

Breaking the Fourth Wall: Filipino Indigeneity in the Diaspora

By Lauren J. Cambroner

Abstract: This paper contributes to the literature of Filipino indigeneity in the diaspora, by examining the participation of Filipino American students on the University of Washington campus from the 2013 Philippine Culture Night, (colloquially referred to as “Filnight” or “PCN”). I will draw upon my own working theory and visually represent a roadmap similar to the Borromean rings, which are designed as three inseparably and interlocked rings. I will introduce my own Borromean-inspired analytical lens to re-conceptualize the three relationships between storytelling (both fiction and nonfiction), visual performances, and the spectator-performer relationship to complicate the narratives on Filipino indigeneity within the performing arts. My research includes both on and off stage perspectives, to capture the experience of performers and spectators, both Filipinos and non-Filipinos alike. I will also draw upon Virgilio Enriquez’ groundbreaking research “Sikolohiyang Pilipino” (Filipino Psychology) to ground my study on Tagalog-based terms and explanations, for a comprehensive understanding of cultural performance. Then, this paper will shift the direction towards critiques on the Indigenization movement as it relates to Sikolohiyang Pilipino. The Indigenization movement began in the spaces of academia as Philippine scholars sought to raise national consciousness and “liberate” Filipinos from the colonial mentality that permeated the educational institutions. The paper will also discuss critiques on the PCN culture that makes indigeneity complex for culturally hybrid students. Overall, I argue that despite the complexities and struggles for indigeneity within the PCN, the 2013 Filnight play accomplished a feat that brought together multiple storylines that are culturally indigenous to the Filipino peoples and historically relevant to multiple ethnic communities through the three interconnected rings: storytelling, visual performance, and a dynamic spectator-performer relationship.

Prologue: Memoria

I can still see the audience behind the blinding lights. I can still hear the sound of thunderous applause. I can still remember the sensation of my pounding heart racing with overwhelming happiness and pride. What stands out in my memories of Filnight is not the actual performance or the nerves prior to saying my lines as a fictional overzealous UW tour guide. What stands out was the visceral and affective memories: my feelings of pride as I stood on that stage with my fellow Filipino peers and acquaintances that had gone through the theatrical and cultural

experience with me. Filnight gave me something that I had never experienced: Pride in my history, my first stage performance, and being a Filipino American.

Introduction

For readers unfamiliar to the term “Philippine Culture Night,” (also colloquially referred to as PCN and Filnight) this event is held nationwide across college campuses that seek to celebrate and showcase the rich heritage, stories, struggles, culture, and history of the Filipino people. Performances vary in scope, storyline, genre, and grandeur based on the Filipino association within each campus.

This essay focuses specifically on the University of Washington’s 2013 Filnight, which placed heavy emphasis on the stories and history tied to the local communities within the Pacific Northwest. The play follows three male students during their 2013 freshman orientation at the University of Washington. After sneaking away from their orientation group, they get electrocuted in a bathroom, and find themselves sucked into a time portal that transports them back to 1972. The story follows their adventures as they learn the history of Filipino-American students, political activism, and narratives of struggling immigrants and their families. The shared ancestral histories within the play bound the intergenerational struggle of the 70’s as Filipino students fought for their educational rights to teach classes specific to their homelands, and the hardships that men faced when they traveled to the Alaskan canneries to support their families. While this play uses humor and fictional scenarios like the “time portal,” the stories are still relevant for generations of today, both for Filipinos and other communities of color.

Personal and Theoretical Explanations

Drawing on my own experience as a Filipino-American participant in the 2013 play becomes challenging and facile to believe that the Philippine Culture Night was a simple re-connection to my lost history and ancestry. I seek to internalize the costs and struggles for reclaiming my cultural identity through the analytical lens of Sikolohiyang Pilipino and the Borromeian links. While I am fully aware that I have a distinct bias that makes me unabashedly proud as a “Born-Again” Filipino, I hope to gain an understanding of the process that goes beyond glorification. The Born-Again experience refers to second-generation Filipino’s in the diaspora seeking a return to their ethnicity because of their strong interest in Philippine culture and history.¹

Critical analysis of the Philippine Culture Night serves several purposes. As a student of color, it becomes almost natural for myself and other students of different

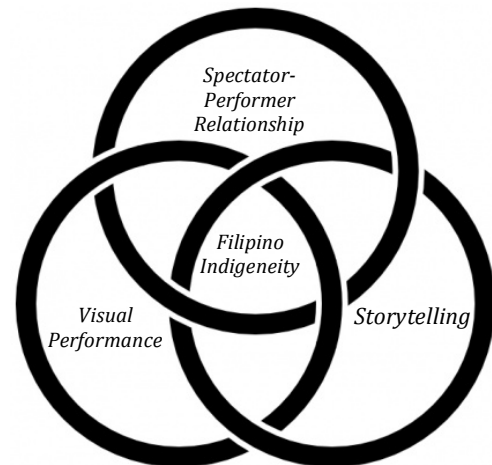


Diagram of Borromeian rings

¹ Okamura, Jonathan Y. *Imagining the Filipino American Diaspora: Transnational Relations, Identities, and Communities*. N.p.: Taylor & Francis, 1998. Web. 17 Aug. 2014. 22.

ethnicities to surround themselves with their own peoples and ethnic communities on college campuses. This becomes especially true for students that haven't had similar opportunities in their youth. For this reason, this essay seeks to analyze the Philippine Culture Nights that serve the Filipino communities across the nation. Historically, Filipino Americans have constantly sought to assimilate to American customs, hide their Filipino accents, and speak in languages local to their land, rather than their native homeland. This essay will seek to find a clarified and comprehensive approach that explains the PCN experience through the thematic rings of storytelling, visual performance, and the spectator-performer relationship. These common threads will be my roadmap for guiding this paper as I explore the relationships within and among the three Borromean rings as they produce meaningful spaces for Filipino indigeneity.

While I use the Borromean rings as visual tool for conceptualizing the linkages, my intellectual research versus personal affective relationship to the Filnight will be a source of contention. I will draw on what Fatimah Rony's refers to as the "third eye" in exploring questions of indigeneity and decolonization in the diaspora. She explains this "third eye" as an out-of-body experience when attempting to explain a phenomenon. Her example includes the third eye being utilized during a lover's quarrel and viewing the altercation "with the dispassionate air of a zoologist examining a specimen."² In a similar fashion, a third eye will be utilized to capture a lens beyond my own personal performance to view the stories, visual performances, and spectator-performer relationship in a lens that can critically analyze the formations within the Filnight. The third eye will balance this paper in dialogue that brings out both the internal space that resides in personal memory and affective experience, along with the outside lens for discussing the broader critiques of the Filnight experience through a neutral standpoint. Incorporating the third eye forces me to grapple with these issues, leaving me in a state of cognitive dissonance as I attempt to both appreciate my Filnight experience while fully engaging in the questions and issues that arise from Filnight culture, Sikolohiyang Pilipino, and its relationship to the Indigenization Movement.

My purposes for conceptualizing the themes as Borromean rings will be the visual framework in which I seeks to prove that the work of storytelling and visual performances have effects both positive and negative to the spectator-performer relationship. Similarly, the spectator-performer relationship creates opportunities for storytelling and future participation in visual performance beyond the Filnight. Discussing one ring ultimately finds connections and linkages to its counterparts, making these themes uniquely interconnected. Understanding these links create important spaces that both advocate and/or complicate the narrative for Filipino indigeneity, which lies at the center of the intertwined rings.

Rise of Sikolohiyang Pilipino

For those unfamiliar to Filipino histories, I seek to explain a brief history lesson to validate the indigenous processes. Common narratives of Filipino history

² Rony, Fatimah T. *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle*. N.p.: Duke University Press, 1996.

may reflect the simplified version: the Philippine nation made up of 7,100 islands was violently colonized by Spain for over 350 years and became a neocolony under the United States for nearly half a century.³ The uncommon narrative that is unspoken and seemingly forgotten has been the ideological violence that the Americans wrought on the Filipinos. The Americans successfully campaigned the mis-education of Filipino history by placing a colonist and racist education system inherently foreign to the Filipinos. Examples include the use of American textbooks in classrooms while using the colonizer's language, specifically English as the primary language of instruction.⁴ Covar explains:

We were made to hope that Western education was going to liberate our minds and elevate our quality of life, but the opposite happened – we became captive to Western ways of thinking and systems of economy. Our thinking, culture, and society became virtually Westernized when we were, in fact, Asians. The categories we used to make sense of the world were not ours; they were borrowed and offered by the academic disciplines. We became mesmerized and awed by the claim and promise of universalism. We disparaged and marginalized our own indigenous view as “ethnic,” “parochial,” and “provincial.” Who will not be appalled at such an insult?⁵

For this reason, a nationalist endeavor within the scholarly realms of University of Philippines arose, hoping to deconstruct the Western ways and re-conceptualize their educational institutions. The purpose for using the term “indigenization” within the diaspora is meant to defy the belief that indigeneity solely exists within a set spatial and geographical area. Due to the large populations of Filipinos abroad, indigenization can reaffirm their cultural identity and metaphorically break the invisible fourth wall, allowing Filipino American students to reclaim the true histories, narratives, and traditions of their native homelands.

Assuredly, there are political complications for using “indigenization” as a means for national consciousness. While it may have a unique connotation unfamiliar to its common definition, the term in this essay hopes to reaffirm and reclaim the struggles similar to other Native indigenous communities worldwide. Filipinos throughout the country, both urban and rural have faced severe hardship to survive the violence brought by Spanish colonizers and American imperialists, leaving our nation in an unfortunate dilemma that glorifies the victors, yet forgets our Native histories and people. Other dilemmas have questioned the term “indigeneity” as an “inordinate attachment to traditional and allegedly backward traditional practices of indigenous cultural communities.”⁶ This latter statement

³ Mendoza, S L. *Between the Home and the Diaspora: The Politics of Theorizing Filipino and Filipino American Identities*. Manila: UST Publishing House, 2002. 11.

⁴ Enriquez, Virgilio. *From Colonial to Liberation Psychology: The Philippine Experience*. Manila: De Salle University Press, 1994.

⁵ Covar as cited and translated in: Mendoza, S L. *Between the Home and the Diaspora: The Politics of Theorizing Filipino and Filipino American Identities*. Manila: UST Publishing House, 2002. 60.

⁶ Enriquez, *From Colonial to Liberation Psychology*, 27.

must be dismissed, not only for its unsubstantial claim, but also in its relation to the endeavors of Sikolohiyang Pilipino, which seeks to involve indigenous practices for Filipino-based ontologies and epistemologies.

Specifically, this essay will focus on the more prominent works of Virgilio Enriquez, who introduced Sikolohiyang Pilipino (Filipino Psychology) as a liberation psychology. His work focused on challenging the Universalist claims made by Western psychology and re-theorizing the Filipino individual in terms that were indigenous and relevant to its people. From this liberation movement, the psychology discourse spread to America as Enriquez spent his time in the States. His recognition of Filipino indigeneity in the diaspora resonated with fellow Filipino American youth, embracing their Filipino identity and re-connecting them to their homelands. This has been further dubbed as the “Born-Again Filipino” Movement, signifying the experience among people who find a re-energized pride and purpose against the struggle for assimilation in America.⁷ Beyond this history lesson, I intend to explore the possibilities for Filipino-centered explanations in the context of the largely popular PCN for students in a unique position as a culturally hybrid individual in the diaspora. Later, I will further engage the discourse on this “Born-Again” experience.

(hi)Stories of America

Returning to the Filnight plot, the three students were stunned by their unusual circumstance in 1972 when they were introduced to real-life Filipino activists on the UW campus such as Silme Domingo and Gene Viernes. The introduction of these two prominent characters is an important contribution for the Filipino community both in history and today. Having their names and stories introduced in the play meant to pay respects for the work of the two men who actively sought to bring America to act on its democratic ideals. The two political activists were Alaskan cannery union workers of the International Longshoremen’s and Warehousemen’s Union, Local 37 branch (ILWU) who were ultimately murdered for involvement in union reform and fighting arduously for workers’ rights. Domingo and Viernes’ murder was ultimately tied to a hit originating from the Marcos regime.⁸ While Viernes’ involvement on the UW campus was fictionally portrayed, he had interest for ethnic studies and history on the Central Washington University campus. Domingo on the other hand, was a University of Washington student interested in community activism and joined the Filipino Family Affairs newspaper movement in 1971. While their stories were limited within the PCN as student activists, their stories were able to engage audience with the true history that shook the Filipino American communities based in Seattle. The fight for personal change was the important connection that brought history and fiction together in the Filnight plot.

⁷ Mendoza, *Between the Homeland and the Diaspora*, 15-16.

⁸ Gee, Shannon. *One Generation's Time: The Legacy of Silme and Dominguez*. Film. 2014. Seattle : Seattle Channel 21.

A second storyline follows the struggles and issues that resonated within the student communities on campus and the issues they fought for. In one particular scene, the audience is introduced to the different factions within the Filipino student association of the time. On one side of the room are activist-minded individuals who seek to participate in various projects such as signing petitions for American Ethnic Studies classes that represent their people and incorporating a Tagalog (Filipino language) class on the UW campus. These issues in real life are later established on the UW campus and can now be taken for students interested in ethnic studies and learning the Tagalog language. Yet, the plot complicates the story by giving a true depiction of the divergence among groups. On the other side of the Filipino club meeting is a group of easy-going Filipino Americans who aren't interested in constant activism. Rather, they complain and have interests in social participation and the Filipino community. When discussing the opportunity for classes taught about Filipinos, one student asked, "Will they teach us how to make lumpia?" Although humorous, this scene portrayed the real division of interests between the social and political during that time.

However, one of the most serious and important scenes was later introduced. It created a story that promoted Filipino indigeneity by the shared narratives and histories unique to the Filipino community. The three boys are staying at the home of a Filipino UW worker named Ralph and his family from the 1970's. During dinner, the parents share their story as immigrants living in America:

Ralph's Mother: A few years back, Ralph's father and I heard about a man named Marcos taking over the Philippines. We decided to leave even though all of our friends told us not to. Ralph's father and I had to come to America alone because our children could not get green cards. So, we came here and started a life in Seattle. Ralph's father couldn't find a job at first. He could only find odd jobs like bussing tables, cleaning hotels, and washing the dishes. Men that were educated and had held high social positions in the Philippines would come here to do servant work. But, he [Ralph's father] knew that he was making these sacrifices so his family could have a better future... We knew of other families in the same situation as us. Children left behind, husbands and wives separated for years waiting for their green cards. Some of the men became lonely looking for gambling and boxing as outlets... And then, finally, Ralph's found the canneries in Alaska. He had to work under Filipino men that had worked in the US longer... No matter what positions Filipinos held, they could never be above the white man.

Ralph's father begins his oral monologue: I couldn't find (find) a job even though I was a piter (fighter) pilot in the Philippines. (*He distinctly uses a strong Filipino accent with difficulty pronouncing the "F" in words, then transitions to a clearly distinguished English accent*) No one was willing to give me work. I had to lose my accent JUST so people would feel comfortable enough to hire me to scrub their toilets and fold their laundry. My friend told me about this opportunity in Alaska. When we got to the canneries, most of us worked in the fish house where you would gut the pieces of fish that

wasn't caught by the machine. After a while, we moved to the lines where you'd cook the salmon in the cans and spend the entire day pushing and pulling the carts and loading them into the trucks and the boats...When we moved to the International district in 1984, every season I would go back to the canneries and do it all over again... for my family. Yes, it was hard work but I was proud to work with my hands to send money back to the people I loved.⁹

Ralph's parent's story to survive in America was not unfamiliar. Many Filipino families could relate to the multiple struggles of family separation and difficult labor conditions. Following the end of my performance, this powerful story resonated with my father in the audience. This familiar family history created not only a conversation that transcended from performance to reality, but also shifted the spectator-performer relationship. On the ride home, my father relayed the stories of our own family experiences in the Alaskan canneries. This conversation had the capability to create a collaborative space between spectator (my father) and performer (me). From this conversation, our roles had reversed, as I became the listener while my father became the orator. Astrid Breel writes of a similar narrative on spectator participation within photography. She argues, "Within much socially engaged practice, the work created by the artist is constituted by an engagement with a participating public, rather than any object of performance."¹⁰ Taking this perspective into account, the theatrical performance does not become an end product. Instead, it becomes the means for the spectator to engage and participate in meaningful ways, producing empowerment and indigeneity for both parties following the performance's conclusion.

Sikolohiyang Pilipino would explain this phenomenon as an example of "*kapwa*" with its closest English definition to mean something along the lines of "fellow" or "others." The connotation is very distinct from English however, as it refers to a deeper definition of recognizing a shared identity. "*Kapwa*" does not just equate to an English concept of "us." Instead, it is psychologically and philosophically significant for comprehending the Filipino values with the inner self that is shared with others.¹¹ My father's implicit action to tell me our own family history exhibited "*kapwa*." By telling the true (hi)stories of my uncles, great uncles, and grandfathers' experience in the Alaskan canneries, my father and I felt a stronger connection between our individual selves and other Filipinos that shared the same struggles and stories. Our experience centered the conversation towards the common struggle among Filipino immigrants. While impossible to fully embody our Filipino identity, I felt a sense of pride for my family and other Filipino "Alaskeros" who worked in the canneries.

My very reaction after my father's stories also went along the idea of "*utang na loob*," meaning to define the Filipino value for debt, gratitude and respect of another person. While English translation has the tendency to get lost in colonist language, it is important to recognize that this debt does not refer to a contractual or

⁹ Oliva, Amanda. *Filipino Night 2013: Our Diversity*. Youtube Film.

¹⁰ Breel, Astrid. "Emancipating the Spectator: Participation in Performance." : 86. Web. 7 Aug. 2014.

¹¹ Enriquez, *From Colonial to Liberation Psychology*, 45.

pragmatist concept “you scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours” as outsiders have claimed. Following the values of Filipino language means that this debt comes from a place of solidarity, which promotes and defends the basic dignity of each individual.¹² Similar to the narrative of Ralph’s father, my own grandfather had hoped to come to America and continue his legal education. He left the Philippines only to find an occupation as cook to be his sole career option. Facing severe racial discrimination, my grandpa Jessie never had the opportunity to practice law in America, and spent his life supporting his family cooking meals. Having the free will and opportunity to study and educate myself in college has made me feel indebted to my ancestors and family members that have endured racial discrimination, language barriers, and family separation all for the sake of a better future for later generations.



Filnigh Scene depicting the shadow acting and Ralph's family sharing their immigrant story

This story moved beyond the ring of storytelling as a visual performance. Throughout Ralph’s father’s narrative, the stage became a contrast of light and shadow, depicting the very real scenes that the father was describing. The collaboration used the familiar visual representation of complex shadow puppetry. Matthew Huey, a student that was in the audience recalled, “The shadow was a unique way to portray the story and helped me visualize the hard work that he [Ralph’s father] went through. It was very relatable to the minority communities in general. It doesn’t have to be just Filipinos. You can be Chinese, Japanese, Korean etc.” The aesthetic performance allowed audiences to engage both the auditory and visual senses on the immigrant stories. The shadow presented a unique visionary experience for the audience to follow the immigrant journey and struggle in a reflective performance. The fluid movements of “shadow actors” created a temporal shift on stage, as these stories were told within the memories of the parents. While they were meant to be told, these dim and shadowy memories as immigrants in America were far removed, as they chronicled their dark and difficult experiences.

The visual scene also contributed to the complexities of the spectator-performer relationship. The well-executed story and visual performance ultimately produced an organic engagement amongst audiences, as Matt further explained: “It made me think about my own experience and how hard my grandparents had to work in order to support the family. Like, I’m not saying they had the exact job as the father in the play. But they probably had to work equally just as hard, because my grandparents would work at a Laundromat. So they would work all day and night... Not only my grandparents, but my dad in general work also so hard as a necessity for supporting the family.” The collaborative performance within oral storytelling and the aesthetic performance created a unique space for spectators to directly engage and reflect. Whether it was the intention of the directors and writers

¹² Ibid. 68-70.

of Our Diversity to create this dynamic relationship is unclear. However, the mere reactions and sense of “*kapwa*” (shared self) alone prove that the spectators were not passive observers, but engaged participants.

Translated into Obscurity

The depth of the physical terms that the Indigenization utilizes can face some possible mishaps for re-purposing a nationalist intention within the Filipino language. As I am unfamiliar with the Tagalog language, I wanted the explanations of these Tagalog based terms from my brother Richard, living in Metro Manila and his colleague Levon Cepeda, who was born and raised in the Philippines. As “*kapwa*”

has been one of the most well-cited values in Sikolohiyang Pilipino, Richard and Levedo felt that the definition of shared humanity wasn’t fully accurate. They both explained the definition in their every day experience as “fellow.” Richard explains, “I guess it [Sikolohiyang’s definition of “*kapwa*” as shared humanity] can be a deep interpretation. It’s like saying a simple word in English like “is” and interpret it to be something profound and deep. We don’t break down the words like that and



Photo by Michael D. Sellars

conceptualize it.” For him, he wasn’t too assured about claiming “*kapwa*” as a deeper philosophical Filipino value. This deeply complicates the narrative on what can fully constitute a value that is prominent in the lived experiences of other Filipinos. For this reason, the complications of linguistics and semiotics can become blurred and misunderstood. While Sikolohiyang Pilipino’s definition may possibly conceptualize common phrases and values for nationalist intentions, it is still a relevant theory for decolonizing the mind and body in diaspora.

Indigenization From Without: Other Peoples, Other Communities

The effect of the 2013 Filnight is not only relevant for Filipino performers. Instead, conversations with non-Filipino spectators gave an insightful approach to how they remembered the night. Student Luz Guillén explained, “When you’re outside the [Filipino] community, as a spectator you tend to want to pay attention more to comprehend where they’re coming from. As a spectator... it’s outside your community and you see their performance as a story. You’re not there to question, but to engage and learn.” She makes connections to her Mexican student organization Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano/a de Azatlan (MEChA) by explaining, “The way I recall it is MEChA’s connection to the alumni who share their stories. Without these stories, we wouldn’t be here.” Her sentiments follow closely to the importance of storytelling.

The shared struggle and history for ethnic communities was prominent in the Filnight storyline when a multicultural celebration ensued on stage. The celebration consisted of First Nations students performing a ceremony, MEChA contributing a dance performance, and a poem from a representative of the Black

Student Union. The story of the colored struggle on campus was an important theme on diversity for the 2013 Filnight. Having the non-Filipino spectators engage with the visual performance and stories once again highlight the relationship that demonstrate participation and engagement.

The significant theme of diversity was also temporally relevant for current students as a celebration of the Diversity requirement on the UW campus being passed days before the Filnight performance. The legislation explains the diversity requirement for “help[ing] the student develop an understanding of the complexities of living in increasingly diverse and interconnected societies.”¹³ In order to successfully graduate, students are expected to include three credits of coursework that focus on the sociocultural, political and economic diversity of human experience at local, regional or global scales. The history for the passing of this requirement has historically faced resistance for 25 years. The origin for the requirement resulted from the work of the UW Students for Diversity Coalition that included the Black Student Union, First Nations, Filipino American Student Association, and Movimiento Estudiantil Students of the UW. The epochal accomplishment was significant for continuing the student participation and activism that goes back to the multicultural club histories from the 1970’s.

Visual Performance: Dancing with Sticks

One of the most popularized Filipino performances that require analysis is the Tinikling. The folk dance is a pre-Spanish performance involving two people performing mimetic dance moves similar to the Tinkling bird as it walks and flies in its environment. The movement of a bird native to the Philippines has significance, representing the possibilities for aesthetic performance relevant to our people, history, and culture. It features two pole sticks being clapped together as a male and female dancer attempt to step around and in between the two poles, while the pace of the rhythm increases. The excitement as a spectator becomes riveting as the two dancers effortlessly escape and jump between the poles to a rhythm that makes the movements seem also impossible without getting hit by the bamboo poles. While Lopez claims that non-Filipinos are attracted to the Tinikling for its novelty, vibrant costumes, and the energized pounding rhythms, this does not fully explain how it has become THE representation for Filipino culture, including the dance presented to visiting Heads of State such as Lyndon B Johnson and his wife, Lady Bird.



Found on LonelyPlanet by Jahanzeb Nazir

¹³ Rowley, Erin. "Diversity graduation requirement for UW undergraduates approved." *UW Today*, June 3, 2013.

This familiar dance is almost always featured during the various PCN's nationwide. For this reason, I will discuss the dance with Diana Taylor's and Joseph Roach's position arguing that the visual performance can be a source for the transfer and continuity of indigenous knowledge. I will also draw on the prominent scholar Mellie Lopez for her extensive cross-cultural background in folk studies. I would like to prove that the Tinikling becomes an alternative for conveyance.

The influence of the repertoire, as Taylor explains, consists of the ephemeral embodied knowledge such as spoken language, dance, ritual, and/or sport. In this case, both the oral storytelling and dance play a significant role as methods for carrying on tradition and cultural practices. The nature of the repertoire comes from bodily movement, gestures, orality, dance, and singing.¹⁴ UW is fortunate enough for the continuance of Sayaw, a traditional folk dance group that performs for several campus and off-campus events. Their embodied knowledge of Filipino dance portray the unique dance suites that are inspired by the different regions in the Philippines. The Filnight of 2013 used the Tinikling as a concluding dance to perform for the fictional freshman orientation group. Having the Tinikling as a fixture within the PCN's provides the necessary community building and continual traditions that keep the Filipino culture alive as an embodied practice. The corporal knowledge also has traditional Filipino values that Lopez cites in detail.

Lopez explains how the dance symbolically represents a reflection of traditional Filipino courtship and marriage. The spatial boundaries between the dancing couple as well as the bamboo poles are a performative reflection of actual Filipino customs. The man and woman dancers play the couple in love, while the bamboo clappers fulfill the roles as the parents. The bamboo clappers control both the rhythm and movement of the dancers, which is the same purpose for elder's that expect younger couples to obey the traditional customs of "bawal ang humipo" (no-touch system). The no-touch system governs the actions and social expectation against public display or physical contact in courtship. The gesture of the dancing couple to light touch fingertips essentially taunts the social custom. However, the clapping bamboo poles become louder and closer to the dancer's ankles, leaving the dancers to watch their dance moves and return their hands to their sides. The dance climaxes as the rhythm of claps increases to a point that the dancers must hold each other as support against the dangerously quick bamboo poles that may hit their ankles. Any movements made in error have significant consequences, both in performance and the symbolic representation for traditional courtship. Stepping in the wrong place can result in the ankle getting snapped on, while the mistake in courtship can lead to a dissolution of the couple. Therefore, the symbolic explanation gives an important knowledge of indigenous and traditional customs regarding the Filipino traditions.¹⁵

Beyond symbolism, the very physical movements are a unique embodied knowledge that can disorient the beginner learning the dance. The very real

¹⁴ Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. N.p.: Duke University Press, 2003. 19-20.

¹⁵ Lopez, Mellie. *A Handbook of Philippine Folklore*. Quezon City, Philippines: University of the Philippines Press, 2006.

possibility of getting hit by the clapping poles requires adjusting to stepping and dancing, as well as finding a balance with your partner for support. While finding physical support, the dancer must also teach themselves to learn spatial boundaries between their partner and the bamboos. This knowledge also teaches grace and elegance, following the symbolic themes of Filipino courtship traditions. The craft for balancing your legs, position, coordination, and gaze culminate the embodied indigenous knowledge. Unfortunately, there is a limit for describing the physical performance of Tinikling. Using written language can only convey a flat, one-dimensional comprehension that is foreign to the intricacies of the dance itself. I beseech the reader to physically watch variations of the dance through digital or live performance and appreciate the embodied knowledge that has been passed down from generation to generation.

Dangers of the Essentialism

As I tread beyond the boundaries of the PCN, the greatest challenge for the transferal of Filipino indigenous knowledge must be the awareness of the often-singular means for national consciousness. While tinikling and traditional dance are often seen, performed, and taught, there is a stark contrast in comparison to the continuity of traditional Filipino folklore, folk songs, and folk drama that are not as well-known for those living in the diaspora communities.¹⁶ The preservation for indigenous Filipino knowledge must not fall into the trap of a singular performance piece to encompass the Filipino identity. Instead, the mass population in the diaspora and students participating in the PCN must cultivate and re-energize these traditions without the temptation for “Orientalizing” the homeland. The Western beliefs that the folk exhibits “uneducated, backward, or peasant” worldviews make the traditional histories and cultures fall into a deceptive colonial mentality.¹⁷ The folk stories and traditions must be taken seriously beyond the Philippines as other alternatives for indigenous knowledges. For this reason, the Tinikling must not be the only aesthetic performance for cultural expression.

Literature following a similar critique is the dangers of essentialism. This critique directly doubts the very PCN institution for performing and transferring indigenous Filipino values and knowledges. Gonzalves further points out that PCN’s tend to assert that the Philippines is a “sturdy repository of knowledge, a repository of Philippine life that can be accessed and brought back.”¹⁸ Cultural performance can become a space that depicts heroic, unified, essentialized histories that are divergent from the real and complex nature of Philippines’ history. For this reason, UW’s 2013 Filnight completely defied essentialism by representing the layered histories and stories found within our own Pacific Northwest community. Rather than make claims of the actors “discovering” their true identity by visiting the Philippines, the Filnight plot sought to empower the audience and its performers

¹⁶ Ibid., 36.

¹⁷ Ibid., 41.

¹⁸ Espiritu, Yen L. *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives across Cultures, Communities, and Countries*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003.

based on historical events from the actions and stories of immigrants and student activists in the Seattle region.

Adaptation Practices from Indigenous to Theatre Performance

Understanding the PCN's familiar dance performances requires the history from its transformation as a folk dance to the formal performance setting. The Bayanihan folk dance group debuted on the world stage to export the ethnic cultural performance during the 1958 World Fair in Brussels.¹⁹ From then on, it performed in various stages around the world for the enjoyment of spectators of all nationalities. Before their success as a cultural performance group and being appointed by the Philippine government as the Official Cultural Mission to the Americas and Europe, the process of preservation and adaptation into the live stage required attention to changes in costume, timing, and movements from its tribal and indigenous origins.²⁰ Crafting the indigenous dance first required researchers to traverse the rural areas and entice the tribal members to perform for them.

Choreographer Lucretia Urtula discussed her challenges for choreographing indigenous dance to the "conventions and possibilities of theater." She envisioned the adapted forms to retain the cultural roots and authentic flavor but restructured the dances in aesthetic dimensions that she called "compression," "enhancement," and "highlighting." Compression required the original dance rituals to be presented in a brief performance versus the challenge of performing a five-day ritual. The enhancement was important for costume designers and musical directors to provide accented beatings and rhythms, while crafting the various costume colors to be differentiated by the various region performances. The dance suites are now easily discernible by the varied costume ensembles: the northern, Spanish colonial, Southern (or Muslim), and rural. The costumes were deliberately emphasized, using colorful hues that related to religious and social values.

Researchers that adapted to the art to performance constantly used terms such as "purify," "elevate," "intensify," and "stylize" as explanation for their contributions to these internationally performed dance suites. Essentially, these adaptations are somehow considered better, clearer, and more effective than its tribal origins.²¹ However, these dance suites have now become so crafted to perform in modern and urban stages for purposes of preservation and nationalism, to a point that they have lost the original spectator-performer participation. While the dance suites are meant to unify the varied regions in succinct forms, colors, and performances, the well-meaning objectives become lost as a necessity for Filipino culture becoming misappropriated for the unification and nationalist effort. Choreographer Reynaldo Alejandro critiques, "the stylistically staged revue dancing of the Bayanihan presents an image of the Filipino people as eternally happy, carefree, childishly irresponsible, ignoring all sense of the hundreds of years of social struggle and suffering that have been the traditional inspiration behind the

¹⁹ Gonzalves, Theodore. *The Day the Dancers Stayed: Performing in the Filipino/American Diaspora*. N.p.: Temple University Press, 2010.

²⁰ Ibid., 72.

²¹ Ibid., 76-77.

greatest works of Philippine literature and music. Dances are copies, then recopied...making copies of copies... the flavor of the dance can become diluted, the spirit dissipated, and all sense of authenticity sold out in favor of the flash and color of theatrical extravaganza.”²² As Alejandro points out, simply replicating a dance does not keep its true indigenous meaning or tribal heritage. What must be encouraged is fully engaging other possibilities for indigenous performance, beyond theatricalized folk dances.

In addition to retaining cultural authenticity, there are more issues with the spectator-performer relationship. While original dance rituals of the indigenous tribes were meant for the outdoors, there were no specified roles between the spectator and the performer. The folk dances allowed direct engagement, which changed during its shift towards theatrical performance. While the PCN may find ways to complicate this narrative, the spectator has no opportunities for direct engagement within the moment. This binary has possibilities for other participation at a later time, as a folk dance may pique the interest of an audience member to learn more about the dances, who might possibly join a community folk group such as Sayaw to directly participate in subsequent performances. Still, there must be possibilities for retaining an authentic adaptation, rather than exploiting the indigenous. The stylized and “enhanced” dance suites have become synonymous to Filipino tradition that they are now proudly portrayed in community, collegial, and national stages. The dance suites have now become a fixture in PCN culture as if it were an art untouched, pure, and authentic to the indigenous Filipinos. The history of adaptation proves that there was practical maneuvering and direct intentions for using the tribes for cultural exportation that takes away the kinship and corporal bonding beyond the formalized theater performance.

Who’s Line, Anyway?

The definition of “bayanihan” also must be met with difficulties. Levedo Cepeda, born and raised in the Philippines further broke down the literal meaning of “bayan” as nation and “ihan” with no direct English translation. Levedo clarifies the origin which had originally meant “a [communal] action to help carry a fellow man’s hut when they moved.” The term eventually came to mean unity, nationalism, or patriotism. However, this fascinating reorientation of the term to pursue a unity and nationalist aim has severed its traditional and indigenized form.

The Bayanihan Dance Company was one of the first organizations to claim this term beyond its true definition for promoting Filipino culture. This can pose issues and complications for even the indigenous language to be adapted for more “modern” terms.



Photo by Michael D. Sellers

²² Ibid., 83

The nationalist cause for indigeneity can fall prey to its own cause. The issue of the nationalist endeavor within the dance suites and linguists has similar parallels to the Indigenization movement, which sought to respond to the call for nationalism.

Trade-offs for Indigeneity and Nationalism

A main concern for drawing on the Indigenization movement literature is attempting not to stretch the ethical boundaries between national consciousness and nationalist ambitions. The presence of politics can turn Sikolohiyang Pilipino into a reverse spin of more Filipino mid-education. Renowned Oxford scholar Sir Isaiah Berlin explains, "I'd like to distinguish between nationalism and national consciousness or national feeling. National feelings seems to me a perfectly normal phenomenon of human beings being brought together by whatever it may be, unity of tradition, living on the same soil, possessing common memories, having gone through common experiences, and needn't take a particular aggressive form."²³ However, I found myself unsatisfied with Sir Berlin's definition of nationalism arising out of a "wounded consciousness," in response to a history of oppression. My explanation between the difference aligns more similarly with Daniel Larison's distinction: "the move from having national feelings to having nationalist feelings is the move from self-identification with a national group to believing that this identity now takes precedence over most or all other loyalties and that it compels some kind of political action. Nationalism inspires people to give priority to national identity and a political project undertaken in the name of the nation, such that national identity comes to trump religion or civic loyalty"²⁴ Therefore, taking action to prioritize the political-ideological national identity is the difference between the national consciousness. A politicized Indigeneity is not the purpose of the PCN, despite its dilemma for impressing audiences with a culturally exported indigenous dance such as the Tinikling.

In the framework of the Filnight, national consciousness becomes evident, as each Filipino American feels united and bonded by a performance that is central to their identity formation. While many may mistake their affective engagement as "nationalism," it's the national consciousness that arouses these emotive sentiments. Sir Isaiah's questions the human need for diaspora communities looking for a "sense of being at home" in a visceral and direct way that miss a certain place, certain sounds, and certain familiar things that can be associated with nationalism.²⁵ The unusual circumstance for later generations may be that Filipino American students (myself included) have never been to the homeland. It becomes seemingly impossible to miss sounds or places when so far removed from the physical homeland. However, the emotional journey of cultural performance creates a removed yet very authentic and genuine pride, as I had mentioned in the prologue. However, finding possibilities of indigeneity are indeed not synonymous with national consciousness.

²³ Thames Television, transcript, *The Problem of Nationalism* (The Isaiah Berlin Virtual Library) 2-3.

²⁴ Daniel Larison, "National Consciousness and Nationalism", *Taki's Magazine*, May, 4, 2008.

²⁵ Thames Television, *The Problem of Nationalism*, 14.

The PCN culture must find a way to recognize and wrestle with these problems. Simply displaying the Tinikling and performing other “indigenous” adaptations are not the answer for national consciousness. When taking into account the third eye, the PCN cannot rely solely on visceral emotion for reconnection. They must provide a deeper space that will create real attachments and kinship, rather than relying on the monolithic nation state. Filipino Americans who acknowledge their ethnicity as “Filipino” may face larger problems when they don’t know the specific province or island they come from, nor the rich histories and narratives of their ancestry. Encouragement and inquiry can build greater opportunities for engagement. The challenge for PCN’s is to not engage in practices that spur blinded nationalism for the homeland, but a national consciousness that is connected and aware of their culture beyond the ubiquitous cultural representations of Philippines from Tinikling, Filipino flags, or lumpia. (Filipino egg rolls)

Community Beyond the Spectator-Performer

Breaking the invisible wall between the spectator and performer requires greater attention. Filnight was able to physically capture the complex relationship as background characters, including myself physically walked between the aisles in darkened theater using flashlights in close proximity to audience members. This scene was depicting the actions of students volunteering their time to participate in the fire watches to save the Milwaukee Hotel. This historical true story occurred when a downtown hotel went up in flames in 1970, killing twenty people. City leaders decided to enact stringent fire codes, leaving many hotel owners incapable of satisfying new codes and shutting down. The Milwaukee Hotel was guilty of sixty code violations and ready to be shut down, forcing the eviction of low-income, minority, and elderly residents. For this reason, Asian American activists took care of the hotel in 1977 to stop the closure through fire watches, cleaning out the building, and organizing fundraisers to raise funds for upgrades. The work of these activists allowed the hotel and its residents to be saved from hotel closure and eviction.²⁶ Having this story portrayed in the Filnight once again explained the multi-layered narratives within the two-hour play.

The actions of this scene were deeply moving for the audience and performers. As a fire watcher, my job was to move between the walk-ways using a flashlight and represent the actions of the Filipino American activists. While this scene was occurring, a Filipino-American student was singing a song in Tagalog, creating a dynamic and empowering theater space. From this one scene, we had no longer become “performers” and “spectators.” Instead, the theater became a community with a common struggle for justice. As an actor, I realized that my actions as a fire code watcher were protecting the livelihoods and homes of the very real friends and loved ones sitting in the audience. From this historical and realistic performance, the scenes were not just “acting” but sharing the amazing stories and

²⁶ Nguyen, Bao. "History Repeats Itself A New Generation Moves into the Historic Milwaukee Hotel." *The International Examiner*, July 7, 2011.

histories captured within our own city. The visceral and emotive responses were overwhelming in building up to the Filnight finale. Saving the building led to the resolution of the plot as the boys found themselves back in their 2013 freshman orientation group, becoming more conscious as “born-again” Filipino Americans.

Conclusion

The issues of the contemporary Filipino American fall into an unusual place for grappling with a Western lifestyle and South East Asian ancestry. My own narrative as a second generation American-born Filipino living in a Caucasian-dominated community made it almost impossible for me to be aware of my Filipinoness beyond a Filipino diet. The experience within my household consisted of an English-speaking household with no opportunities for learning or participating in Filipino culture. I grew up with being constantly called a “coconut” (referring to the brown complexion on the outside, but “white-ness” on the inside) for my lack of speaking Tagalog among family and friends. Transitioning to college provided me a local Filipino community and opportunities for engaging with other members. Participating in the 2013 Filnight gave me the basic resources as a performer to engage more fully with my long-lost identity. This Born-Again experience allowed a dialogue between my family’s history, and a personal interest beyond the performance for learning about my people as I took a history class that focused on the South East Asian countries Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Researching the histories and relationships of the stories, dance suites, and spectator-performance relationship ultimately opens up questions on ways for improving the PCN that dignifies and empowers the indigenous Filipino identity. Due to unfortunate circumstances, the 2014 Filnight struggled internally to provide any unique narrative and became an ethnic umbrella showcase for multiculturalism. While there are impossible standards for retaining and reclaiming “paksasakatubo” (indigenization), my hopes for the future Filnights will incorporate the indigenous histories and embodied knowledges of Filipino culture. The largest questions and challenges are producing future Filnights that are true to their indigenous form and building a communal space that break down the barriers between spectators and performers. The next step for this research is to provide an answer for finding a balance between nationalism and indigeneity that can provide a collaborative space for later generations of Filipino Americans to learn, practice and participate in indigenous Filipino traditions, histories, and performances through the Borromean rings.

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