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Brokering Sonic Modernities: migrant Manila musicians in the Asia Pacific, 1881-1948

In the second half of the 19th and in the beginning of the 20th century, the Asia Pacific region was inevitably entangled with early modern globalisation. In this article the author examines the spread of town bands and popular music in this period, and the ways in which both the bands and their music were intertwined with the modernist aspirations of the urban capitals, from Manila and into the Asia Pacific region. The role of the Manila musicians as crucial cultural mediators in this sonic modernisation project is closely examined. Looking into biographies, historical newspapers, and surviving archival documents, the author surveys some general patterns and specific narratives in the various replications of modernities, through the movement of sounds and ideas instigated by the migrant Manila musicians. In particular, the case of the Sta. Cecilia Band in Singapore between 1892 and 1910 is analysed. meLê yamomo is an Assistant Professor of Theatre Studies at the University of Amsterdam (The Netherlands) and previously worked as researcher at the DFG Project-Global Theatre Histories in Munich. He completed his PhD in Theatre Studies and Musicology at the University of Munich.

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Throughout the history of globalisation, cultural agents and mediators were the key characters that negotiated translocal and cross-cultural transactions. Yet, they remain neglected in general (often nationalist-bent) historiography. Academic research has only recently been paying these historical personas some belated attention. In the introduction to *Agents of Transculturation: Border-Crossers, Mediators, Go-Betweens* (2013), editors Sebastian Jobs and Gesa Mackenthun underline the key roles of “missionaries, traders, political refugees, beachcombers, pirates, anthropologists, actors in Völkerschauen in zoos, runaway

slaves, and itinerant doctors” in the global transformations that have taken place since early modernity.¹ In this article, I will be investigating the migrant Manila musicians as particular cultural brokers in the transactions that shaped acoustic modernisation in the late 19th and early 20th century Asia Pacific. Towards the end of the 19th century, the Manila musicians became in-demand cultural labourers in the different Asian cities where they served crucial roles in the acoustic urbanisation and modernisation projects of the colonialists. Concomitantly, as ‘natives’ of the region, their presence in these modernising cities functioned as a ‘third culture’ or a ‘fulcrum’ in the cross-cultural negotiations that occurred among the colonial and local communities in the different Asian urban centres.

The scope of my research covers the period of early globalisation prior to the establishment of the nation-state, although some important cases will be mentioned in the analysis that links the role of the Manila musicians from the pre-nation-states to the postcolonial Asia Pacific. In examining the processes of early cultural globalisation, there is a need to historicise the fluctuating racial categories that were used (and imposed) on these musicians in the Spanish Philippines and across the colonial Asia Pacific. In the Spanish-Philippine *casta* system, natives of the Philippine islands were referred to as *indios*. Until 1896, the term Filipino referred only to Spanish citizens of European descent born in the Philippines—for the moment I will anachronistically use the term Filipino to refer to the natives of the Philippines. Outside the Philippines, there did not exist any clear term used to refer to the Philippine *indios*. Filipinos who jumped the galleons (Spanish trade ships) in the Americas were called *chinos* in Mexico.² Migrant Filipinos in the Dutch Indies were categorised in the general group of Malays. In the 19th century during the implementation of modern censuses, especially in the British territories, migrant Filipinos began to be recorded in the immigration records as Manila men.³ In the absence of a nation-state identifier, migrant Filipinos (even those who came from other regions and language groups) were identified with Manila, the emblematic capital of the colony, as a term of reference recognised outside the Spanish empire.⁴ It is in this same light that the Manila musicians were referred to as such.

This article serves as a survey rather than a biographical account of the Manila musicians. As the main characters of this historical research, the individual lives of the Manila musicians fall outside (or in between) the narratives of national histories in the cities where they originated from and migrated to. Tracing them requires heuristic approaches in the different archives of the cities where they resided. Translocal research requires time, resources, and an approach that is often contrary to the national archives’ methodology of ‘seeing like a state.’⁵ My research aims to put these characters forward as important brokers of cultural modernity in Asia’s entanglement with modern globalisation. I further argue that parallel to Benedict Anderson’s proposal that modernity and nation were ‘serialised’ by print technology,⁶ alternative imaginations of modernities were transmitted through hearing and sonic embodiment. Here, I analyse how the sonic imagination and practices of modernity were mediated and brokered in the different communities of

late 19th century and early 20th century Asia Pacific through their embodiment in the migrant Manila musicians.

Migrant Manila Musicians across the Asia-Pacific

The Philippine band is one of the chief articles of export from Manila, and groups of natives with their cheap instruments are shipped off to Japan, India, and the Spice Islands, to carry harmony into the midst of communities where music is uncultivated.⁷

So writes an American businessman Joseph Earle Stevens in his memoir, *Yesterdays in the Philippines* (1898), during his sojourn as a trade pioneer in Manila from 1894 to 1896. In a rather Eurocentric tone, he likens the Manila musicians to missionaries bringing the 'cultivated' western music where they were needed. In opinion articles in Singapore newspapers, it is possible to follow the *zeitgeist* of colonial East and Southeast Asia during the late 19th century. Urban acoustic modernisation was not just the unique interest of the different colonial cities; each one was competing with the other. We read for example in the *Singapore Daily Advertiser* of 29 August 1892:

Though the leading Settlement in the Colony, Singapore unfortunately does not enjoy the reputation of occupying the foremost position in every item on the list, and in no column is she so deplorably low as in that pertaining to music. As a matter of fact, instead of setting the example to Penang in this, as in all other respects, she does not only allow the sister Settlement to go before her with a town band, but appears as if she is destined to surrender her position even to the whole of the Native States. That this state of things is strongly deprecated by the Singapore public we have no doubt, and that the absence of a town band is keenly felt here.

Three years later, on 20 August 1895, the same opinion was also strongly voiced in the *Mid-day Herald*:

It is a matter of some surprise that a city like Singapore does not possess a town band. They have one in Penang, and why not here in Singapore. Take a glance at the model settlement of Shanghai for instance. For the past fifteen years they have had an efficient town band composed of some thirty old Manila musicians, and they perform in public two or three times a week and are paid for their services out of the Municipal rates quite as a matter of course, and why could not the same plan be adapted in Singapore.

A few years prior to the 1892 article quoted above, arrangements to import Manila musicians had been started, although this was a goal that remained as yet unsuccessful. In the same article there appear lamentations about "the deplorable absence of a town band, and ... a never-coming band from Manila."⁸ On 8 October 1892, in the *Daily Advertiser*, the same sentiment continued: "Indeed, two or three

Christmases have come and gone and the assurance still seems to be that the band is coming.” The speculation was “[p]ossibly there is a desire to economise.”⁹ Complaining about the non-arrival of the Manila musicians, these two articles proposed, as an alternative, to appoint the local parish band (comprised of young boys) as the municipal band. Though this idea was supported by the parishioners and backed-up by an argument for lesser expenses, the city officials and town elites did not warm to the idea. It is telling that the delayed process (which took more than three years) was in part due to abstruse eligibilities of professionalism and virtuosity for the position. In the report of the meeting of the Cricket Club dedicated to raising funds for the town band, this issue was indirectly broached: “There were a good many people who held that it would be better to have no Band at all than have a ‘tin-pot’ Band (Hear hear)...”¹⁰ The inextricable relationship of the acoustic imagination of modernity, with its particular sounds, entails that this sound (the mediatised (re)production of modernity) operates within a uniform aesthetics which is activated through the sonic embodiment of its producers and consumers. In this particular acoustic modernist enterprise, the sonic media of modernity was also intertwined with the bodies of its performers—the Manila musicians.

Unlike the theatre, opera, and *zarzuela* ‘stars,’ or the history-conscious elites whose lives were deliberately documented by themselves or by scholars institutionalising theatre and music as autonomous artistic disciplines, the traces of the lives of the migrant Manila musicians are scattered over disparate archives. From early bureaucratic recordings of territorial comings and goings, personal anecdotes from biographies, and archival documents in different cities in Asia and in Europe, we can chart some of the vestiges they left behind. Most helpful in this project are historical newspapers, which were once only available physically in various colonial archives across the world, and are now digitised and have recently become publicly accessible. While these fragments provide for us some general motives in the patterns of migration of the Manila musicians, researching the individual biographies of the musicians is a scholarly endeavour yet to be undertaken. In investigating the stories of the migrant musicians, we could perhaps harken back to the individual subjectivities that they were forming for themselves prior to the identitarian constructs that we tend to impose on them now. Or, if put together, we might even hear how different modernit(ies) were alternatively imagined across the more fluid borders of 19th century globalisation. I draw my research from various archival sources, some fragmentary, others more layered: historical newspapers, memoirs, passport applications, employment contracts, and government reports from various cities in Southeast Asia and their previous colonisers. To fill some historical gaps, I have also consulted secondary materials—often written within the framework of national musical histories of neighbouring Asian countries—which trace the beginnings of their modernisation with the recruitment of Filipino musicians. From these I identify some patterns and propose some conclusions.

In Spanish colonial archives in Manila, we find the traces of the Manila musicians’ applications for passports. Given that many of the documents at the

National Archive of the Philippines were destroyed during the Japanese-American War in Manila, there are only a handful of surviving records in the *Pasaportes* section: applications by twelve musicians requesting passage to Penang (Straits Settlements) submitted all together on 18 March 1891; and nine members of Banda de Malate and Banda de Mariquina applying for passage to Singapore in January 1892. The latter were to form the all Manila musician Sta. Cecilia Band in Singapore, which I will discuss in detail below.

On 7 September 1892, Doroteo Javier, resident of Calle de Cevantes, and on 15 September, Sanchez, a native of Tondo (Calle Azcarraga), applied for passports to emigrate to Sarawak to become part of a music band already “formed earlier by natives of this country [that is Filipinas].”¹¹ Sanchez’s application included the request to bring with him his wife and son. Manila musicians’ passport applications were routinely marked for additional investigation by the military and local government of their town of residence. Musicians younger than forty applying to work abroad required a clearance from their district government to ensure that they were not on active military duty. This was a logical bureaucratic action, since most of the migrating musicians were trained and employed by the regimental bands and the Royal decree of 1836 committed all enlisted soldiers to an eight-year term of military duty (*quinta*).¹²

The process of hiring for Manila musicians was also an ongoing one. As mentioned earlier, some passport applications indicated that musicians were emigrating to cities to join already existing Manila bands.¹³ Most applicants followed a standard template for their application letter, indicating simply that they were applying for passage and entry to the city of destination, and this would have normally sufficed. Applicants for a position with the Sta. Cecilia Band in Singapore, wrote in their letters that their reason for emigration was: “to dedicate their lives to a profession in the arts.”¹⁴ Here we find how the Manila musicians imagined their role, but we also infer how the romanticist notion of artists and the arts permeated globally as it began to reconfigure music and theatre production into its own autonomous space. We will also find that this was going to affect the economics of maintaining the municipal bands in the different cities of Southeast Asia, where music production was caught between the intersections of old archaic systems and the new commodification of cultural practice.

In the Dutch Indies, a twenty-piece Manila band was contracted for a year in Medan (Sumatra), beginning weekly performances on 13 April 1899.¹⁵ The contract was to be extended, depending on the availability of funds. A newspaper article in *De Sumatra Post*, dated 7 February 1899, called on the public for cash contributions and donations to maintain the band. The article mentions that some of these musicians moved to Medan from their previous post in Japan.¹⁶ A review of newspaper announcements for the different weekly programs shows that the repertoire of the Manila Band in Medan included marches, waltzes and other popular dance music of the time, as well as opera melodies by Strauss, Verdi, and Bizet, among others.

Secondary sources also mention fragments and traces of the places where the Manila musicians migrated and became entangled with local histories. For example, music historians Patricia Matusky and James Chopyak note in the music history of Peninsular Malaysia, the establishment of the Selangor State band in 1894, comprised of all-Filipino musicians. They were eventually to constitute the Malayan state and police band.¹⁷ Lee William Watkins's dissertation talks about Portuguese-influenced Macau, where the Manila musicians also formed the first band of musicians who accompanied the town's music for marches, official ceremonies, and religious festivities. They kept this role in Macau until the 1930s.¹⁸

Hiring Manila musicians in order to have access to the latest popular music—the acoustic experience of modernity—was not just in the interest of imperialists in the colonial cities. During the 19th century, Manila musicians were also employed to contribute to the aural modernisation projects of native kingdom states in the region. We have the example of Cosme Buenaventura, who was among the Filipinos who migrated to Phnom Penh in 1869 to form the core of the royal court band of King Norodom I.¹⁹ Buenaventura, a native of the Sampaloc district of Manila, came from a family of musicians. His father was a church musician and singer. Before moving to Cambodia, he was a *musico mayor* (chief musician) in the Spanish infantry.²⁰ It was the Khmer royal ensemble of Manila musicians of which Buenaventura was a member that welcomed and solemnised the courtesy visit of the Spanish diplomatic corps to the royal court in Phnom Penh in 1879.²¹

For various citizens across the different Asian urban centres, the Manila musicians embodied 'modern' music. By 'modern' music, I do not refer to the aesthetic construction of artistic modernity. Rather, I situate the production and consumption of their music within the social practice of modernity. Employing the Manila bands ensured the global contemporaneity of a city's soundscape. The local kingdoms and European colonies gained access to the sounds of modernity when they employed the Manila musicians, who became as it were, the medium of modernity. In this sense, I cast music as a modern technology that was deemed useful for the modernisation (and later nationalist) interests of the neighbouring Asian cities. We take note that at this time, the interest in modernity would complement the emerging nationalism—one that was not yet characterised by Herderian ideologies of folk nationalism.

19th century transportation and communication technologies did not just allow migration between urban centres. Efficient and economical transcontinental transportation systems meant that the peripatetic lifestyle of touring production companies was now global in scale. And the Manila musicians were very much involved in this. For example, the arrival in Manila in May 1886 of Giuseppe Chiarini's Circus, and the company's daily advertisements during its two months stay, were well publicised in all of the city's major newspapers. We construe that during the circus's stay in Manila, local musicians were recruited to form the musical band for its performances. The group of musicians travelled with the circus

to Macau and on its tour of China. At the end of July, 13 Manila musicians were included in the company's request for permission to enter Yokohama.²²

Prior to the invention of recording technologies and the emergence of the music reproduction industry, the town bands were the means through which the public accessed music. During this time, access to music was a status symbol. Cities aspired to have their own resident music ensembles. For the moneyed, having a band playing the latest modern music added prestige to their weddings and private events. In the private homes, the piano became a ubiquitous music technology. At the end of the 19th century, owning a piano was no longer just for the elite. The rising middle-class eagerly sounded their modernity with their pianos, paid on an installment plan.²³ Manila musicians in Hanoi and Phnom Penh were also hired to teach piano to the new middle-class piano owners.

In Shanghai, the first interest to form a municipal band was documented in *The Shanghai Evening Courier* in 1872.²⁴ But it wasn't until 1881 when a Spanish band-master, Melchior Vela, was appointed to form and lead the ensemble. Vela recruited nineteen Manila musicians (one was arrested prior to boarding the ship, and two young musicians brought their families).²⁵ These musicians formed the municipal brass band. Music historian Robert Bickers' reading of the town reports on the Shanghai Municipal Band reveal that there was a high turnover of musicians due to death, or to men running away, which necessitated the recruitment of replacement musicians from Manila.²⁶

Concurrent with the flourishing of the newspaper industry in Manila was the arrival of travelling European theatre and music companies, and the burgeoning of local commercial theatre and music entertainment—all of which was documented in Manila's dailies. Though read mostly by locals, these newspapers were an important translocal communication medium linked to Europe, and the neighbouring cities, by telegraph. The latest news from Madrid, London, New York, Paris, Batavia, Hanoi, and Shanghai kept the Manilans abreast of the latest cultural trends in the cosmopolitan world, while news from Manila was transmitted to Europe and to the other colonial capitals in the Asia Pacific region. It is unsurprising then that it was through the newspapers that the reputation of the Manila musicians was circulated to other cities, and it was through these newspapers that the demand for Manila musicians was advertised. In the 1880s, employment openings for musicians in Shanghai, for example, and in other cities, were announced in the newspapers. We read for example this notice (for replacement musicians in Shanghai), published on 11 July 1882 in *La Oceaña Española*:

Notice to musicians. Wanted for the town band in Shanghai, one first clarinet and one id. second. Good salary is provided. Those who are interested to be employed can make arrangements with the agent. Elzinger Hnos.²⁷

What we can construe from this advertisement is that the further recruitment of musicians for Shanghai was routed through the Elzinger Hermanos, a

music store in Manila whose proprietors functioned as agents. There appears however to be no standardised process through which musicians were recruited in other Southeast Asian cities and there were no organised recruitment agencies at this time. Band-masters, and later managers, came to Manila and coordinated their recruitment of musicians with referrals through the city's various music organisations, such as the band masters of the numerous town bands in Manila, or music societies such as the Sociedad Musical Filipina de Santa Cecilia, through which musicians in the Sta. Cecilia Band in Singapore were enlisted.

In keeping with the social hierarchy of the colonial cities in Asia, the Manila musicians were only heard by the European colonial community in Shanghai, except when they were performing in public events, in which case the local Chinese would also hear their music.²⁸ Later on as state support for the musicians dwindled, their services were offered for hire for weddings, birthdays, and private events. It did not matter whether the patrons were British expatriates or the wealthy locals. As music became commodified, the British imperialists lost the monopoly in the acoustic modernisation project in the city. Locals who were able to afford the fees of the band sounded their 'modernity' through the hired performances of the Manila musicians.

In 1898 after the end of the Spanish regime in the Philippines, the colonial military bands were disbanded in Shanghai. In 1899, agents were sent to Manila to recruit twenty-two musicians,²⁹ and as the Manila musicians were considered unfit to perform solo parts, eight European musicians were hired for the ensemble in 1906, "to act as leaders of the different sections in the orchestra and to perform as soloists."³⁰ Eventually, the band/orchestra came to be dominated by European musicians who also brought with them the social distinction of 'art musicians' from Europe. The European musicians thought it below their station to play dance music, or to perform for funerals, even if these engagements were paid for by the most elite members of Chinese society.³¹ As the state-subsidised ensemble was being re-organised into an art music orchestra, the demand for popular music was also increasing with the rise of clubs, cinema, theatres, and other entertainment halls. These venues hired more musicians from the US, Europe and Manila, although popular music in Shanghai was dominated by Manila musicians until the 1940s. In the early 20th century, American jazz and popular music found a paying market among the middle and working classes in the city, which the Manila musicians—who were at this point American subjects—also picked up. In the meantime, the tax-subsidised municipal orchestra, which had evolved into an art orchestra in the European model, faced patronage problems, as it became more of a luxury entertainment rather than an essential social service.³²

The Sta. Cecilia Band in Singapore

As indicated in the opening epigraph of the previous section, the desire to have a town band was on the modernising agenda of various colonial settlements and Singapore was a case in point, with plans to import Manila musicians in the

early 1890s. In November 1892 further actions were implemented when the Singapore Cricket Club was approached for financial support of the band (the proposal also considered the alternative possibility of hiring from the disbanded Madras regiment). A report of a special meeting of the Cricket Club, with the agenda: "To consider the desirability of the S.C.C. contributing the sum of \$50 per mensem towards the maintenance of the proposed Town Band and guaranteeing the continuance of the same for three years," appeared in *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* on 19 November 1892. The report reiterated the deemed necessity of a town band, arguing that "[i]n towns very much smaller than Singapore a Town Band was held to be a *sine qua non*."³³ Not just for the European expatriates, it was argued that having a town band would also benefit the "Asiatic community," citing the Penang band as an example. The weekly performance of the Manila band at the esplanade was considered "one of the most popular events of the week, and when it played at Dato Kramat crowds of natives were equally appreciative."³⁴ Despite such efforts however, the request for funding did not receive enough support from the Cricket Club members, and after this disappointing outcome, discussion about the hiring of a Town Band was halted for three years.

In Manila, the process of recruitment had already been underway since 1892. A local government statement dated 29 January 1892 submitted to the Governor General, certified nine musicians applying for passports to work as musicians in Singapore were to be free of military duties.³⁵ Among them was Cecilio Mañalong who was a veteran migrant musician. Mañalong's application indicates that his previous addresses included Kuala Lumpur and Selangor where he was involved in the local bands of those cities.³⁶

With no other available documents, I rely on the newspaper accounts for information on the Singapore side. The timing of the arrival of the musicians in Singapore is unclear, as there was no discussion about the band in the Singapore newspapers between 1893 and 1894. The silence was broken on 20 May 1895, with the report of the "Sta. Cecilia's Band composed of Manila Musicians" performing at the Criterion dinner at Raffles Hotel.³⁷ Later that month, *The Singapore Free Press* ran an advertisement: "Wallett's Bijou Circus opens on Saturday night on the Tank Road site, and promises a good show. 'Johnny' himself is well known in Singapore as jester and clown. He brings also a strong Japanese troupe and has engaged the Sta. Cecilia's Band during the stay here."³⁸

From reports of Town Council meetings, we learn that a Mr. G. Uruttia took on the enterprise of bringing the twenty members of the Sta. Cecilia Band to Singapore at his own expense, and was the group's manager.³⁹ He also provided accommodation for the musicians and their spouses. G. Uruttia was a wealthy Basque businessman who owned a wine and tobacco warehouse in Singapore.⁴⁰ He was also a member of the Singapore Town Council. So given the ongoing clamour of Singapore residents for a Town Band, it would have been convenient for him to submit a petition for the Sta. Cecilia's Band to take the position. However, this did not go as smoothly as might have been expected and for the remainder of 1895, the

issue was the topic of the newspapers. The opinions and arguments expressed in the newspapers reveal much about the social dynamics of the British colonial society. In the opinion article published 20 August 1895 in the *Mid-day Herald* (quoted earlier in this article), we read about the attitude of the Singapore community towards their city modernisation project, and how they compare their city to other colonial capitals. After another four months of indecisiveness, the Town Council finally arrived at the decision to support the group, albeit conditionally:

MUNICIPAL COMMISSION: The Municipality and Music: A Town Band

The President said, as regards a town band, now that Budget had been sanctioned, the Commissioners would be perfectly prepared to contribute the expenses of a weekly performance ... but that one condition was that the public should show their appreciation and desire of music by promising to subscribe ... The amount they had put into the budget was \$15 a week. The Golf Club paid \$10 a week at present ... It only remained for the public to rise to the occasion by subscribing sufficient to enable them to avail themselves of the opportunity that they now had of securing the services of this band at an exceedingly moderate sum.⁴¹

While the Town Council and the local community might have been lukewarm about securing professional fees for the musicians, it appears that Mr. Urrutia actually intended the Sta. Cecilia Band for commercial services, as evidenced by regular advertisements offering the services of the band from 1895: “20 trained Manila musicians is [sic] open to engagements for Soirees, Balls, Theatre, Funerals, Baptisms, Weddings, Picnics, &c.”⁴² In a growing city of commerce, adding the services of high quality professional musicians to his catalogue of Spanish colonial wares would prove to be lucrative for Mr. Urrutia. For the next decade, the Sta. Cecilia Band was a household name for music in all cultural and social events in Singapore; they are recorded in advertisements for theatre companies that contracted their services; in performance announcements for various public and exclusive venues; and in announcements for weddings and funerals. At this point in time, the musicians’ clientele extended to the different sections of Singaporean society. As hybrid cultural workers, the Filipino musicians served as a fulcrum in the transcultural processes between the European and Asian inhabitants of the city. The band was an attraction at the British golf courses as well as at Chinese funerals. In 1907, the band added string musicians and they increased their number to cater to the growing demands for professional music services. In the same year, silent film arrived in Singapore, and the Manila musicians were hired to accompany the films. As with the case of the Shanghai Municipal Band, changes in the economics of cultural production—from imperial monopoly to the market economy—provided a democratisation of the circulation of (what Arjun Appadurai calls) ‘mediascapes’⁴³ of modernity for the local imaginings of modernity.

Mediating Sonic Modernities: into the 20th Century

At the turn of the 20th century, the Philippines had been taken over by the American colonisers who began to call the territory the Philippine Islands. This meant that the terms Manila men and Manila musicians were eventually replaced by the term Filipino, although at this time they would be subjects of the American empire. The now called Filipino musicians continued to work for the state bands and orchestras in the colonial capitals across Asia until the end of the Second World War. At this point, new popular music and entertainment forms found new audiences in the rising middle and working classes of the new commercial urban centers. In the early 20th century, the Filipinos were hired as musicians in the royal courts and nightclubs of Cambodia. Outside the elite opera houses of the French colonial Hanoi and Saigon, Filipinos worked as orchestra and dancehall musicians and teachers to the Vietnamese elite.⁴⁴ Among them was Juan de Sahagon Hernandez, who was recruited by the French Ambassador in Manila to become the Music Director and Orchestra Leader at the Café dell Musique in Hanoi in 1902.⁴⁵ Throughout the first half of the 20th century, jazz and popular music band-leaders and producers came to Manila to recruit musicians for theatres, clubs, and entertainment venues from Guam to Tokyo and Hong Kong, to Bangkok and Singapore, and all the way to the Middle East. In the 1930s, Filipino jazz bands were the most sought after in Shanghai.⁴⁶ Music scholar Stephanie Sooklynn Ng notes that Chinese and Japanese jazz musicians credited their craft to the Filipino band musicians.⁴⁷ The nine-member Filipino dance band led by L. F. Marcial was also known on the cabaret club circuit in British Malaya. In 1946, the band performed at the Great World Cabaret in Singapore and became a resident at the Lucky Cabaret in Kuala Lumpur.⁴⁸

New entertainment technologies were also on the rise. Silent films needed live music accompanists and Filipino orchestras and pianists filled these roles. In Shanghai the Filipino musicians, who were nicknamed 'foreign piano devils,' worked for record companies like Pathé (now EMI).⁴⁹ Music scholars Wong Kee Chee and Lee William Watkins trace the genealogy of the *Shi dai qu* (songs of the times), the local popular music form in Shanghai, to the Filipino bands who introduced American popular and Latin music to the city. *Shi dai qu* were adaptations of western pop music and Chinese folk songs and were extremely popular until the Chinese Cultural Revolution in 1949.⁵⁰

After the lull in labor migrations during the war, the flow of migrant laborers picked up again in the 1950s. Current historiography of labour migration (where the stories of migrant musicians are also found) often begins here. At this point in time, the new regime of international/interstate relations was to govern the transactions of migration. While the scope of this research focuses on the translocal migration of musicians prior to the establishment of the Asian nation-states, I trace here notable trajectories: how the migrant Filipino musicians became entangled with the postcolonial nation-building of their host countries. I follow the Filipino musicians' liminal role in the replication of acoustic modernity in other Asian cities.

The global hype of Latin music in the 1960s was filled in by Filipino musicians in Asia, the Middle East, and in Australia. During this period, Filipino bands also dominated the onboard entertainments of cruise liners. With the further increase in demand for live musicians in clubs, hotels, and bars in the 1970s and 1980s, and with the revised labour export policy under the Marcos presidency, these were the decades of the exodus of thousands of 'Overseas Filipino Entertainers.'⁵¹ Though excluded in the history of cultural nationalism, their remittances, together with those of millions of migrant Filipino workers, would have kept the national economy afloat. Yet, it has to be noted that these labour export policies reinforced archaic labour forms in which the Filipino workers' racial and class marginalisation was exploited in the international labour market. The Manila musicians' cultural hybridity—once perceived as the embodiment of the modernist imagination— was seen as a vestige of their former indentured colonial worker status. As such, their services became easy to exploit, particularly given the unequal distribution of labour rights in the global capitalist market

Concurrently, betwixt the boundaries of nations and cultures, the liminal Filipino musicians served as agents in the modernisation processes of transculturalisation and national culture formations in other Asian states. In Malaysia, Alfonso Soliano led the establishment of the Television Malaysia (RTM) Orchestra. The Filipino musicians' ability to perform a wide range of styles and repertoires also allowed them, as Asian performers reproducing different cultural systems, to open up avenues of transculturalisation. After the Chinese revolution of 1949, the entire culture and entertainment industry (including the Filipinos working in it) were relocated to Hong Kong where Chinese mass media was to flourish. Popular music, which fused western and Cantonese musical idioms, was created for the Hong Kong urban public. Bridging these musical cultural divides were Filipino arrangers who were able to adjust Chinese melodies to the modern western musical idiom.⁵²

In the second half of the 20th century, the migration of Filipino musicians can be seen as what cultural historian James Clifford calls discrepant cosmopolitanism.⁵³ Although they lacked institutionally granted social capital, due to the racial and social marginalisation reinforced by interstate labour policies, they functioned as musical intermediaries in their host cultures. Watkins sees the Filipino musicians as minstrels; as peripatetic entertainers, they were able to become catalysts of change by virtue of their being critical outsiders.⁵⁴

In this article I have surveyed the global movements of the Manila musicians during the late 19th and early 20th centuries by tracing their movements within the different urban capitals in modernising East and Southeast Asia, where they were entangled in the imperial and local imaginations and soundings of modernity. Dominant historiography of cultural modernity normally predicates the 'flow' of global modernity from the West to the rest—with an almost positivistic assumption that aural media and technologies of modernity were transferred from Europe to

the colonies through ‘osmosis.’ Drawing from the cases offered above, I argue that the dissemination of Manila musicians across the Asian capitals mediated the collective imagining of modernity across the different social stratifications. Rather than the West-centric idea that touring theatre, opera, and concert stars from Europe (who performed mostly in confined colonial theatre spaces) brought civilising culture to colonial Southeast Asia, I argue that it was the liminally positioned Manila musicians who interpolated the modern sound between races and classes in colonial spaces.

I have argued that the experience of modernity is intertwined with its aurality—that cities projected their modernist imaginations onto the musical performances of the Manila musicians. In characterising modernity, the modern experience is thus composed into an autonomous sonic-scape, detached or recontextualised from archaic cultural systems. In this sense, the experience of modernity is inextricable from its sonic mediatisation in music. The encoding and decoding of such imagining of this acoustic experience of modernities, transpires through its embodiment—where the transfer of the mediatised imagination, and the articulation of sonic modernity, is transacted and negotiated through the body. The global cultural movement of modernity has been thought of as a ‘flow,’ as in Saskia Sassen’s theory of globalisation as a flow of capital and labour between industrialised cities and the Third World.⁵⁵ Drawing from the epistemological processes of language, Ryan Bishop, John Phillips, and Wei-wei Yeo instead propose that

If we consider the possibilities implied by the restless repetition, replication, displacement, and diversification of a notion that is supposed to account for the incessant repetition, replication, displacement, and diversification of labor, capital, commodities, and culture on a global level, then we may be encouraged to begin to see specific sites in terms of specific engagements, actions, and responses to these conditions of possibility.⁵⁶

Building on this notion of the movement of globalisation (and plural modernities), I underscore the crucial role of the musicians’ bodies, which repeated, replicated, displaced, and diversified the imagining and enunciation of modernities through their performances. As I have described in the various instances of the Manila musicians’ embodied performances of modernity, the sonic imaginations and performances of modernity were constantly replicated, displaced and negotiated. Here, I argue that in the importation of the Manila musicians to different Asian cities, the bodies of the musicians were the sites of contestations and aspirations. For the colonialists, the Manila musicians’ embodiment of the music was seen as an imperial triumph. For the local audiences, concomitant to hearing the sound (music), was consumption of the mediated performance of the Manila musician’s embodiment of modernity as mediatised sound. In this sense, what was commodified was not music *per se*, but embodied transculturalisation evolved by the colonial cultural processes of the Filipinos, and their replication, displacement, and diversification of sonically imagined modernities.

- ¹ Sebastian Jobs and Gesa Mackenthun, eds., *Agents of Transculturation: Border-Crossers, Mediators, Go-Betweens* (Münster: Waxmann Verlag GmbH, 2013), 7-8.
- ² Floro L. Mercene, *Manila Men in the New World: Filipino Migration to Mexico and the Americas from the Sixteenth Century* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2007), 6.
- ³ In various archival documents I consulted, Manila is often misspelled as Manilla, as in the case for example of the town band in Medan referred to as Manilla Band te Medan.
- ⁴ Jr Aguilar and V. Filomeno, "Routes to Modernity: Philippine Labor Migration in the Age of Empire," in *Filipinas, Un País Entre Dos Imperios*, eds. Maria Dolores Elizalde and Josep M. Delgado (Barcelona: Ed. Bellatera, 2011) 84-85.
- ⁵ James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999).
- ⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991); Benedict Anderson, "Nationalism, Identity, and the Logic of Seriality," in *Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2004), 29-45.
- ⁷ Joseph Earle Stevens, *Yesterdays in the Philippines* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898), 31.
- ⁸ *The Daily Advertiser* (Singapore), 29 August 1892.
- ⁹ *The Daily Advertiser* (Singapore), 8 October 1892.
- ¹⁰ *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 19 November 1892.
- ¹¹ National Archive of the Philippines (Referred to as NAP from here on) - *Pasageros Llegadas, 1892-1893*: SDS3149-S91.
- ¹² From the report of the Manila Superintendent, Juan Manuel de la Matta (Manila, 25 February 1843) in Emma Helen Blair and James Alexander Robertson, *The Philippine Islands, 1493-1898*, vol. 52 (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1906).
- ¹³ For example: here is the original Spanish text from the approval of application document given to Doroteo Javier: "En cumplimiento a lo ordenado por VE en su respetable escrito de 7 actual, tengo el honor de informar que en esta comandancia no existe inconveniente en que se el conceda pasaporte para Sarawack (Borneo) al indigena Doroteo Javier vecino de la calle de Cervantes segueinte solicitado del Excmo. Señor Gobernador General de estas Yslas y que el objeto de su marcha es para formar parte de una banda de musica que hay en aquella isla a la que ya pertenecen alguna naturales de este pais."
- ¹⁴ NAP - SDS3149-S502-547.
- ¹⁵ *De Sumatra Post* (Medan), 7 February 1899, 9.
- ¹⁶ Ibid. The anonymous writer wonders what is more alluring in Sumatra compared to Japan.
- ¹⁷ Patricia Matusky and James Chopyak, "Peninsular Malaysia" in *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music, Volume 4: Southeast Asia* (New York: Garland, 1998), 440.
- ¹⁸ Lee William Watkins, "Minstrely in the Margin: Re-Covering the Memories and Lives of Filipino Musicians in Hong Kong." PhD Diss, University of Hong Kong, 2004, 14.
- ¹⁹ Gabriel Beato Francisco, "Ang Mga Pilipinong Nagsidayo Sa Kotsintsina," in *Sa Labas Ng Tahanan at Sa Lilim Ng Ibang Langit* (Manila: Limb. ng "La Vanguardia" at "Taliba", 1916).
- ²⁰ Gabriel Beato Francisco, *Casaysayan Nang Bayan Nang Sampaloc* (Manila: Imprenta de Santa Cruz, 1890), 82-83.
- ²¹ Francisco, "Ang Mga Pilipinong Nagsidayo Sa Kotsintsina."
- ²² Circopedia, "Giuseppe Chiarini." This is the only source available at the moment; more research is needed to find and verify this data.
- ²³ Music stores across Southeast Asia advertised different piano brands and most offered installment plans.
- ²⁴ Ra Bickers, "'The Greatest Cultural Asset East of Suez': The History and Politics of the Shanghai Municipal Orchestra and Public Band, 1881-1946," in *二十世紀的中國與世界 (China and the World in the Twentieth Century)*, ed. Chi-hsiung Chang, vol. II (Taipei: Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, 2001), 841-842, cited from *The Shanghai Evening Courier*, 23 July 1872, 681.
- ²⁵ Ibid., 843.
- ²⁶ Ibid.

- ²⁷ *La Oceaña Española* (Manila), 11 July 1882. Translated from the original Spanish: "Aviso a los músicos. Se necesita para la banda municipal de Shangai un clarinete primero, uno id. segundo. Se les darà muy buen sueldo. Los que quieran contratarse pueden entenderse con los encargados. Elzinger Hnos."
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 846.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 843–844.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 848., quoted from the Shanghai Municipal Council Annual Report 1906, 200.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 850–51.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 861.
- ³³ *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 19 November 1892.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*
- ³⁵ NAP-SDS3148-S16.
- ³⁶ NAP- SDS3149-S502.
- ³⁷ *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 20 May 1895.
- ³⁸ *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 31 May 1895.
- ³⁹ With the scarcity of biographical materials, I relied on the surviving Town Council reports and commercial business directory to trace the information regarding G. Urrutia. I hope to gather further information about him and the individual musicians through further research at the Singapore colonial archive in London.
- ⁴⁰ It is important to note during this time, as part of the product diversification scheme of the Spanish colonial government, tobacco was started as a Philippine industry which led to its becoming the primary supplier of first-class tobacco in the world. Finding that growing tobacco was lucrative, the Dutch started their own farm in the Netherlands Indies and imported tobacco workers from Manila to Java.
- ⁴¹ *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 19 December 1895.
- ⁴² *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 25 September 1895.
- ⁴³ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
- ⁴⁴ Gibbs, "Nhac Tien Chien: The Origins of Vietnamese Popular Song," *Things Asian*, last modified 1998, <http://www.thingsasian.com/stories-photos/1211>.
- ⁴⁵ Millie Gonzalez Martelino, *The Forgotten Maestro: Juan de Sahagun Hernandez* (Virginia: Mind and Heart Books, 2010), 9.
- ⁴⁶ Stephanie Sooklynn Ng, "Filipino Bands Performing in Hotels, Clubs and Restaurants in Asia: Purveyors of Transnational Culture in a Global Arena." PhD diss, University of Michigan, 2006, 47, cited from Joshua Shi, "Jazzing It Up and Down," *Shanghai Star*, 29 March 2001.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, cited from *Music Makers*, 20 June 1947.
- ⁴⁹ Watkins, "Minstrelsy in the Margin," 15, cited from H. Ng, *Songstresses of the World* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Film Archive, 1993), Booklet 9, issued for the 17th Hong Kong International Film Festival, 8 April 1993-23 April 1993, 24-25.
- ⁵⁰ Watkins, "Minstrelsy in the Margin," 15. For further reading on the history of popular music in China in the early 20th century, also see: 黃奇智 (Wong Kee Chee), *The Age of Shanghainese Pops 1930-1970* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 2001); Szu-Wei Chen, "The Rise and Generic Features of Shanghai Popular Songs in the 1930s and 1940s," *Popular Music* 24:1 (January 2005): 107-125; Andrew F. Jones, *Yellow Music: Media Culture and Colonial Modernity in the Chinese Jazz Age* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).
- ⁵¹ Overseas Filipino Workers or OFW is the term used to refer to migrant Filipino workers employed outside the Philippines including the overseas Filipino entertainers. In the 2000 report of the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA), 47,017 OFWs are registered as entertainers in Asia. See: Nimfa B. Ogena, "Policies on International Migration: Philippine Issues and Challenges," *International Migration in Southeast Asia*, eds. Aris Ananta and Evi Nurvidya Arifin (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2004), 297.

⁵² J-S. J. Wong, "The Rise and Decline of Canto-pop: A Study of Hong Kong Popular Music (1949-1997)." PhD diss., University of Hong Kong, 2003, 47-50, quoted and translated in Watkins, "Minstrelsy in the Margin," 16.

⁵³ James Clifford, "Traveling Cultures," in *Cultural Studies*, eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), 108.

⁵⁴ Watkins, "Minstrelsy in the Margin," 24.

⁵⁵ See Bryan Roberts and Saskia Sassen, *The Mobility of Labor and Capital: A Study in International Investment and Labor Flow*, *Contemporary Sociology*, vol. 19 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁵⁶ Ryan Bishop, John Phillips, and Wei-wei Yeo, "Perpetuating Cities: Excepting Globalization and the Southeast Asia Supplement," in *Postcolonial Urbanism: Southeast Asian Cities and Global Processes*, eds. Ryan Bishop, John Phillips, and Wei-Wei Yeo (New York/London: Routledge, 2003), 9-10.