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Multicultural mediations, developing world realities: Indians, Koreans and Manila's entertainment media

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Abstract

In this article, I examine the mediation of multiculturalism in the developing world city of Manila, the Philippines. Drawing on both a thematic analysis of the Manila-centric Philippine entertainment media and six focus group discussions with the city's local Filipinos, I reveal that this instance of mediation is entangled with the broader discourses of the Philippine postcolonial nationalist project. For one, the mediation of multiculturalism in Manila tends to symbolically marginalize the city's Indians and Koreans and, in so doing, reinforces existing negative discourses about them. I contend that this is linked to the locals' preoccupation with establishing a unifying cultural identity that tends to make them elide the issue of their own internal cultural diversity, as well as of the increasing diasporic population of the city. Second, the said mediation also tends to valorize the lighter-skinned Koreans over the darker-skinned Indians. I posit that this is related to how the locals' discourse of cultural homogeneity has resulted in their continued reluctance to publicly discuss the persistence of their unspoken skin-tone-based racial hierarchy not only of themselves, but also of their cultural others.

Keywords

cultural identity, developing world city, diaspora, entertainment media, media representation, mediation, public talk

In this article, I seek to establish the links between how the Manila-centric Philippine entertainment media and how Manila's local Filipinos talk about the city's Indian and Korean diasporas. Through the particular case of the Philippine capital – a mega-city with a population of 12 million, including most of the country's 114,500 Koreans (Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2009) and 67,000 Indians (Salazar, 2008) – I hope to gain insight into the broader issue of whether and how, in the context of the cities of the developing world, mainstream media talk and public talk about diasporas might be interrelated with each other. This endeavour offers the possibility of expanding the present discussions about the media representation of diasporas, which have mostly been situated in the global cities of the developed world and, as such, understood in relation to the particular sets of multicultural discourses in this specific context (e.g. Ang et al, 2008; Deltombe, 2005; Georgiou, 2013; Hamilton, 1997; Madianou, 2005; Parekh, 2000).

One characteristic that makes Manila an important prism for rethinking the relationship between the mainstream media's representation and the public's talk about diasporas is that, as in many other cities in the developing world, the economic relationship between its locals and its transnational migrants is in stark contrast from what can be found in the global cities of the developed world. As an International Labour Office document notes

(ILO, 2007), migrants in the developed world tend to be economically inferior to the locals. A majority of them are labourers 'motivated [to go abroad] ... because of the lack of opportunities for full employment and decent work in many developing countries' (ILO, 2007: 2–3). In contrast, most of the migrants who have come to settle in Manila tend to be economically superior to the locals. During the city's colonial past, it was the seat of power for the Philippines' Spanish and American masters, as well as an important trading centre for many European and Chinese merchants (Connaughton et al., 1995; Irving, 2010; Wilson, 2004). In the city's postcolonial present, it has attracted a rapidly increasing number of Indian entrepreneurs (Lorenzana, 2013; Salazar, 2008; Thapan, 2002), as well as Korean businesspeople and students (Miralao, 2007). Unlike their counterparts in the developed world then, the diasporas in Manila often do not experience economic marginalization (see Lentin and Titley, 2011; Roberts and Mahtani, 2010).

Another crucial characteristic that makes Manila an interesting counterpoint to the global cities of the developed world is that it presently has no overt institutional policies about multiculturalism. As Ien Ang points out, a significant number of influential governments in the developed world – such as those in Canada, Australia, the United States of America and the United Kingdom – have had at least 40 years of engaging in debates about policies aimed at 'address[ing] real or potential ethnic tension and racial conflict' (2005: 34). She further says that, by the turn of the 21st century, 'it ha[s] become commonplace for Western liberal democracies to describe themselves as multicultural societies, even though only a few ha[ve] embraced official policies of multiculturalism' (2005: 34). In Manila, most of the local Filipinos subscribe to the myth that their city – and the rest of the country – is culturally homogeneous (Teodoro in PNS, 2010). Despite the capital's long history of being a migrant hub (Irving, 2010), most of its locals appear to be reluctant to confront the reality of the city's cultural diversity (Ang-See, 1992). In this regard, the diasporas in Manila diverge once again from their counterparts in the developed world, as they are not really confronted with sustained media and public discussions about multiculturalism that, whether intentionally or otherwise, problematize their presence (see Ang, 2005; Benhabib, 2002; Phillips, 2008).

The distinct social dynamics of cultural diversity in a developing world city such as Manila put into question a key assumption shared by much of the existing empirical research on the media representation of diasporas: that these migrant groups often experience both symbolic and material marginalization (see Georgiou, 2006; Husband, 1994; Silverstone and Georgiou, 2005). The case of Manila allows this article to ask new questions about the kinds of talk surrounding these groups. Consequently, the rest of the discussion identifies the talk about multiculturalism that emerges when the diasporas of a society are symbolically inferior but economically superior to their local counterparts. Specifically, it looks at the ways in which the Manila-centric Philippine entertainment media's talk about the city's Indians and Koreans, on the one hand, and Manila's local Filipinos talk about these migrant groups on the other hand, shape and transform each other.

A mediational approach to cultural diversity in Manila

The key concept that this article uses to approach the research problem raised above is mediation. It must be noted that this concept has been made to refer to different things across various scholarly disciplines and, as such, can be potentially confusing. With that said, there are several works that are useful in navigating the debates surrounding mediation (see Couldry, 2008, 2012; Thumim, 2012). For the purposes of this article, I take a view of mediation rooted in the work of the media philosopher Roger Silverstone.

According to Silverstone, mediation pertains to the process in which meanings are circulated in society and, as a consequence, are constantly transformed (Silverstone, 1999, 2005, 2007; but see also Couldry, 2008, 2012; Livingstone, 2009; Madianou, 2005; Ong, 2014; Thumim, 2012). He further says that central to understanding this process is the need 'to enquire into the instability and flux of meanings and into their transformations, [and] also into the politics of their fixing' (Silverstone, 1999: 16).

In an effort to trace the ways in which understandings of multiculturalism are circulated and transformed in the context of Manila's society, my discussion examines the links between how the Manila-centric Philippine national media represent Manila's Indians and Koreans (which I will refer to as the media discourse) and how Manila's local Filipinos speak about the Indian and Korean migrants in their midst (which I will refer to as the social discourse). Unfortunately, there are no extant works that use a mediational framework in studying multiculturalism in Manila. There has also been no previous research on both the media and social discourses regarding Manila's Indian and Korean diasporas. In light of this lack of literature, a necessary first step to understanding the mediation of multiculturalism in Manila is to refer to key works that shed light on how the notion of Filipino cultural identity (or Filipino-ness) has been represented in the Philippines' media and social discourses. As I hope to show in the ensuing discussion, this mediation of Filipino-ness in the Philippines is heavily intertwined with the mediation of multiculturalism in Manila.

Mestizos *and* Indios

The most definitive characteristic of Philippine entertainment media's representation of Filipino-ness is how conflicted it is. A key manifestation of this is how the media depict the physical appearance of local Filipinos. Local show business has always been dominated by those who have the so-called Mestizo look possessed primarily by those hyphenated Filipinos who have strong Western (e.g. Spanish, German, Italian and American) and, in recent years, Oriental (e.g. Chinese, Japanese and Middle Eastern) features. These celebrities often end up being the country's film and television superstars. Meanwhile, those who are thought to have the look of an Indio – the stereotypical local Filipino with a flat nose, brown skin and a small stature – have always been in the minority. They are often the ones who are relegated to playing bit parts (see Cuartero, 2010; Lo, 2008; Tiongson, 1984).

There is, however, a strong counter-current in Philippine media that seeks to establish pride in Filipinos with an Indio appearance. There are popular songs that urge listeners to be proud that they are pango (flat-nosed) and kayumanggi (brown-skinned), such as the anthemic 'Bayan Ko' ('My Nation') and the rap piece 'Tayo'y Mga Pinoy' ('We Are Filipinos') (Cabanes, 2009). There is also the fact that, even if there are only a few local-looking movie stars, they count among their number the most legendary Filipino movie star of all time: Nora Aunor (Tadiar, 2004). More recently, there has been a surge in media attention about the 'Cinderella stories' of celebrities who, despite their local Filipino appearance, have had success in the global stage. The most prominent examples are Charice, a hit-making pop singer in the American music scene, and Ariel Pineda, the current vocalist of the legendary American band Journey (Santiago, 2012).

This schizophrenic approach that the Philippine media take towards representing Filipino-ness is actually entwined with the equally contradictory currents that influence how local Filipinos approach their cultural identity. On the one hand, there is this persistence of a racially hierarchical view of local Filipinos, which is one of the unsavoury legacies of the

country's colonial past. On the other hand, there is the project of establishing a singular, all-encompassing and unifying Filipino identity, which is a product of the country's postcolonial present. I explain more about these below.

An unspoken racial hierarchy and an insecure cultural identity

The predominance of Mestizo celebrities in Philippine entertainment media is linked to the often unarticulated but deeply embedded racial hierarchy present in contemporary Philippine society. While local Filipinos are reluctant to talk publicly about this reality, many works argue that most of them subscribe to the notion that those among them who are light- and fair-skinned belong at the top of the social ladder, followed by those who are brown-skinned, and finally those who are dark-skinned (Gaborro, 2009; Rafael, 2000; Rondilla and Spickard, 2007; Tiongson, 1984).

One of the roots of this racial hierarchy is that the country's present oligarchic elite trace their ancestry to those who, during the Spanish regime, were known as *filipinos* (those with half-Spanish and half-Indio blood) and *Mestizos* (those with a half-Chinese and half-Indio blood). The historian Filomeno Aguilar (1999) recounts that these two groups experienced a rapid social ascent during the late Spanish colonial period. From being marginalized for having a mixed heritage, they became Philippine colonial society's *principalia* (noble class), displacing the long-standing leadership role of the Indio-descended *datus* (local village chieftains). It was through their cooperation that both the Spanish and, later on, the Americans ruled the Indio majority. And it is also claimed, rather contradictorily, that it was through their efforts against the Spanish and American regimes that sovereignty was eventually won for all Filipinos. For these reasons, today's local Filipinos with a mixed heritage – now collectively called *Mestizos* – are accorded a high status in Philippine society. By the same token, all other local Filipinos who possess physical features similar to these *Mestizos* are also generally admired.

Aside from these political-economic considerations, the said racial hierarchy was also reinforced by the Western-oriented discourses propagated by some of the leading members of the *principalia*. Because of their desire to assure the Europeans that Filipinos were equal to their colonizers in stature, they worked very hard to present their compatriots as a civilized people. This involved simultaneously limiting the notion of the Filipino to those who belonged to the Spanish-influenced lowland Christianized Malays and closing off the notion of the Filipino to the 'barbaric' upland tribespeople of the islands. This double move contributed to entrenching the idea that the dark-skinned people of the archipelago were inferior to everyone else (Aguilar, 2005). In a similar manner, prominent members of the *principalia* during the American colonial period wanted to show the West their civility by supporting the establishment of an American education system, which propagated the idea that everything associated with the United States of America was superior (Simbulan, 2005). This included the idea of Anglo-whiteness, which further supported the superiority of the light- and fair-skinned *Mestizos* over both the brown-skinned *Indios* and the dark-skinned upland tribespeople (Gaborro, 2008).

Meanwhile, the counter-current seeking to valorize the idea of the Indio is tied to the ongoing project of Philippine postcolonial nationalism. As Randy David (2005, 2009) observes, many of today's local Filipinos are conscious of how their forebears thought of themselves as belonging not to one nation, but to distinct ethnolinguistically defined communities. In an attempt to move beyond this, today's locals display an intense concern with establishing a kind of Filipino-ness that can rally the Philippines' still heavily

fragmented peoples together. They want to find the one distinct cultural identity which they can share and of which they can be proud.

Fernando Zialcita (2006) makes a parallel argument, saying that today's local Filipinos find it difficult to appreciate the notion that their culture derives from a plurality of influences. They constantly lament the fact that their cultural identity has been heavily influenced by their precolonial encounters with India and China, as well as by their long-time colonization under Spain and the United States of America. They also judge themselves to have a culture that is not exotic and is therefore inauthentic. These locals often envy their Southeast Asian neighbours who have more distinct cultural identities, as evidenced by their architecture, their food and their clothing, among other things. Because of these, they have become preoccupied with searching for what it is that makes their own cultural identity distinct.

Exploring the mediation of multiculturalism in Manila

It can be said that the mediation of Filipino-ness in contemporary Philippine society is characterized primarily by a negotiation between the lingering colonial legacy of a hierarchical view of local Filipinos and the urgent postcolonial project of a unifying and distinct Filipino cultural identity. This has made the predominant cultural identity discourse in the country very introspective, focused as it is in resolving this impasse. It is in relation to this that the mediation of multiculturalism in Manila must be understood. In order to explain how the dynamics of this play out, I now present the data I gathered in the course of research that spanned some six months, from January to June 2011. These data are drawn from two sets of research tools.

First, I sought to identify patterns in the Philippine entertainment media's discourse about the city's Indians and Koreans. I did a thematic analysis of the key appearances of the five celebrities who belonged to these diasporic groups. I immersed myself in the texts that featured the sole Indian celebrity – namely Samir Gogna (aka Shivaker and Sam YG) – and the four Korean celebrities – namely Ryan Bang, Grace Lee, Sam Oh and Sandara Park – in Philippine show business. I also watched the entire airing of the television programme *Pinoy Big Brother Teen Edition 2010* because it featured Korean contestants (among other foreign nationals and Filipinos of mixed descent) and glaringly shunned Indian contestants, listened to the hit songs of local comedians who poked fun at the Indians in the Philippines, and took note of other entertainment texts that featured the city's Indians and Koreans.

Second, I aimed to listen to how Manila's local Filipinos talked about the city's diasporic groups and how they drew on the media in the process of doing so, as well as to observe how they discussed the rarely (if at all) talked about issue of multiculturalism, especially in the presence of their fellow locals. I conducted focus group discussions with six sets of local Filipinos. In light of the earlier discussion about the historical relationship between race and class in the Philippines, I divided the participants according to the three key socio-economic groupings in the country; two of these groups came from the upper class, two from the middle class, and two from the lower class (cf. Mercado, 2006; Oblea, 2006; Pinches, 1999). The two upper-class groups were comprised of university students in one of Manila's top universities and of a group of housewives who were classmates in both elementary and high school; the two middle-class groups were comprised of the staff of the accounting department in a small garments enterprise and dentists who were previously classmates in university; and the two lower-class groups were comprised of

contractual promotional merchandisers working for one of the country's telecommunications companies and former Out of School Youths (OSYs) attending an intensive Philippine Education Placement Test (PEP Test) preparatory course at a local state university.

Indians, Koreans and the mediation of multiculturalism in Manila

On the reinforcement of cultural group discourses

I contend that Samir Gogna, Ryan Bang, Grace Lee, Sam Oh and Sandara Park all managed to penetrate the Mestizo-dominated Philippine entertainment media primarily by erasing or exoticizing their cultural identities. They either rendered themselves 'too close' (Silverstone, 2007: 172) by performing a cultural identity that is indistinguishable from Manila's local Filipinos or 'too far' (2007: 172) by performing a cultural identity that is extremely alien to the city's locals.

Of the five celebrities, it is Samir who had the most peculiar way of performing his cultural identity. Instead of just tending towards the erasure or the exoticization of his Indian-ness, he constantly moved between these two polarities. To Manila's urban yuppies, Samir presented himself as Sam YG, one of the three disc jockeys (DJs) in Magic 89.9 FM's controversially naughty radio program, *Boys Night Out (BNO)*. As 'one of the boys' – with his co-hosts Tony Tony and Slick Rick – he downplayed his association with the conservative culture of the city's Indian community and played up his belongingness to the westernized culture of the Filipino socio-economic elite. Not only did he speak with the American-accented English of the city's upper and middle classes, he also spoke candidly about the raciest and sometimes the most socially controversial topics (Abjelina et al., 2011). To the *masa* (or lower class) meanwhile, Samir presented himself as his alter ego Shivaker. Making appearances not only on radio but, crucially, on mainstream television, he caricatured the idea of an Indian guru by exaggerating existing stereotypes about how Indians spoke, gesticulated and dressed. At the same time, he gave tongue-in-cheek love advice – based on Filipino and Western popular culture songs – to fellow local celebrities or to audiences phoning in (Rañoa-Bismark, 2010).

The media personas of the Korean celebrities Grace Lee (real name: Kyung Hee Lee) and Sam Oh (real name: Oh Sang-mi) were like Samir's Sam YG character. Their cultural identity performances emphasized their affinity with the westernized culture of the Filipino elite rather than with the conservative culture of Manila's Korean community. They highlighted how they were 'excellent in English', 'independent', 'successful' and even 'sexually liberated' (Leyson, 2004). Take for instance Grace's on-air character in the Magic 89.9 radio program *Good Times with Mo, Mojo, and Grace Lee*, a show notorious for discussing racy topics despite its morning primetime schedule. While more coy than her male co-hosts Mo Twister and Mojo Jojo, Grace nevertheless gamely engaged them in conversations that often involved the sexual proclivities of local celebrities, as well as the show's call-in audiences (Sadiri, 2007). While less controversial, Sam also hewed closely to the image of a socialite Filipina in her many media gigs. She projected the image of a confident woman who was not afraid to share her thoughts, whether as a television host, a radio DJ or a newspaper columnist (Caruncho, 2009).

With that said, the more successful of the four Korean celebrities in the Philippines were the two who, like Samir's Shivaker character, caricatured their cultural identities. One was Sandara Park (real name: Park Sandara), the pioneering Korean in Philippine television

and cinema. While she is presently known as the international star Dara, a member of the South Korean Pop Music (K-Pop) group 2NE1, she began her career in show business as a contestant in ABS-CBN television network's talent search programme, *Star Circle Quest* (Rodriguez-Deleo, 2009). Although she had no ability to act, sing or dance, she eventually became extremely popular with the local fans by being a comically naïve and Filipino-loving Korean. She became most famous for her trademark wave, which she punctuated with exclamations of '*Mahal ko kayong lahat!* [I love you all!]'. Ryan Bang (real name: Bang Hyun Sung), the most popular Korean in contemporary Philippine show business, appeared to have used the same route. Before becoming a ubiquitous presence on television, he also started out as a contestant in another ABS-CBN show, *Pinoy Big Brother* (Santos, 2010). It was in this programme that he first captured the attention of the local fans by reprising Sandara's role of a comically naïve and Filipino-loving Korean. He also endeared himself to them via his own trademark move: forming the shape of a heart with his hands, thumping them on his chest, and proclaiming, 'I have a Korean body but a Filipino heart!'

It cannot be denied that the five celebrities discussed above were afforded a degree of symbolic power by local show business (see Couldry, 2003; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2008). Not only did each of them have considerable exposure in the media, they were also the only Indians and Koreans in Manila who had public visibility in such an important institution of cultural dissemination. As such, they had some influence with regard to how discourses about Indian-ness and Korean-ness were mediated in Manila. The fact remains, however, that the five celebrities were only minor stars, especially when compared to the top-billing Mestizo-looking and Indio-looking celebrities who commanded considerable influence in the entertainment industry. So whatever 'star power' they had would necessarily be minor as well. More importantly, the five celebrities were still only talents employed by the media companies with which they were affiliated. The final say in how cultural diversity was dealt with in the entertainment industry did not really rest with them. That power and, as a consequence, responsibility, belongs to those in the media who craft, control and cascade company policies. It is they who have the power of 'the edit' (Silverstone, 2007: 141). And, in practice, these people only allowed the five celebrities to perform their cultural identity in ways that tended to be shaped by and, at the same time, tended to reinforce existing derogatory discourses about Manila's Indians and Koreans (see Rose, 2007).

For instance, it was Samir's Shivaker alter ego who was most familiar to the focus groups participants, since it was this character (and not Sam YG) who they got to see more on television. Unfortunately, talking about Shivaker usually served as a prompt for the participants to share the things they disliked about Manila's Indians. They said things such as:

Indians here [in Manila] are all loan sharks (five-six), aren't they? I can't say that I agree with that kind of livelihood. It's very exploitative. (Agnes, 50, female, upper class)

I wouldn't really want to do anything with them. They're cheats (*madugas*)! (Jorel, 40, male, middle class)

Of course, everyone knows that the thing that is most wrong with them is that they're smelly (*mabaho*)! (Junjun, 22, male, lower class)

Interestingly, all the labels they mentioned – five-six (i.e. charging 20% interest on loans), madugas, and mabaho – appeared to draw from the long-established and well-ridiculed caricature of the Indian as the *bumbay*: the smelly, turban-wearing, heavily bearded loan shark who travels around Manila on his motorcycle, preying on needy locals who are desperate enough to agree to borrow money under or buy home appliances through their five-six lending system (Salazar, 2008). These also seemed to mirror the depictions of the *bumbay* that were popularized by the songs of local comedians. These included Michael V's novelty music video entitled *DJ Bumbay*, which featured an Indian selling cheap but defective wares (e.g. a mobile phone with a car battery, an iron that heats up on the handle, and a sleeping mat that can fit ten people, but only if they stand up), as well as Blakdyak's song '*Bumbay*', which told of an Indian who was '*nakamotorsiklo, may dalang payong, may balot sa ulo, balbas sarado* [always on a motorcycle, with his umbrella, his headscarf, and his full-bearded face]'

In a similar manner, most of the participants who knew Sandara and Ryan ended up talking about the how Koreans in Manila were a weird lot. Their comments often included derogatory labels, like:

I see a lot of [Koreans] around. But I don't really talk to them. They're just too strange (*kakaiba*) for me. (Bernice, 19, female, upper class)

Have you seen the way that they dress up? It's like they're abnormal (*abning*). You wouldn't see me wearing the things that they wear. (Sandro, 37, male, middle class)

Koreans? I think they're crazy (*sintu-sinto*)! (Arnie, 15, male lower class)

This notion of the 'weird Korean' had become so pervasive that the leaders of certain Korean community groups became very concerned about it. In a conversation I had with the Korean scholar Kyungmin Bae (personal conversation, 10 March 2011), she talked about how one such organization launched a series seminars for Korean students in Manila that aimed to provide advice on how to best fit in with the local Filipinos. Bae said, 'They especially tell those students who go around in groups to try not to draw attention to themselves. They ask them not to be noisy, not to occupy the middle of the street, things like that'.

On the reinforcement of an other-oriented racial hierarchy

Although the Philippine entertainment media symbolically marginalized both Manila's Indian and Korean celebrities, I also observed that their discourses on Indians and Koreans were beginning to diverge. While the media continued to represent Indians almost exclusively as the *bumbay*, they were beginning to slowly broaden their representational repertoires for Koreans. For example, five of the ten so-called 'teenternational' housemates featured in the reality television programme *Pinoy Big Brother Teen Edition Teen Clash of 2010* were Koreans living in the Philippines (with the other five contestants being Australian, American, Canadian, Taiwanese and Hong Kong Chinese living in the country as well). Because the programme was aired daily for two months, it allowed its local Filipino audience a glimpse into the interactions among the Korean youth and, as a consequence, into the cultural norms that govern many members of Manila's Korean community. Towards the end of my research, I also learned that GMA television network started airing a series entitled *Koreana* (or *Korean Girl*). This soap allowed its audiences to follow the story of its half-Filipino and half-Korean heroine (played by the local Filipino actress, Kris Bernal) through her journey of discovering her cultural roots and, in the

process, her hybrid cultural identity. Finally, a few months after my fieldwork, I saw that one of the biggest Philippine fashion brands, Bench, began using Korean models and, crucially, explicitly referencing their cultural identity. This indicated that Korean-ness was beginning to attain an aspirational status in the local market.

I also saw the difference in the way that the Philippine entertainment media refracted the recent global ascent of the Korean entertainment industry's Hallyu (or the Korean Wave) (Kim, 2008) and of the Indian entertainment industry's Bollywood (Govil, 2008). The local media seemed to be receptive to the popularity of Hallyu, as these allowed a huge influx of Korean novels (or Korean soap operas) and K-Pop (or Korean popular music) hits in the country. In contrast, they had not caught on to the increasing global recognition of Indian popular culture, as evidenced by their general lack of interest in distributing Indian films, television series and music.

The above-mentioned developments did not necessarily make Manila's local Filipinos more aware and more accepting of the Koreans (and for that matter, the Indians) in their midst. In the focus group discussion, for instance, the participants still talked about Manila as if it were a city populated by culturally homogeneous people. It has been argued although that the said developments have contributed to the increasing appreciation that many local Filipinos have for Korean culture (see Hicap, 2010; Meinardus, 2005) and, unfortunately, to the continued indifference of the locals towards Indian culture (see Lorenzana, 2013; Salazar, 2008).

The crucial question to ask here is why the Philippine entertainment media represent Indians and Koreans differently. Here I find the media scholar Roland Tolentino's (personal conversation, 27 January 2011) insight important. He said that the ultimate criterion for whether and how something makes an appearance in the local media boils down to the all-important question, 'Will it sell?' And as my focus group discussion data indicated, the media might indeed be responding to their audience's own preference for Koreans over Indians. These data pointed to how the participants – from across all social classes – subscribed not only to a racial hierarchy of themselves as Filipinos, but also of their cultural others. Even though this hierarchy was equally as implicit and as persistent as the locals' racial hierarchy of themselves, it was governed by a unique set of dynamics. Unlike most other racial hierarchies where affinity would be reserved only for those at the top rung of the racial ladder, this one seemed to allow for the possibility of both affinity and reservation at all the rungs of its ladder.

The participants said many good things about most of the cultural others they have encountered. They seemed generally enamoured by them, regardless of which cultural group they belonged. The participants talked about the physical traits they liked about in other cultural groups: the 'beautiful eyes' of the Middle Easterners, the '*matangos na ilong* (pointed nose)' of the Indians and Americans, and the '*kutis porselana* (porcelain skin)' of the Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese. Aside from this, they pointed out the cultural traits they liked from other cultural groups. They said that:

I think that Americans are the friendliest people in the world. I'd certainly want to have them as friends. (Anna, 18, female, lower class)

I'm sure you've heard about this, but they always say that the Chinese are known to be industrious.... And they're very good with business.... That's why they're taking over the world economy. (Henry, 60, male, middle class)

Don't the Koreans and the Japanese have the fastest internet connection speeds in the world? It's amazing how technologically advanced they are! (Tim, 20, male, upper class)

At the same time, the participants also had their litanies of what they perceived to be the appalling cultural traits of other cultural groups. And, for the most part, they recited this with much conviction. Take, for instance, the following:

[Americans] have boyfriends and girlfriends at 12. Imagine that. What a very immoral country! (Cora, 51, female, upper class)

One of my friends told me that I shouldn't even think of doing business with the Koreans. It's because he himself got duped by them. And I'm talking about a US-educated guy, mind you. (Jenna, 45, female, middle class)

From what I've experienced, [my Indian neighbours] take a bath only once a week. I mean, you can't do that here. It's too hot! You're bound to smell! (Erwin, 26, male, lower class)

Curiously, most of the participants avoided saying derogatory things about the physical traits of others in my presence, except for the often-repeated claim that Indians are smelly and that the Chinese are unhygienic. I surmise that this is because they were wary that I might think of them as racists.

It is crucial to point out, however, that the participants displayed different levels of affinity and reservation about the different cultural groups that they mentioned. I submit that the interplay between these two feelings formed the basis of the locals' racial hierarchy of their cultural others. Those whom the locals had the most affinity for and the least reservations about occupied the top of the hierarchy, while those whom the locals had the least affinity for and the most reservations about occupied the bottom of the hierarchy.

The focus group discussions indicated that, like the locals' racial hierarchy of themselves, they also followed a skin-tone-based principle in their racial hierarchy of their cultural others. It appears that the participants placed the Westerners, whom they generally defined as Americans, at the top of this hierarchy. Meanwhile, they placed the Orientals in the middle, with the Chinese as their most favourite, followed by the Japanese, and then by the Koreans. Finally, they placed the Middle Easterners, the Indians, and, when mentioned, the Africans at the bottom. Aside from the general tenor of the participants' talk about other cultural groups, their subscription to a racial hierarchy was also revealed by their talk about specific topics that I raised during our conversations.

One such topic was whether the participants were interested in having what they called 'foreigner partners'. Almost all of them said yes. Lottie (35, female, middle class) was very vocal about her desire to have a so-called foreigner partner. She said:

Not everyone here will say it, but of course, most of us women dream of that! No offence, okay? But honestly, a white guy has so much more to offer than Filipino men. They generally look better. They're generally richer. I can go on and on.... Right?

Similarly, Phil (20, male, upper class) talked about female foreigners as a 'dream' for Filipino men. 'I'd become super-cool if my friends saw that I was going out with an American girl. I mean, that doesn't happen very often, so it would be a feat!' Very tellingly

however, Lottie, Phil and most of the other participants often assumed that when I said foreigner, I meant a white, usually American, person. When I probed about the possibility of the participants having a relationship with a *chinito* (someone with oriental features), they remained enthusiastic, although less so. Lester (22, male, lower class) articulated the sentiments of most of the participants rather well when he said, '[W]hite girls have much more impact, but oriental-looking girls are still more than all right!' Finally, when I raised the possibility of the participants having a relationship with Indians, many of them expressed reservations. There were some, however, who said that they would at least be open to such a possibility. One particularly interesting reaction came from Elena (18, female, lower class), who shared that one of her aunts actually had an Indian partner. She said:

I think [Indians] are still better than Filipinos because they have a lot of money. But if it were me, I wouldn't think of marrying one. I mean, if I would marry a foreigner, then I'd go for an American. They seem nicer. My aunt's husband beats her up.

Clearly, the hierarchy held in this discussion.

Another topic we talked about was whether the participants were all right with foreigners residing in Manila. As in the case above, almost all the participants said they were all right with foreigners living in Manila, especially if these foreigners were white. Some of them even sought to explain the benefits of having the whites living in Manila:

I think [having more and more white people in Manila is] a sign that our country's going on the up-and-up. That would mean that we've already gained popularity. Because they aren't snubbing us anymore. (Helena, 49, female, upper class)

Of course, of course! They're the ones who start up these companies that bring in the jobs [for us locals]. (Henry, 60, male, middle class)

Of course they can be a problem too. Like with the rape cases wherein they're involved, right? ... But I don't know. It seems to me that, all in all, they do more good than harm to us. (Lolong, 29, male, lower class)

A significant number of the participants also valued the presence of the Orientals, most especially the Japanese. Echoing the sentiments of some of the other participants, Anna (18 female, lower class) said, 'It's okay that they're here. You know, the Japanese are known to be very kind and very generous.' Giving a specific example about how generous the Japanese are, Jenna (45, female, middle class) pointed out that 'The Japanese have always been helpful to us.... Look at our flyovers. You'll see plaques saying they were donated by Japan, right?' However, many of the local Filipinos also had reservations about those whom they referred to as their fellow Asians. Tim captured this shared sentiment quite well when he said,

At the end of day, [our Asian neighbours] are our competition.... We have to be careful about how we share our resources with them, because you can never say.... I think of them as "frenemies" [or friends who are also enemies]. So naturally, I'm a bit wary about them.

Although the participants also extended their welcome to the Middle Easterners and Indians, they were certainly more ambivalent about the benefits of these two migrant communities. For the Middle Easterners, the participants' key concern was about terrorism. Invariably, they would make a comment about how they were afraid that these foreigners were training terrorist groups in the Muslim-dominated areas in the southern

region of Mindanao or were planting bombs themselves. For the Indians, the participants' discussion, as I have already indicated earlier, mostly centred on the benefits but, more than this, the problems that arise because of the *bumbay* and their five-six money-lending scheme.

Conclusion

This article sought to explore the mediation of multiculturalism in Manila by tracing the links between the discourses of the Philippine entertainment media and of Manila's local Filipinos about the city's Indians and Koreans. From the data I presented, it is evident that this particular instance of mediation is characterized by two key things. One is that this mediation symbolically marginalizes Indians and Koreans that, in turn, fuel negative discourses about the Indian as the *bumbay* and the Korean as weird. At the same time however, this mediation also valorizes Koreans over Indians and, in so doing, reinforces the implicit but persistent racial hierarchy of cultural others to which many local Filipinos subscribe.

I argue that the mediation of multiculturalism in Manila is entangled with the broader dynamics of the mediation of Filipino cultural identity. As I discussed earlier in this article, most of contemporary Philippine society, including Manila's local Filipinos, are focused on establishing that singular and unifying cultural identity that all Filipinos can share. As such, their preoccupation is more about what makes them culturally homogeneous, rather than what makes them culturally diverse (see Teodoro in PNS, 2010). In the same way that this contemporary project of postcolonial nationalism has made Manila's locals elide the issue of their internal cultural diversity, it has also made them inattentive to the issues brought about by the increasing cultural diversity of the city's growing diasporic population. Similarly, this project has meant the locals' continued reluctance to publicly discuss the persistence of their unspoken racial hierarchy not only of themselves, but also of their cultural others.

All of these suggest that contemporary Philippine society, including Manila's local Filipinos, would do well to accommodate the idea that having a shared Filipino identity can be compatible with cultural diversity. It is only with this conceptual shift that Manila's local Filipinos can come to terms with not only their internal plurality but also the increasing number of migrants in their midst. Only then can they truly engage with the issues that confront their decidedly multicultural society.

Subsequent studies can explore the mediation of multiculturalism in Manila in relation to the city's other diasporic groups, such as its long-established Western expatriate community and its slowly but surely increasing Japanese and Iranian communities. Future works can also look into the impact that the mediation of multiculturalism in Manila has on the everyday lives of the city's diasporic groups. Both these suggested directions would help contribute to providing more complexity to the presently scarce literature on the mediation of multiculturalism not only in Manila, but also in many other cities in the developing world.

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