously lucrative. *Bukas Luluhod ang mga Tala* did well at the box office and was the first of her two most conspicuously Noranian

films. The second was the following year's *Bituing Walang Ningning,* which set a new box office record,[45] prompting *Liwayway* to pronounce her "the new movie queen" of the Philippines.[46] In the wake of her Noranian turn, Sharon took up Nora Aunor's mantle as the new superstar of Filipino cinema in the eighties.

In *Bituing Walang Ninging,* Sharon plays Dorina, a lowly street vendor who sells *sampaguita* flowers and avidly follows the career of her favorite mestiza star, Lavinia (played by actress Cherie Gil). Dorina begins as a mestiza star's devoted fan, but, having launched her own successful recording career, Dorina ends by usurping and surpassing the mestiza star-turned-rival both professionally and personally. Cervantes considers Sharon Cuneta "Nora's successor in popularity" in the eighties and notes the following of Sharon's roles in that era: "On film, she appears as the sturdy modern Filipina confronting predatory mestizas like Cherie Gil and Jackie Lou Blanco—who, if they had come upon the scene 20 years ago, would surely have become major stars. Instead, they now represent foreign aggression ably parried by Sharon Cuneta."[47]

The indigenization of Sharon's elite-identified screen persona was accomplished in part by casting other mixed-race performers as "predatory mestizas" upon whom Sharon's characters visited righteous vengeance tempered by compassion.[48] The dynamics of imitation and indigenization in Philippine cinema as explored by Tiongson and Cervantes emphasize two translative processes: either the "making-native" of Hollywood stars by proffering local mestizo actors as counterparts, or the repackaging of mestiza stars through Filipino-sounding stage names and, on screen, via costuming and Tagalog dialogue. In contrast, the indigenization of Sharon's Taglish-speaking mestiza teen film persona involved a different operation of translation; that is, a transformation of the prior coordinates of Nora Aunor's mythology toward the reinvention of an ascendant mestiza star. This conversion took the form of a metaphoric transfiguration of Sharon Cuneta's iconography through a *making-indigent* of her heretofore upper-class screen roles. This translative reimagining of Sharon as the new Nora distanced Sharon Cuneta from the wealth and neocolonial privilege associated with mestiza actresses by emphasizing an important confluence with the Noranian persona: the cinematic success enabled by a prior adolescent career in popular music.

What are we to make of the logic of mestizo envy, of the cinema as an institutionalized desire for a mestizo social order, when, in the aftermath of Nora's spectacular success, even the mestiza star emulates the *kayumangging kaligatan,* thus resisting and partially reversing the pull of white love?

First, Sharon's Noranian turn in the mid-eighties produced conspicuous reversals in comparison to her prior films' metonymic logic of place. In Sharon's melodramatic backstage musicals, *Bukas Luluhod ang Mga Tala* and *Bituing Walang Ningning,* haciendas and country clubs give way to urban servants' quarters and squatter colonies, the latter figured as that largest backstage sphere out of which a virtuous and gifted singer-actress will climb. In referring to these films as backstage musicals, I am arguing that these films employ an expanded notion of the backstage, one that encompasses the entire social landscape of urban poverty from which Sharon's character begins her trajectories of social ascent. Second, Sharon-as-Nora inaugurates a play of misidentifications (the mestiza appropriates Noranian mythology) through which the disruption of mestiza stardom inaugurated by Nora comes full circle, partly capturing and domesticating Noranian mythology for an elite-identified star but also partly reversing the terms of white love. As we have seen, historically the mestiza star was routinely indigenized by studios to rub away the hard edges of her foreignness. Too stark a reminder of colonial complicity and class privilege might erode the appeal of the mestiza's visage by provoking a nationalist or nativist resentment of precisely that which was desired, as well as despised: the way the mestiza star looked so nearly white. In the post–studio era, two moments, encapsulated by two stars, Nora Aunor and Sharon Cuneta, ensue: In the first, a brown beauty, the first *kayumanggi* superstar, upends the rule of mestiza stardom. In the second, a decade after Nora's emergence, another star is born: a mestiza colegiala, Sharon Cuneta, whose indigenizing bid to become the Cinderella Superstar's successor takes the precise form of mimicking, not Hollywood stars, but Noranian embodiment.

In the crosscurrents of mestizas who imitate whiteness but also brownness, we glimpse what Rafael has called the characteristic ambivalence of "nationalist responses to the call of white love." Of Filipino resistance to, as well as collaboration with, Spanish and American colonial rule, Rafael writes, "[T]o the extent that nationalism is a response to imperialism, it necessarily finds itself assuming the latter's accents and tones, even as it dismantles its categories, exposes its limits and calls into question its moral claims."[49] I am struck by the metaphor of speech here, of the sound of submission and revolt compared to the cadence of speaking. Nationalism is likened by Rafael to the sound of a sentence that dismantles the power of the dominant while to some extent ventriloquizing it. In all this we already hear the ambivalences of Taglish.

Philippine Cinema and the Language Wars

In 1969, the *Philippines Free Press,* the most prestigious English-language weekly in the nation, summed up a tumultuous decade with the following remark: "Make no mistake about it: we are in the midst of a language revolution in this country."[50] In the heated national language debates, the recognition of the citizenry's suffusive multilingualism often gave way to a reductive polarization of the "language problem" to a conflict between two rivals: English, on the one hand, and Philippine languages, especially Tagalog, on the other. The exceptionalism of the "Philippine language scene" was often noted: "To be sure, the Philippines is linguistically unique! It is one of the few countries in the world where bilinguals and trilinguals outnumber monolinguals."[51] At school, Filipino students likewise encountered a profusion of languages: English, instituted in 1903 by American colonial rule; Tagalog-based Pilipino, promulgated as a medium of instruction in 1946; and other major vernaculars, adopted as teaching languages in 1957. By the 1960s, it was widely understood that the Philippine education system served a profoundly multilingual studentry. Though some called for *interlingual* education (which meant, among other things, a peaceful coexistence among the various competing languages of instruction), the loudest voices in the language controversies of that decade insisted on "one-language domination," proclaiming the ascendancy of either English or Tagalog-based Pilipino.[52]

My essay revisits the language controversies of the 1960s and 1970s in order to sketch, in part, the larger cultural context of Nora's ascent into popularity and the significance of Taglish in the early career of her successor in stardom, Sharon Cuneta. This was an era in which an unprecedented interest in specialist debates in linguistics—including multilingualism and orthography (the alphabet and the spelling of foreign loanwords became symbolic of the "proper" assimilation of colonial influences into the national culture)—spilled over into the pages of the Philippine popular press, as well as being given pride of place in academic journals.[53] Repeated references to the role of cinema, radio, and television in the dissemination of the national language form a kind of leitmotif of that period.[54] Several commentators, both popular and academic, note that although the Constitutional mandate for the propagation of Tagalog-based Pilipino as the national language aroused vociferous regionalist resistance among non-Tagalogs, radio and especially the movies accomplished what legislation could not.[55]

The nation-binding function of the cinema as disseminator of Tagalog to audiences all over the ethnolinguistically diverse

archipelago began in the early sound period. According to film historian Clodualdo del Mundo Jr., the advent of sound technology in the 1930s led to an unexpected rise in the popularity of domestically produced movies vis-à-vis imported films.[56] Philippine audiences in the 1930s patronized local films in growing numbers because the sound of Philippine languages could now be heard at the movies. By the 1970s, with the decline of Visayan regional filmmaking, the sound of Filipino popular cinema had grown identifiable with one vernacular whose dominance was inextricable from Manila, the urban center of the local film industry: "Filipino filmmaking is based in Manila and Philippine films are basically Tagalog. The dominance of Manila-based movies could also be credited with the spread of Filipino, the Philippine language, which is based on Tagalog."[57] The colloquial term for popular Philippine cinema, *Tagalog movies,* thus indexes the homogenizing, nation-binding function of the cinematic medium, one that successfully contributed to the erosion of the ascendancy of English in the country while also relegating the ethnolinguistic diversity of other vernaculars and regional film movements to offscreen space.

Though the Tagalog-based national language was, as Rafael puts it, "projected as the potential language of cultural authenticity with which to articulate a precolonial past with a decolonized future," it has never quite succeeded in fulfilling such aims. Today, English, not Tagalog, is still the language used for higher education and the conduct of state business; in non-Tagalog regions and outside urban centers, the languages of politics are English and local vernaculars. In the hierarchy of languages in the Philippines, then, English, the legatee of American imperialism, is still accorded the greatest social distinction, Spanish continues to connote rarefied elite use, and Tagalog commands the least social distinction of these "translocal" Philippine languages, despite leftist and nationalist attempts to counter the ideological privileging of English[58] and the fact that, among Philippine vernaculars, Tagalog is regarded as the most prestigious due to its association with Manila and with the Manila-based film and media industries.[59]

In 1970, Jose Lacaba—poet, journalist, and screenwriter for several major works of the Philippine New Cinema—famously predicted, "I'm giving English in the Philippines a decade at the most."[60] In subsequent reflections on this piece, Lacaba acknowledges that his prediction on the imminent fall of English was premature, though he remains (rightly) convinced that much of the commentary he offered in his 1970 essay "Pilipino Forever" remains germane to the Philippine cultural scene.[61] What interests me is Lacaba's invocation of a Filipino movie star—Nora Aunor—as

proof positive of the nearing ascendancy of Pilipino as national language and, implicitly, as an acknowledgment of the nationalizing effect of popular cinema.[62] Lacaba's vivid portrait of Nora's place in the language wars of that decade is worth revisiting at length:

> As staff writer for the *Free Press,* I have done quite a lot of traveling around the country. What strikes me most whenever I come to a new town is the abundance of theaters showing Tagalog movies and stands selling or renting out Tagalog comic books. Nora Aunor is everywhere, from Jolo to Sorsogon, and I suppose all the way to Ilocos Sur, where I have not been to yet. I remember a film exchange representative telling me that in the provinces Tagalog movies beat English-language pictures any time, even if the Tagalog moviehouses are mostly rundown and fleabitten. And everywhere, too, *Pogi* and *Pilipino Komiks* and all those little comic books available at every corner in Manila are doing brisk business.
>
> What this proves is that Tagalog-based Pilipino is more widespread than its enemies think. The squealing teenager in Naga who adores Nora Aunor will not endure the fleas and the bedbugs if she cannot understand what Nora Aunor is saying between songs. . . . Thanks to the movies and the comic books, I have very seldom encountered difficulty in communicating with people born and bred in a different dialect.[63]

All over the country, the suffusive presence of Nora Aunor was palpable on theater marquees and on the covers of colorful comic-book–sized weekly magazines featuring film celebrities (figure 8). Provincial sidewalks crowded with movie-mad *komiks* reminded the city journalist of the streets of Manila. Nora's face, peering out of every *komiks* cover, signified to Lacaba a fording of both ethnolinguistic and spatial distances. Images of movie stars hawked by sidewalk vendors from Jolo to Sorsogon reassured the Manila-based journalist that Tagalog, the idiom of the movies, bound audiences across the diverse archipelago.

At least until the seventies, however, Filipino movie audiences remained split along class lines. In industry parlance, "D and E" audiences—the two lowest income categories composed of blue-collar workers, agricultural laborers, vendors, and the unemployed—comprise the majority of audiences for popular Filipino cinema throughout most of its history. In contrast, "A and B" upper-class spectators—businesspeople and professionals—were thought to patronize primarily English (i.e., Hollywood) movies. According to the *CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art,* "Until the 1960s, Tagalog movies shown in Tagalog moviehouses were generally labeled bakya (low class) in contrast to English movies in so-called classy English movie houses."[64]

In the heat of the language debates of the sixties, former president Manuel L. Quezon, under whose Commonwealth government the national language policy was first forged, published a series of



Figure 8. Nora Aunor's face was ubiquitous on the covers of *komiks,* colorful comic-book–sized Tagalog weekly magazines featuring film celebrities. Clockwise from the **top left:** Nora Aunor (affectionately known to fans as "Guy") and Tirso Cruz III (nicknamed "Pip"), with whom she was romantically linked both on screen and off screen, were featured on the covers of *Love* 1, no. 10 (1971), and *Bondying Movie Specials* 78 (1971). Nora also appeared by herself and with Maria Leonora Theresa, the famous three-foot-tall ceramic doll featured in her movies with Pip on the covers of *9Teeners* 1, no. 31 (1971), and 2, no. 51 (1971), respectively.

essays in the prestigious English-language magazine *Weekly Graphic*. Quezon described in knowing detail an elite minority of "Filipinos who are at home in English. They know English better than the average American, have a wider vocabulary and wield it more accurately. They are the more vocal portion of the population and exert an influence in intellectual circles out of all proportion to their numbers." In opposing Pilipino as a national language, Quezon argued, the English-speaking elite is, in effect, asking the "majority of Filipinos who cannot acquire the same familiarity with English to adjust themselves to the convenience of a small minority."[65] Quezon warned that failure to embrace a national language would result in a "split culture," a nation divided between a "culture-making minority" of English-identified elites and the vernacularized popular culture of the majority.[66]

Outside of the broader debate on the national language, in pedagogical discussions on the deterioration of English instruction in the Philippines, the question of Filipino competence in English was approached quite differently. A familiar motif in the language scene of the postwar period emerges: the long lament, often punctuated by condescending humor, regarding the inadequacy of what was called "Filipino English." Among educators wrestling with teaching English in a bilingual or multilingual Philippine context, Filipino English begins as a neutral designation but quickly becomes synonymous with "the deterioration in our spoken English" since the end of American rule in the Philippines.[67] The postwar anxiety over deteriorating educational standards was underwritten by the nostalgic pull of the American colonial era, a time when most Filipinos were taught English by native speakers—the Thomasites and their successors.[68] Federico Licsi Espino Jr. condescendingly described "the sound of Juan's English" as "speech that makes no distinction between 'f' and 'p,' between 'v' and 'b' and sheer bamboo English that wreaks havoc on Her Majesty's phonetics."[69] "Imperfect" pronunciation and problems with intonation and rhythm in spoken English loomed large in these accounts. Seldom framed as an expected and inevitable consequence of culture contact, a strong form of borrowing and convergence typical of multilinguistic situations and a language variant in its own right, Filipino English was seen as poor translation ("transliteration") and imperfect bilingualism: "much of Filipino English, let's face it, is only English imperfectly known. . . . [T]he other half of Filipino English is Pilipino literally translated."[70]

Filipino English is a species of failure that proper pedagogy must counteract, and the speech clinic was the remedy of choice (figure 9). The logic of the speech clinic is one of helping Filipinos



Figure 9. Photograph of a speech clinic featured in the 13 September 1967 issue of the prestigious English-language magazine *Weekly Graphic*. The headline reads, "Away with provincial accents!" A subheading embedded in the photograph notes, "Just a touch of Americanese in speech is considered very proper, very attractive, and quite practical for Filipino speakers." Courtesy of the Rizal Library Filipiniana periodicals collection, Ateneo de Manila University.

to learn how to sound like Americans.[71] This fantasy of linguistic deracination was surprisingly pervasive in both popular and scholarly writing on English in the Philippines. Exhortations to Filipino English speakers to improve their spoken competence by enrolling in speech clinics always urged them to take on linguistic self-improvement while warning them, beforehand, that perfect mimicry of the colonial mentor was impossible.[72]

I want to suggest that beyond the capture of Noranian iconography for the bourgeois star, there is also a linguistic, spoken component to Sharon's Noranian turn. A surreal speech-clinic scene stands out in *Bituing Walang Ningning*, the film whose story of a poor adolescent singer's overnight success turned the tide for Sharon Cuneta's film career. Lacaba has pointed out that the social-climbing parvenu, seeking to strip herself of the stigma of her *bakya* (tacky, low income, or provincial) social origins in search of middlebrow respectability, needed a cure for bakya English, a



Figures 10. Sharon/Dorina's speech clinic scene in *Bituing Walang Ningning* (Star without Sparkle, dir. Emmanuel Borlaza, 1984). Clockwise from the **top left:** An establishing shot of the speech-clinic awning; the speech clinic instructor leads the class in pronunciation exercises; Sharon Cuneta's character, Dorina, is centered among the speech clinic's students; and, framed in surreal close shots, Dorina recites complex tongue twisters in English with astonishing facility, resulting in an unintentionally campy scene.

supposedly failed English riddled with malapropisms: "A Mustang and a Pierre Cardin shirt and a speech-clinic accent have magical properties; they confer an aura of class and remove the stigma of bakya."[73] The speech clinic becomes a figure in Lacaba's analysis for the nouveau riche's linguistic reeducation in English, the language of the elite.

Bituing Walang Ningning stages this very fantasy of class rebirth, with Sharon playing the memorable Noranian figure of Dorina, a poor street vendor who, en route to pop-music stardom, must first learn to speak English before making any public appearances. The unwitting humor 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 Cuneta's Dorina, framed in surreal close shots, enunciates with astonishing facility (figure 10). The diegetic heroine's capacity to speak English like those born to wealth far exceeds what can be motivated by the story world 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 (which would be regarded as "classiest" of all). The private schools' long-standing intransigence to the vernacularization of school instruction ensured that one could hear what one writer called the "social cleavage"[74] in Philippine education in students' actual speech. 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.[75]

The split between public schools where the primary medium of instruction was Pilipino or Filipino, and private schools that continued to teach in the prestige language, English, was lived in every Filipino student's linguistic habitus. In this historical view, the auditory distinction of Sharon Cuneta's private-school diction—whether in English or Taglish—stood out in sharp relief against the much-impugned "sound of Juan's English." It was precisely the sound of mestiza privilege that such scenes in *Bituing Walang Ningning* trumpeted to unintentional camp effect. On screen, we are asked to witness the Pygmalion-like transformation of a street urchin into the toast of society, a demonstration of linguistic ability ranging from movie Tagalog to colegiala English; but this points always, off screen, to the knowledge that Sharon captivates precisely because of her upper-class habitus. In such a context, the speech-clinic scene of *Bituing Walang Ningning* 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 thus underscores, or makes emphatic, the ruse that underpins the Sharon films of this period: an elite star slumming as a Noranian figure, Sharon in drag.

Star-Crossed Audiences: Mestiza Noranians and the "Bakya Crowd"

Jose Lacaba, the journalist and screenwriter who invoked Nora Aunor as a sign of the impending triumph of the national language, was also the foremost cultural commentator on bakya, a critic who rigorously interrogated the classed fantasies that underpinned this term of derision and who illuminated its relationship to contemporary Philippine cinema in a series of essays published in the seventies. In his 1970 article "Notes On 'Bakya': Being an Apologia of

Sorts for Filipino Masscult," Lacaba put forward a groundbreaking, redemptive discussion of bakya sensibility in Philippine popular culture.[76] The article opens by testing the reader's familiarity with, among other bits of popular trivia, the name "Nora Cabaltera Villamayor." Lacaba considered familiarity with the real name of the Philippines' reigning superstar a litmus test of belongingness to kitschy trash culture, incontrovertible evidence of being a "true connoisseur of bakya."[77] According to Lacaba, the term literally refers to "wooden slippers worn in lieu of shoes by the poor in the barrios," a metonym that comes finally, in the late sixties and seventies, to denote the "style of popular culture, the sensibility of . . . masscult," disparagingly characterized by most as "cheap, gauche, naive, provincial, and terribly popular."[78]

In another fascinating reflection on contemporary Philippine cinema, "We All Lost It at The Movies," published two years prior to "Notes On Bakya," Lacaba claims that the bakya crowd, the favorite "whipping boy" of those who disdain Filipino film, is actually a "vanishing breed." The bakya is precisely "what we lost at the movies." The lost quality ruined by celluloid pleasures is, Lacaba implies, the cultural provincialism (or, perhaps, the cultural virginity) signified by the wooden slippers of the rural poor. Such pastoral "innocence" cannot withstand the urbanizing technology that is the cinema.[79]

At first glance, the term "bakya crowd" seemed to make straightforward reference to an economically disenfranchised popular audience to whose uneducated tastes Filipino film producers pandered. In hindsight, however, it becomes clear that the near-universal disparagement of "Tagalog movies" and the "bakya crowd" in English-language periodicals of the sixties and seventies also functioned as rhetorical shorthand for the conditions of post–studio era filmmaking in the Philippines: quickie filmmaking financed by inexperienced producers; poor technical quality and low prestige value in comparison with studio-era productions; and the unprecedented power of the freelance star (or star-producer), who is able to command inflated talent fees that would have been unheard of in the days of studio contracts. This much was registered in Lacaba's 1979 essay "Movies, Critics, and the Bakya Crowd," in which he suggests that bakya names not so much an audience but a kind of movie—the commercial Tagalog movie—as opposed to prestige films intended to compete for awards.[80]

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 the theaters. The bakya crowd then no longer simply designates a type of moviegoer; it is

also a way of naming (and blaming) a whole host of conditions perceived as standing in the way of accomplishing a prestige cinema of quality in mainstream Filipino filmmaking.

Nora Aunor, who suffered the deleterious excesses of the star system she personified, was a figuration of both a film-industrial moment and the historical audience it constituted in a reciprocal movement. Pejoratively referred to as "darling of the Bakya crowd,"[81] Nora commanded a fan base of such scale that one critic described her Noranians as "the biggest and most formidable unarmed force in the Philippines."[82] The affective-political horizon of Nora's spectacular fan following is what Neferti Xina Tadiar calls the "Noranian Imaginary," an exhortation to the feminized poor to believe in their own historical agency. Tadiar illuminates the heretical, collective dimensions at work both in Nora Aunor's 1982 film *Himala* (Miracle) and in the popular mythology surrounding the star:

> [T]he subversive power (*kapangyarihan*) that she portends for the ruling classes lies precisely in her "eventfulness," her capacity to arouse her followers to act out their passions and to do as they desire than as others desire (to "follow" their *kalooban*, their inner motivation), which is precisely the realization of their own capacity (*kaypangyarihan*) to make things happen (*mangyari*).[83]

Though, as Tadiar observes, the heretical 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,[84] the redemptive, if unrealized, horizon of Noranian fandom remains. As Patrick Flores puts it, Nora's horizon of reception is "forged at the conjunctures of desire and social transformation," articulating a collective transformation of affect, a yearning for things to be other than what they are.[85]

By 1971, Nora Aunor, the bakya pop icon, had begun to breach class boundaries. The *Asia-Philippines Leader* grudgingly grants that the superstar was unmistakably crossing over to middle-class and upper-class audiences: "The maids talk of nothing else; they know her whole life story. But it isn't just the maids. Nora is not purely bakya stuff. Not anymore." The writer notes with amazement that her nieces and their friends—colegialas from the upper-crust private schools of Metro Manila—all watched *Lollipops and Roses* (1971) for the mestizo male lead (Cocoy Laurel) and came away with a regard for Nora. "There's no ignoring the golden voice" when her music plays everywhere, her songs becoming a part of everyone's daily commute.[86]

One writer for *Weekly Graphic* attempted to analyze what she called "this Nora thing" at arm's length, only to collapse in an

admission of conversion to the virtues of Noranian embodiment. Monina Mercado's short piece records the discomfited confessions of a mestiza Noranian, a disclosure that is equal parts adoration and disavowal. At first, her article seems to confirm the stereotypical view of Nora as a phenomenon confined to the bakya crowd. In response to the burning question of the moment, "Why is Nora so popular?" one "actress-on-the-comeback" bitingly retorts, "[T]he secret is that housemaids can relate to her." The beginning of Mercado's article seems to echo the actress's verdict: "[E]ver since this new maid joined my household three months ago, I have had at least three hours end-to-end of daily exposure to Nora Aunor." The writer's middle-class family, it appears, are "exposed" against their will (Nora as popular contagion!) through the radio-mediated, fanatical devotion of their housemaid. Mercado's five-year-old daughter is catty: "[B]ut Nora isn't pretty," she protests. The writer's husband seems irritated at first but is later revealed as a closeted Noranian himself: "[O]n the fringes, he could still hear and was listening sharply, too, I discovered from a remark he tossed nonchalantly. 'It's unbelievable,' he said, 'that such a big voice could belong to such a little girl.'" The rigid, class-demarcated distinction between middle-class critic and Noranian housemaid is starting to break down. Mercado reveals that it's "time for my own confession: I had long been a Nora watcher."

What follows amounts to a soliloquy on Noranian embodiment. Mercado had been watching Nora for years, long before the new housemaid and her transistor radio arrived at the family home. Exposure—contagion to the Noranian bug—happened long before, on television, as a remarkable adolescent girl of fourteen let loose "the same lung power which makes Janis Joplin so electrifying." This "puny," "apologetic"-looking girl, "deliberately saccharine in frilly white things with choking necklines and long sleeves" sang with a voice that didn't seem to be her own, a "baritonic boom" at odds with her tiny, girlish countenance. But it wasn't just her voice. The author waxes lyrical in defense of Nora's supposedly unpretty face, her "exotic eyes" and most especially "her cheekbones, those twin sharp slashes between her lips and her eyes, the model's cheekbones, Suzy Parker, Verushka, Capucine, even Lee Radziwill. If she burns those frilly dresses, puts on the right make-up and wears the correct hairdo, she could look smashing. How the palms itched to do these transformations." Mercado confesses, "I too was hooked."[87]

The Filipina writer in English whose comparison texts are Joplin and Verushka, the master of the house who listened to Nora on the sly, the daughter who thinks Nora unlovely, and, most especially,

the "actress-on-the-comeback" adversely affected by Nora's reversal of the rule of fair-skinned stardom—all are coded by their aesthetic, linguistic, and classed allegiances as mestizo/a-identified audience members. And two of them were "hooked."

Over a decade later, in 1984, the year of Sharon's own translative Noranian conversion, the degree to which her predecessor had altered the terms of Philippine film stardom was apparent in *Liwayway*'s account of the obstacles Sharon successfully overcame to win the hearts of the mass audience. I provide my own English translation of Liwayway's Tagalog account of Sharon's crossover success:

> The public has accepted Sharon even though she is from an upper-class family. She is bourgeois [*burgis*]. English-speaking [*inglisera*]. But despite these, Sharon has been accepted wholeheartedly by the masses [*napalapit at napamahal sa masa si Sharon*]. She has thousands of fans. She has made a name for herself not only as a singer, but also in the movies, where her talent fee is at the level of superstars.[88]

Lower-income spectators, this writer suggests, had to hurdle a figurative distance in order to accept and finally enfold Sharon to their hearts. (That distance is the inverse of the one Nora had to travel in order to upend the Philippine star system in the late sixties). By 1984, Sharon's social and linguistic distinction as an English-speaking bourgeois, a *burgis inglisera*—which in pre-Aunor days would have affirmed the prestige of mestiza stars—was almost a barrier to Sharon's success. As *Liwayway* frames it, Sharon is a crossover star in the reverse direction. Sharon's oft-remarked popularity with the "campus crowd"[89] recalled an earlier film-marketing term, an "invisible audience" made up of "college students, professionals, and ordinary mature citizens who could be interested in local films but do not go to see them." The "invisible audience" had been a kind of holy grail in 1960s' film writing: "[I]f the 'invisible audience' could be made to patronize local films as well as they do foreign movies, it would mean a bonanza for the local film industry."[90] Sharon's capacity to command an inordinately high talent fee at the inception of her career sprang from the hope she held out of becoming a music-to-movie star who could speak to "A and B" audiences, students and professionals who had long preferred Hollywood product to local fare. Having begun by enchanting an elite-identified campus crowd, the invisible educated audience so long desired by Philippine film producers, Sharon eventually managed to win the devotion of the kind of spectator Nora had addressed from the first: moviegoers who decades ago were dubbed bakya.

My final point about Sharon Cuneta's Noranian turn in the mid-1980s, then, is that it points to a broader shift in audience patterns in Filipino popular cinema. For historians of contemporary Philippine cinema, it has become a truism that, sometime between the late 1960s and the early 1980s, the divisions between audiences, in terms both of class and language, started to become more permeable: the poor started to watch both locally made prestige pictures and Hollywood movies in English, while the professional classes started to patronize domestically produced films whose lingua franca was first Tagalog, then increasingly Taglish. My hunch is that the passing of the torch of superstardom from Nora to Sharon affords a glimpse into the dynamics of that transformation in audience proclivities and in the idiom of 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-class and upper-class spectators were screening Philippine-made films as well, in part due to the penetration of Tagalog films into formerly English-only moviehouses in the entertainment districts of Avenida, Cubao, and Makati in the sixties and seventies.[91] Nora's movement from teenybopper movies to critically acclaimed social problem films blurred the borders between bakya and quality film and attracted fans across classes, from domestic helpers to their middle-class employers. Sharon's brand of mestiza stardom invited upper-class audiences predisposed to English-language Hollywood fare to watch Tagalog movies and embrace a Filipino movie star. Sharon served, for a particular generation of young filmgoers, as the bourgeois viewer's point of entry into popular Filipino films. 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 to a bourgeois spectatorship. In an important lesson about the heterogeneity of audiences, as well as the facility of bourgeois tactics of supplantation, we realize that Sharon Cuneta was, after all, not the first mestiza Noranian.

Notes

This essay is dedicated to Noranians and/or Sharonians in my life (who may or may not share my views!): Joya Escobar, Val Lim, Joi Barrios, Joel David, Napoleon Lustre, Anya Leonardia, Kelly Wolf, Chammy Uy, Blanca Ocampo-Lim, Marlene Oviedo-Marmo, and Ninay Santos-Morales. My research for this article would not have been possible without the valuable Filipiniana periodical archives at the Main Library of the University of the Philippines (UP), Diliman, and the Rizal Library

of the Ateneo de Manila University. My thanks to the Reference and Filipiniana librarians of the Rizal Library at Ateneo and to Regina Murillo and Wilma Azarcon of the UP Main Library. I am also grateful to Margot Orendain and Lulu Reyes for facilitating my summer 2009 visiting professorship with the Ateneo de Manila Department of English, during which I conducted archival research for this essay at the Rizal library.

All translations from Tagalog or Taglish to English in this essay are my own.

[1] Quijano de Manila, "Don't Rock the Star System!" *Philippines Free Press* 58, no. 31 (1965): 6–7. The dissolution of the studio system meant that, by 1965, a handful of top stars were getting paid six times their normal asking price in comparison with their usual fee in 1960; the film industry as a whole was producing almost two hundred films a year, nearly double the annual number of films produced in the studio era. See Ross F. Celino, "Busiest Stars of 1965," *Weekly Graphic* 32, no. 28 (1966): 38–39.

[2] Nicanor G. Tiongson, "The Filipino Film Industry," *East-West Film Journal* 6, no. 2 (1992): 23–61. The full quote from Tiongson reads,

> With the gradual disappearance of the big studios of the 1960s and with the proliferation of scores of independent companies that cared for nothing but profit, the film industry sank into one of its lowest periods. Even as the more enlightened sectors of academe began to confront and analyze the problems of Philippine society, the movies indulged their audiences in an orgy of escapism, pushing the star system to its limits (movies then made money simply because they had superstar Nora Aunor). (29–30)

[3] Quijano de Manila, "Golden Girl," *Philippines Free Press* 63, no. 28 (1970): 6–7, 57–59.

[4] According to Virgilio S. Almario,

> It was the time of the Beatles, Everly Brothers, Cascades, and various other foreign singers. As a rule, only foreign records were making money, with isolated hits coming from local singers like Sylvia la Torre, Bobby Gonzales, Fred Panopio and a few others. Most local singers had to follow whatever craze prevailed as dictated by Tin Pan Alley, although a few original talents were then rising, among them the likes of Merci Molina, Carmen Soriano and Pilita Corrales, but the track record set by Nora was unprecedented. She changed the history of the recording industry, Philippine record producers agree. She set the local recording industry on its present prosperous course and assured thereby the future of local records. ("Cinderella Superstar: The Life and Legend of Nora Aunor," in *Readings in Philippine Cinema,* ed. Rafael Ma. Guerrero [Manila: Experimental Cinema of the Philippines, 1983], 135–43, quotation on 137)

In 1983, well past her peak years in the early to mid-seventies, Nora still held the record for singles and LPs sold, surpassing other legends of the local music industry: Pilita Corales, Victor Wood, and Eddie Peregrina (see Ronald K. Constantino, "Will Nora Aunor Make It Again as a Recording Star?" *Parade* 5, no. 15 [1983]: 14).

[5] Joel David, *Fields of Vision: Critical Applications in Recent Philippine Cinema* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1995), 58.

[6] The blurring of Nora Aunor's biographical mythology with the roles she has played in filmic story worlds is rooted in the star system's tendency to conflate the diegesis with extracinematic discourses on the star's professional and private life. Miriam Hansen's pioneering work on stardom underscores this point:

> Because the star is defined by his or her existence outside of individual films, by the publicity that surrounds his or her professional and "private" personality, the star's presence in a particular film blurs the boundary between diegesis and discourse, between an address relying on the identification with fictional characters and an activation of the viewer's familiarity with the star on the basis of production and publicity intertexts. Ideally the levels of discourse and diegesis are designed to interlock and reinforce each other. The casting of a star binds the viewer all the more firmly into the fictional world of the film by drawing on more sustained structures of identification, mobilizing long-term psychic investments in particular ego ideals and primary object substitutes. At the same time the reincarnation of the star with each new film reconfirms, inflects, and keeps alive his or her publicity existence. (*Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991], 246)

[7] Neferti Xina M. Tadiar, "Himala, 'Miracle': The Heretical Potential of Nora Aunor's Star Power," in *Fantasy-Production: Sexual Economies and Other Philippine Consequences for the New World Order* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2004), 225–60.

[8] Nicanor G. Tiongson, "Si Kristo, Ronnie Poe, at Iba Pang 'Idolo': Apat Na Pagpapahalaga Sa Dula at Pelikulang Pilipino" [Jesus Christ, Ronnie Poe, and Other "Idols": Four Values in Filipino Theater and Film], *Sagisag* 4, no. 9 (1979): 11–39, esp. 17.

[9] de Manila, "Golden Girl," 6–7.

[10] Danny Villanueva, "'69: The Year of the Bomba," *Weekly Nation* 5, no. 20 (1970): 37–38, quotation on 38.

[11] Danny Villanueva, "Nora Aunor Is Sampaguita Muse," *Weekly Nation* 5, no. 20 (1970): 42–43, esp. 42.

[12] Vicente L. Rafael, "Preface to the Philippine Edition," in *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2000), 164–67.

[13] P. A. Zapanta, "The Girl Who Made Good," *Sunday Times Magazine,* 27 September 1970, 42–45, quotation on 43.

[14] In *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History,* Vicente L. Rafael theorizes envy as a mode of spectatorship for Filipino audiences watching Hollywood film stars. Rafael conceives of "white love" as an equivocal term for both the racist assumptions of American colonial policy in the Philippines and the ambivalence toward whiteness "that came to inform if not inflict the varieties of Filipino nationalism that emerged under American patronage." For "white love," see Rafael, "Preface to the Philippine Edition," xi–xii. For his discussion of "mestizo envy," see *White Love,* 162–67.

[15] Rafael, *White Love,* 167.

[16] Tiongson, "Filipino Film Industry," 24.

[17] Behn Cervantes, "The Mestiza Mystique in Filipino Movies," *Pelikula* 2, no. 1 (2000): 16–19.

[18] Jared Sexton argues that "the fundamental insecurity of racist reasoning" is that racial purity does not exist prior to miscegenation. Racializing discourse is always belied by the fact that "we are all of mixed origin," an incoherence that racial

categories strive to hierarchize, to enduringly powerful effect ("The Consequences of Race Mixture: Racialised Barriers and the Politics of Desire," *Social Identities* 9, no. 2 [2003]: 241–75).

[19] Rafael, *White Love,* 165.

[20] Ibid., 162–66.

[21] Vicente Rafael, "Taglish, or the Phantom Power of the Lingua Franca," *Public Culture* 8, no. 1 (1995): 101–26, quotation on 104.

[22] Cervantes, "Mestiza Mystique," 18.

[23] For the Filipino film studios' management of audience ambivalence toward mestiza stars, see ibid., 18–19. For another discussion of the dynamics of mimicry and indigenization in the Filipino film industry vis-à-vis Hollywood, see Nicanor G. Tiongson, "The Imitation and Indigenization of Hollywood." *Pelikula* 2, no. 1 (2000): 22–30, quotations on 24–26. For movie dialogue as divorced from "Tagalog as actually spoken," see de Manila, "Don't Rock," 7.

[24] Tiongson, "Si Kristo," 12–14.

[25] Cervantes, "Mestiza Mystique," 20.

[26] See P. A. Zapanta, "About Today's Teenage Favorites" (*Sunday Times Magazine,* 5 July 1970, 20), who quotes a fan letter found in his suite.

[27] The incongruity of the Aunor voice surfaces also in Nick Joaquin's writing:

> Whether belting out a hot number or crooning a *kundiman* [love song], the Aunor voice identified itself by a certain huskiness of tone, quite remarkable in so young a girl. The Aunor voice has never been particularly young-girlish. Even at 14, when she pitched low, the effect was of smoky torch. . . . It's in the heartbreak songs that the throat really comes through—and the sound is all woman. (de Manila, "Golden Girl," 7)

Significantly, Tiongson credits Nora's capacity to flout the valuation of whiteness as beauty to the fact that she became famous for her singing ("Si Kristo," 14).

[28] Cervantes, "Mestiza Mystique," 20.

[29] Lena Pareja, "Sharon Cuneta," in *CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art* (Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines, 1994), 225.

[30] Sharon Cuneta's aunt and uncle, Helen Gamboa and Tito Sotto, were television personalities with connections in music and film. At the age of twelve, Sharon began appearing in television variety shows they hosted. Her first single, "Tawag Ng Pag-Ibig," was recorded by Vicor Music Corporation, the parent company of Blackgold Records, where Sotto was a music executive (see Ross F. Celino, "The Sharon-Gabby Love Story: Mayabang, Antipatiko!" *Liwayway,* 15 October 1984, 20, 38).

[31] Ronald K. Constantino, "Sharon Makes Waves," *Focus Philippines* 9, no. 19 (1981): 22. See also Celino, "Sharon-Gabby Love Story," 20.

[32] Sharon's father, Pablo Cuneta, insisted on a wholesome screen image for Sharon, "imposing several stringent conditions: no kissing scenes, much less bed scenes; no wearing of bikini, not even shorts," in negotiations with Sharon's first film studio, Sining Silangan. The contrast in Sharon's iconography as compared to the more sexually risqué forays of Cherie Gil, another young star of Sharon's generation, who ended up cast in supporting roles as Sharon's mestiza antagonist in films like *Bituing Walang Ningning,* is instructive in this respect. Gil, who got her

start two years before Sharon and whom industry insiders saw as the next superstar, ended up being cast in supporting roles as Sharon's mestiza antagonist in the mid-eighties. This seems to confirm Cervantes's point that although various mestiza actresses tried to challenge Nora Aunor's box-office dominance, "they could not dislodge her. These mestizas were left to dominate the *bomba* [sexpoloitation] genre" (see Cervantes, "Mestiza Mystique," 20; Constantino, "Sharon Makes Waves," 22; and Ricardo F. Lo, "Cherie in Bloom," *Expressweek,* 5 July 1979, 39).

[33] de Manila, "Don't Rock," 6–7.

[34] Rowena M. Agilada, "I Hope 1984 Will Be a Better Year—Sharon Cuneta," *Liwayway,* 2 January 1984, 13, 18–19, esp. 19.

[35] Rafael, *White Love,* 257.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Several of the concepts I use in this essay to describe the forms of cultural valuation embodied by Sharon Cuneta and Nora Aunor—habitus, distinction, and a critical interrogation of the demarcation of legitimate, middlebrow, or lowbrow "bakya" taste cultures—are drawn from Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste,* trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984). Briefly, for Bourdieu, "tastes function as markers of class" and underpin a "social hierarchy of consumers" (2–3). Habitus is for Bourdieu the "generative principle" that underlies each person's "meaningful practices" and "meaning-giving perceptions"—including the work one produces, one's lifestyle and judgments. In calling habitus a "structuring and structured structure," Bourdieu is arguing that while the habitus structures one's tastes it is also itself determined by the realm of the social: tastes are strongly class conformist and inflected by education, though this structuration is unintentional and actively forgotten (172–73). For Bourdieu, *cultural distinction* (a term that in his work captures the high stakes of "cultural nobility" or "legitimate" ways of relating to cultural texts) is often the converse of popularization, since symbolic profits are reaped in relation to the rarity of the aesthetic disposition possessed. Of the petit bourgeois figure of the parvenu, one who has achieved upward class mobility but has not yet been accepted into a higher class, Bourdieu suggests that the appearance of "pretension" or affectation arises from the marked attempt to attain distinction, "albeit in the illusory form of bluff or imitation" (128, 252–55).

[38] Mario Dumaual, "What Now, Young Stars?" *Parade* 5, no. 12 (1983): 8–9.

[39] Nestor U. Torre, "What Now, Sharon C.?" *Parade* 5, no. 9 (1983): 4.

[40] The Noranian allusions in *Pasan Ko ang Daigdig* have been analyzed by Joi Barrios, who offers an important feminist critique of the identificatory pleasures of Sharon Cuneta's films:

> The film *Pasan Ko ang Daigdig* enables its audience to forget the roots of poverty in the Philippines. What it emphasizes is the unique, single narrative of success. The story of the garbage collector is also the story of the young girl who used to sell water at the train station but who rose to become a superstar. [Barrios's footnote to her English translation notes that "this refers to Nora Aunor, considered to be the superstar of Philippine movies."] . . . These narratives divert our attention to the individual's struggle to break away from the shackles of poverty (promoting values of competitiveness instead of cooperation) instead of addressing the complex dynamics of colonial history, feudal culture, and imperialist control that are the root causes of poverty in the Philippines. ("Kung Bakit Ko

> Pinapanood and mga Pelikula ni Sharon Cuneta" [Mirrors and Movies, or Why I Watch Sharon Cuneta Films], *Kultura* 2, no. 4 [1989]: 2–8)

My thanks to Joi Barrios for so generously providing an English translation for that article, quoted here, for my undergraduate students in a Philippine Cinema class that I taught at the University of California, Irvine, in 2004.

[41] For a discussion of *bayad-utang* in *Pati Ba Pintig ng Puso,* see ibid.

[42] Sharon Cuneta, "Sharon at Gabby, Mag-Steady Uli?" interview by Josephine Cuneta, *Liwayway,* 30 April 1984, 12.

[43] Sharon remarks to her interviewer,

> Marami nga ang nagsabi na hindi ko raw mabibigyan ng *justice* ang pagganap ko sa pelikulang ito dahil hindi ko naman naranasan ang ganoong uri ng buhay, pero kahit naman papaano ay naglalaba rin ako ng panyolito sa bahay. [Many say that I will not be able to do justice to this film role because I've never experienced that kind of life but even I have washed handkerchiefs at home.] (Ervie S. Nangca, "Sharon Cuneta: 'Hindi Pa Ako Mag-Aasawa . . .'" [Sharon Cuneta: "I Don't Plan on Marrying Yet"], *Liwayway,* 23 July 1984, 18–19)

[44] Sharon's Noranian turn sometimes strained the moviegoing public's capacity to overlook the chasm between Sharon Cuneta's onscreen roles and her offscreen star persona. *Pasan Ko ang Daigdig* featured Sharon Cuneta in the role of an immiserated slum dweller scavenging for a living on Smokey Mountain, a real-life garbage pile several stories high in Tondo, Manila, where the film was shot. The official Sharon Cuneta website features several comments from Viva Films' publicity director Baby Gil explaining why *Pasan Ko ang Daigdig* failed at the box office:

> The public has this belief that you have to experience something to project it on screen. Sharon never experienced poverty, so how can she project it? *Ang* perception *ng tao* [People have this perception that], she can never project being poor on screen. [Director] Lino Brocka opposed this. . . . People equate her film with real-life events. *Pag gumawa ka ng malayo sa buhay niya, di tanggap ng tao* no matter how good she is. [If you do a film that is too different from her actual life, people will refuse to accept her in the role no matter how good she is]. (available at www.sharoncuneta.com/articles/artcle94.html)

[45] Erlinda Rapadas, "Mapanatili Kaya Ni Sharon Ang Pagiging Box Office Queen?" [Can Sharon Remain Box Office Queen?], *Liwayway,* 22 April 1985, 8, 28.

[46] *Liwayway* enthuses,

> Sharon is the new movie queen. She proved this beyond the shadow of a doubt in 1985, a year when 3 of her films made box office history (*Bituing Walang Ningning, Pati Ba Pintig Ng Puso?* and *Kailang Sasabihing Mahal Kita?*) Her successes have made rival movie producers furious; caused the pulses of other film queens to flutter with insecurity; brought the jingling sound of money to the ears of theater owners; and emboldened the profiteering dreams of her producers.

This is the original Tagalog text of that article:

> Si *Sharon Cuneta* ang siyang bagong reyna ng pelikula at walang alinlangang pinatunayan niya ito sa pagbubukas at pagsasara ng taong 1985.

> Tatlong pelikula yun (*Bituing Walang Ningning, Pati Ba Pintig ng Puso?* at *Kailang Sasabihing Mahal kita?*) na lumikha ng istorya sa takilya at napangitngit sa mga higanteng prodyuser na kalaban ng Viva films; magpa-*insecure* sa eratikang pulso ng ibang reyna; nagpatagingting sa libro ng mga *booker* at *theater-owner;* at lalong nagpatatag sa panaginip-na-may-peso sign ng prodyuser. (Gil Villasana, "Isang Sulyap Sa Taong Tinigib Ng Tamis, Tinigmak Ng Pait" [A Glimpse at a Bittersweet Year], *Liwayway,* 6 January 1986, 7, 17, quotation on 7)

[47] Cervantes, "Mestiza Mystique," 20.

[48] For a nuanced discussion of stardom and genre in Philippine cinema, see Roland B. Tolentino, "Icons, Genres, and Values," *Pelikula* 1, no. 1 (1999): 5–7. For Tolentino, Sharon's star persona is indivisible from the melodramatic generic formula of her films in the eighties and nineties, which he describes as follows: A virtuous heroine played by Sharon is unjustly oppressed by an archrival; through the aid of a benevolent outsider, the heroine will eventually attain and surpass the material and professional success of her former oppressors. The climax and denouement of these melodramas see aggression sublimated into moral ascendancy. According to Tolentino, by the end of her films Sharon's character "avenges her plight . . . [but] at the point where she can settle the score with the archrival, she forgives her." (7)

[49] Rafael, *White Love,* xii.

[50] Apolinar B. Parale, "The Pilipino Revolution," *Philippines Free Press* 62, no. 2 (1969): 15.

[51] Donald N. Larson, "The Philippine Language Scene," *Philippine Sociological Review* 11, nos. 1–2 (1963): 4–12, quotations on 4, 11.

[52] Jose V. Aguilar, "Improving Teaching and Learning in Language Instruction," *Philippine Journal of Education* 45, no. 5 (1966): 334–36, 389–90, quotation on 334–35.

[53] Under the Commonwealth government, the Institute of National Language (INL) was created in 1936 and tasked with choosing a single Filipino language that would form the basis for a national language (*wikang pambansa*). Composed of seven scholars representing several of the major Philippine regional languages (Visayan, Ilocano, Cebuano, Bicol, Moro, and Tagalog), the INL selected Tagalog as the basis of the national language. Beginning in 1940 and continuing to the postwar era, the Tagalog-based national language, christened "Pilipino," was used as a national medium of instruction, but many elite-identified schools resisted this change. Though the architects of the INL hailed the advent of a "Tagalog based" national language as "the beginning of a new era in Filipino nationalism" (Eric S. Giron, "Tagalog Lurches On," *Mirror,* 7 August 1965, 15) vigorous regionalist objections to "Tagalog-based Pilipino" in favor of English as national language, alongside legal challenges to the constitutionality of Pilipino and of the INL, persisted for decades.

One of the most contentious issues in the national language wars of the 1960s was sparked by a seemingly minute objection: *orthography,* or the proper spelling of words in accordance with standard usage. After the fashion of distinguished writer and grammarian Lope K. Santos, the INL adopted the *abakada*—a twenty-letter Tagalog alphabet—for the national language. The abakada excluded letters found in English, Spanish, and many foreign loanwords, as well as Spanish-derived Philippine surnames. Vocal critics of the INL excoriated the official adoption of the abakada as emblematic of a "purist" position on national language, a purism that, INL opponents claimed, sought to purge all non-Tagalog cultural influences

in the name of a narrow-minded, Tagalog-centric patriotism. The charge of purism focused on a potent orthographic emblem: official spelling mandated "Pilipino" instead of "Filipino," the latter being the orthography adopted by nineteenth-century reformists and revolutionaries, among them the national hero, Jose Rizal. A tempest raged around whether the national language should be spelled "Filipino" or "Pilipino" since this word was especially important in an era of nationalist resurgence, both as a noun for national language and citizenry and as an identitarian adjective. In 1973, the national language was renamed "Filipino" under Ferdinand Marcos's martial law regime.

[54] See, for example, Roderick J. Hemphill, "The Philippine Language Scene," *Philippine Sociological Review* 10, nos. 1–2 (1962): 26–33, quotation on 31; and Edward R. Kiunisala, "Pilipino for Filipinos," *Philippines Free Press* 62, no. 35 (1969): 32, 175–76, esp. 175.

[55] Tiongson, "Filipino Film Industry," 24.

[56] Clodualdo del Mundo Jr. notes,

> Although foreign distributors were convinced that sound would not discourage the Filipinos from watching films in English and that there was a sufficient number of English-speaking people in Manila "to warrant the installation of talking equipment", they did not foresee the boost in local productions that the new technology would provide. ("Philippine Cinema: An Historical Overview," *Asian Cinema* 10, no. 2 [1999]: 29–66, quotation on 30–31)

[57] Ibid., 40.

[58] Rafael, *White Love,* 169.

[59] Teodoro A. Llamzon, "On Tagalog as Dominant Language," *Philippine Studies* 16, no. 4 (1968): 729–49, quotations on 724, 735.

[60] Jose F. Lacaba, "Pilipino Forever, or, the Decline and Foreseeable Fall of English in the Philippines," *Philippines Free Press* 63, no. 35 (1970): 6.

[61] See Jose F. Lacaba, "A, Ewan, Basta Sa Pilipino Pa Rin Ako!" [I'm Still Rooting for Filipino]; reprinted from *Who,* 5 August 1978, available from http://kapetesapatalim.blogspot.com/2009/09/ewan-basta-sa-pilipino-pa-rin-ako.html; and Jose F. Lacaba, "*Pilipino Forever!*" available from http://kapetesapatalim.blogspot.com/2009/09/pilipino-forever.html.

[62] Lacaba was not alone; other proponents of Tagalog as the basis for the national language in the seventies and eighties voiced a euphoric belief in the coming "fall of English" by invoking the figure of Nora Aunor. Federico Licsi Espino Jr. argues that there is a "disregard for regionalism in the film world," citing the superstardom of a "true blue Bikolana from Iriga like Nora Aunor." For Espino,

> the boob tube and the silver screen do influence the drift of language. And whether the Ilokano, Pangasinense, Pampango, Visayan, and Bikolano *dalubwikas* [experts on language] like it or not, Tagalog movies constitute the most potent force in disseminating the language of Balagtas in its modern trappings, minus the label "Pilipino" or "Tagalog-based Pilipino." The people do not object to Tagalog if it is not labeled "Pilipino," specially where movies are concerned. ("A Choice of Four: Pilipino, Vernaclish, Tagalog, or Engalog?" *Expressweek,* 21 February 1980, 17–19, quotation on 17)

[63] Lacaba, "Pilipino Forever," 7.

[64] R. Matilac, Justino Dormiendo, and Nicanor G. Tiongson, "Audiences," in *CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art* (see note 29), 99–100.

[65] Manuel L. Quezon Jr., "Language: A People's Soul," *Weekly Graphic* 33, no. 9 (1966): 16–17, quotation on 17.

[66] Manuel L. Quezon Jr., "Language: A People's Soul (Conclusion)," *Weekly Graphic* 33, no. 10 (1966): 34.

[67] Sophie M. Catbagan, "How Bad Is the Filipino's Spoken English?" *Verge* 1, no. 1 (1966): 122–34, esp. 122–29, 134.

[68] The Thomasites were American teachers who arrived on the U.S. Army transport *Thomas* in 1901, an appellation that "the Filipinos lovingly applied to all American teachers" (Roger M. Thompson, *Filipino English and Taglish* [Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2003], 21).

[69] Federico Licsi Espino Jr., "The Sound of Juan's English," *Mirror,* 9 November 1968, 14.

[70] Carmen Guerrero Nakpil, "Filipino English," *Asia Magazine* 10, no. 10 (1970): 10–11. See also Loreto Juntado, "Special Problems in the Teaching of English to Filipino Students," *Silliman Journal,* 3rd Quarter, 1967, 315–24, esp. 317–24.

[71] Bonifacio Sibayan acknowledges that the question "Should we teach Filipino children to speak English like Americans?" is a false problem, "because it is of course not possible to make Filipinos speak like Americans." But he nonetheless defends the educational goal of "making Filipinos speak like Americans" by warning that a "deterioration of standards" in Filipino English has been under way since independence: "The problem is compounded by the fact that practically all those who are teaching English today are non-native speakers of the language who in turn learned their English in the majority of cases from non-native speakers of English" ("Some Problems of Bilingual Education in the Philippines," *Philippine Journal of Education* 45, no. 1 [1966]: 18–20, 70–71, quotations on 70–71).

[72] Edwin T. Cornelius, quoted in Catbagan ("How Bad," 134), writes, "[A]ll non-native speakers, regardless of where they live, how much they have studied, or how long they have taught the foreign language, always have something to learn."

[73] Jose Lacaba, "Notes on 'Bakya,'" in *Readings in Philippine Cinema* (see note 4), 117–23, quotation on 122; reprinted from *Philippines Free Press* 63, no. 5 (1970).

[74] Tommy R. Anderson, "How to Develop the National Language," *Philippines Free Press* 61, no. 27 (1968): 5, 56, 59–62, esp. 62.

[75] Ibid., 57.

[76] Lacaba enjoins his readers to reappropriate bakya as "a term of reproach . . . as a badge of honor—the way [our] forebears used the word *indio*" ("Notes on 'Bakya,'" 123).

[77] Ibid., 117. See also Vicente L. Rafael's discussion of bakya in relation to linguistic syncretism in "Taglish, or the Phantom Power of the Lingua Franca," where he writes,

> Within the nationalist framework, the bakya appears as one version of the crowd: as the depoliticized and indiscriminating mass of consumers. . . . [F]or Lacaba, the bakya sensibility was tied not only to a kitsch aesthetic,

> but also to what seemed like a perverse linguistic economy . . . a kind of English full of humorous malapropisms. (in *Public Culture* 8 [1995]: 101–26, quotation on 110–11)

[78] Lacaba, "Notes on 'Bakya,'" 117–19.

[79] Jose F. Lacaba, "We All Lost It at the Movies: Notes toward a Definition of—Ha, Ha—Contemporary Philippine Cinema," *Philippines Free Press* 61, no. 35 (1968): 12, 170–72, quotations on 170.

[80] Jose F. Lacaba, "Movies, Critics, and the Bakya Crowd," in *Readings in Philippine Cinema* (see note 4), 175–81, esp. 176; reprinted from *AAP Liham* 3, no. 4 (1979).

[81] Mener G. Frades, "What Makes Movie Stars Click," *Sunday Times Magazine,* 16 August 1970, 20.

[82] Amadis Ma. Guerrero wryly notes, "[H]er fans remain silent over the fascism of the state, but have epileptic fits of fury whenever an unfavorable remark is uttered about their idol" ("A Study in Speculation: Nora and the Golden Buddha," *Weekly Graphic* 37, no. 52 [1971]: 10–11, quotation on 10).

[83] Tadiar, "Himala," 237.

[84] Ibid., 237, 259.

[85] Patrick D. Flores has demonstrated how the Nora Aunor film *The Flor Contemplacion Story* (1995) "refunctions the commodification of grief into a virtue of collective action" ("The Dissemination of Nora Aunor," in *Geopolitics of the Visible: Essays on Philippine Film Cultures,* ed. Rolando B. Tolentino [Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2000], 77–95, quotation on 85).

[86] Lorna M. Kalaw, "Getting to Know Nora—and Liking Her," *Asia-Philippines Leader* 1, no. 3 (1971): 27–29, 34, quotations on 27.

[87] Monina A. Mercado, "This Nora Thing," *Weekly Graphic* 37, no. 6 (1970): 56.

[88] Rowena M. Agilada, "I Hope 1984 Will Be a Better Year—Sharon Cuneta," *Liwayway,* 2 January 1984, 13, 18–19, quotation on 18–19.

[89] References to educated filmgoers or the "campus crowd" as Sharon's first audience emerge repeatedly in coverage of her early career. See Enrique L. Calderon, "Sharon and William: Portrait of Achievers," *Focus Philippines* 10, no. 28 (1982): 18–19; and Constantino, "Sharon Makes Waves," 22.

[90] Danny Villanueva, "More on the 'Invisible Audience,'" *Weekly Graphic* 32, no. 6 (1965): 72.

[91] Matilac et al., "Audiences," 99–100.