Hybridity and National Identity: Different Perspectives of Two National Folk Dance Companies in the Philippines

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Abstract

This paper will examine how Philippine folk dance performances by two state-sponsored folk dance groups, the Bayanihan Philippine National Folk Dance Company (Bayanihan) and the Ramon Obusan Folkloric Group (ROFG), both resident companies of the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP), has produced and developed the concept of hybridity, a dominant narrative of national identity and art style/form in postcolonial Philippines. The two dance companies have developed different dance styles/forms and staging approaches, representing two contrasting traditions of hybridity, which have brought about different effects to form and inform national identity. By comparing the two groups, I will analyze how they show different perspectives on the concept of hybridity, and hopefully present the specific way in which the two groups and their hybridity form and inform a national identity through Philippine folk dance performance.

Keywords: folk dance, national identity, hybridity, performance, postcolonial Philippines

Introduction

"PHILIPPINE folk dance"[1] refers to a contemporary folk dance genre that has emerged in postcolonial Philippines and continues to be popularized as part of the national process of constructing national identity and culture. In a Philippine folk dance presentation, a variety of local dances that show Hispanic, European, and other Asian cultural influences are usually strung together into a program and transformed into a stage show. Philippine folk dance thus represents and embodies a hybrid cultural identity of the Philippines through its hybrid art style/form that conflates high art and folklore, modern and traditional.

This paper will examine how the concept of hybridity, a dominant narrative of national identity and art style/form in postcolonial Philippines, has been produced and developed in Philippine folk dance performances by two state-sponsored folk dance companies, the Bayanihan Philippine National Folk Dance Company (Bayanihan) and the Ramon Obusan Folkloric Group (ROFG), both of which are resident folk dance companies of the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP). In a postcolonial climate in which Philippine culture has been injuriously seen as "fragmented" and "divided" after a long history of western colonization that has brought about drastic cultural changes to the country, Filipinos faced a serious identity problem. In this context, hybridity has been thought of in celebratory terms as a concept or strategy to construct and represent a distinctive Filipino national identity and culture, and Philippine folk dance has been used as a powerful medium for that purpose.

Bayanihan and ROFG, however, have developed different dance styles/forms and staging approaches, representing two contrasting traditions of hybridity, which have brought about different effects to form and inform national identity. By comparing the two groups, I will analyze how they show different perspectives toward the concept of hybridity, and hopefully present the specific way in which the two groups and their hybridity form and inform a national identity through Philippine folk dance performance.

What is Philippine folk dance?: Working definition

"Philippine folk dance" is a national form of dance presentation in which a variety of local dances are brought together into a program and presented through the medium of theater. To use the concept of two forms of hybridization distinguished by Bakhtin and further modified by Werbner (1997, 2001), Philippine folk dance is characterized by the combination of both "organic" and "intentional" hybridizations. According to Werbner (1997), organic, unconscious hybridity is a historical process in which "culture evolves historically through unreflexive borrowings, mimetic appropriation, exchange and inventions," and it does not disrupt the sense of continuity; whereas intentional or conscious hybridity "shocks, changes, challenges, revitalises, or disrupts through deliberate, intended fusions" (pp. 4-5). In Philippine folk dance, individual dance numbers presented in a program are based on cultural diversity born of organic hybridization through years. When staged, these local dances are intentionally shortened in length, choreographed and stylized according to the western convention of stage art, and organized into a specific programming (which is aesthetically intentional hybridization).

When Philippine folk dance is performed at full length by Manila-based folk dance troupes, a standard program is generally composed of five categories or "suites": (a) Cordillera, (b) western-influenced or "Maria Clara,"[2] (c) Muslim, (d) *lumad*,[3] and (e) rural. Although different folk dance groups might use different terms to name these categories or present different dance numbers under these categories, this program format has been widely adopted by many folk dance troupes as a national form of representing Philippine culture. In the Cordillera suite, dances of mountain tribes in Northern Luzon, such as those of the Kalinga and the Ifugao people, are presented. Western-influenced or Maria Clara suite shows dances with strong western (mainly European) influence practiced among mestizo elites, accompanied with rondalla string ensemble. Muslim suite presents dances of Islamized groups in Mindanao and Sulu archipelago, such as Maranao and Tausug dances, which bear similarities in movements with those of neighboring countries such as Indonesia and Thailand. The

lumad suite is quite a newly created category in which dances of non-Muslim and non-Christian indigenous groups in Mindanao—such as the T'boli, Bagobo, and Bukidnon—are presented. Rural suite presents cheerful and playful dances of rural folks, such as "Tinikling"[4] and "Pandanggo sa Ilaw,"[5] which show unique fusion of western and local/indigenous forms of dancing found at a mass level. By juxtaposing both Western and Asian cultural heritages coexisting in the Philippines, Philippine folk dance successfully gives visible form to the hybrid identity/culture of the country—that is, a mixture of East and West.

Such a variety of local dances are then presented in a hybrid form or manner that intentionally adopts Western theater practice and aesthetics. Local dance forms are adjusted to theater concert stage, with each dance number set to beautiful and modern choreography and inserted into a flowing and well-rehearsed program. Technically speaking, a full-length program usually runs for about two hours, including a 10-15-minute intermission, and comprises a total of 25-30 dance numbers from the different suites. Each dance is shortened to 3-5 minutes, and presented one after the other, without breaks in between, in a visual, musical, and choreographic medley. Accordingly, dancers change their colorful costumes and accessories for every dance number, creating a kaleidoscopic effect for the audience. In short, local dances are completely framed and presented as a stage show.

Philippine folk dance in historical perspective: Changing discourses

Philippine folk dance, which presents both western and Asian cultural elements visible in local dance traditions, brings the country's colonial past to the fore. The Christian-Filipino representation of folk dance, although claimed to be uniquely "ours" or "Filipino" and not something just borrowed from the West, is quite unique in Southeast Asia. The age-old classical or court dances of many other Southeast Asian countries are presented as national and worthy of preservation, and do not show any trace or evidence of colonial past.

The formation and early development of Philippine folk dance cannot be separated from postcolonial discourse on decolonization and reorientation to Asian identity of Filipinos. The long colonial history of the country changed its cultural landscape drastically, and Filipinos very much leaned toward western culture. Although geographically located in Southeast Asia, the Philippines was perceived to be closer culturally to Latin America. However, as a newly independent nation-state in Southeast Asia, there was an urgent need to establish a prominent, universally recognized national existence, and reconstruct its own national history and tradition by tracing back its precolonial or pre-Hispanic past. But unlike many other Southeast Asian countries, the Philippines has no ancient monument or ruin that shows the existence of a powerful ancient kingdom and glorious past before the arrival of Spain. This made it difficult for Filipinos to trace back their cultural roots or origins to the ancient past and use them as a source of national unity and pride.

The lack of solid cultural grounding or base for constructing and defining Filipino-ness has generated and complicated an identity problem in postcolonial Philippines. In this context, traditional dance, which is handed down from generation to generation since time immemorial, and consists of body, movement, dress, and music that are able to convey unique Filipino culture, has served as a significant medium in searching for and constructing a national Filipino identity.

Formation of program: "Identity crisis"

The basic, standard program format of the Philippine folk dance was not accidentally created but was based on a bitter postcolonial experience that featured the earnest involvement of Bayanihan Philippine National Folk Dance Company, which was formally founded in 1957 at the Philippine Women's University (PWU).[6] In the Philippines, the first revival movement of folk dances and songs started as early as the 1930s, in which Francisca Reyes Aquino, who later became known as a pioneer researcher of folk dances in the Philippines, has played a central role. Dances collected and revived during this period, however, were largely derived from lowland

Christian Filipinos (see Aquino 1953-1975; Tolentino 1946). In 1954, PWU sent its dance group, which was later named Bayanihan, as a delegation to the Asian Festival of Dance and Music held in Dacca, East Pakistan.[7] There the group presented a series of "folk" dances of Christian Filipinos,[8] with guitar accompaniment.[9] As might easily be imagined, their performance stood out from the other participant groups who displayed their distinctive Asian cultures. The PWU delegation recalled that other countries were better able to preserve their own culture while the Philippines were so influenced by the West that they seemed to be "outsiders, among fellow Asians" (de Guzman 1987, p. 81).

This eye-opening experience made the folk dance pioneers in the 1950s very much aware of what they called "identity crisis" (de Guzman 1987, p. 81). It made them self-critical of Filipino cultural identity as well as colonial mentality, and they actively reoriented themselves to their Asian cultural heritage. After returning from the trip, the PWU group organized its own research team to dig out little-known ethnic dances of the Cordillera and Mindanao regions (which consisted, for the most part, the "ethnic" dance repertoire of Bayanihan) and produced a new dance program (Santos 2004, pp. 7-13).

Adoption of Western stage art: Reaction to colonialism

Bayanihan also invented a new hybrid form by adopting Western theater conventions and possibilities to present local folklore. The primary purpose for this was to "suit the format of a sophisticated contemporary theatrical performance" (Bayanihan Folk Arts Foundation 1987, p. 14) and raise local folk dances to the level of stage art, or "high" art, in order to display the same level of Western "civility" or "modernity" in the Philippines. For postcolonial Philippines in the Third World, there was an urgent need to reconstruct a national identity that had been constructed in a negative light as "immature" or given a negative stereotype by the West during the previous colonial period. Local dances were beautifully stylized and choreographed for stage performance, and the basics of ballet, such as foot-and-arm positions and body posture, were applied to local dance

movements. Old photographs very well show this point: a Bayanihan dancer's body is always pulled up, the chin kept up, and the toes frequently pointed. Local costumes were also especially redesigned for stage use by sewing several pieces that constituted a set of traditional attire. These were formed by incorporating zippers and Velcro to facilitate quick costume changes. What is known as the "Maria Clara" costume was restyled by Bayanihan by sewing a blouse and a skirt together into one single dress. Tribal costumes were also redesigned to be modern and fashionable by exaggerating some ethnic motifs or icons while disregarding others or by replacing them with geometric motifs that may have nothing to do with the ethnic group the company represents but effectively project a tribal image. Added to these, simple dances were elaborated upon and orchestrated in a large-scale, spectacular dance production. A good example is the dance "Singkil," which is named after the brass anklets used in the original dance that Bayanihan researched.[10]

The "Singkil" dance of the Maranao: Bayanihan's innovation

"Singkil" is one of Bayanihan's signature dances derived from the Maranao, a Mindanao Muslim ethnoliguistic group. This is widely known today as the royal dance of a prince and a princess weaving in and out of crisscrossed bamboo poles that are clapped in syncopated rhythm; while the man manipulates a sword and shield, the woman artfully twirls a pair of fans. In the original context, according to Bayanihan's interpretation, it was performed by women only, with the principal dancer being of royal blood. She is supported by her attendants, one of whom holds an umbrella over the princess's head, while the other women clap a set of crisscrossed bamboo poles.

The "Singkil" was first researched by Henrietta Ele-Hoffer together with Lucrecia Urtula, a dance director of Bayanihan in the mid-1950s. Hoffer became the first "Singkil" dancer of the Philippine Women's University even before Bayanihan was so named. According to her, the "Singkil" dancer whom she researched, Bae Tarhata Alonto of Lanao,[11] manipulated three fans in each hand.[12] Later on, the dance was set into a

storyline based on an episode of the *Darangan* epic: Bantugan, a Maranao prince noted for his amorous exploits, is finally captivated by the lovely princess Gandingan whom he pursues in courtship. But the *diwata*, or guardian spirits that hover over the forest, in order to punish Bantugan for his erstwhile philanderings, beset his path with difficulties, causing a heaving of the earth and clashing of rocks that hinder his pursuit of the princess (Bayanihan's interpretation).[13] In this rendering, the prince has a contingent of male warriors/assistants (counterparts of the princess's court ladies) that serve as background fan dancers who simulate the waves of the sea with their movements. According to Trimillos (1988, p. 110), the fan dance is an incursion from another dance of a different Muslim group, allegedly the *daling-daling* from the Tausug of Sulu archipelago. All these different elements—the original all-woman "Singkil" dance, the *Darangan* epic, and the daling-daling fan dance—have been incorporated into the Bayanihan "Singkil," which is now the more recognized, iconic, and popular "Singkil" dance compared with the far less-known original.

With such theatricalization, local Filipino folk dances that were previously a part of physical education or of social/cultural events of village communities were recreated into a spectacular theater production and brought to the world as part of a burgeoning national discourse.

In 1958, Bayanihan presented a Philippine folk dance production at the Brussels Expo and received international recognition. Bayanihan's success at the world stage made Philippine folk dance, as well as Bayanihan, world famous. Inspired by the company, many folk dance groups, some of which already existed and others newly formed, went for cultural and diplomatic missions abroad.[14] As Trimillos stated, "the Philippine was one of the first Asian nations to use dance as a primary means of establishing international standing" (1985, p. 104) to project and promote a new, "beautiful" image of the Philippines around the world. This subsequently brought about what Trimillos called an "era of dance diplomacy" in the 1960s and 1970s (1985, p. 104).

The 'Imeldific' influence: Emphasis on a hybrid art form

During the Marcos regime (1965-1986), Philippine folk dance became a powerful and effective political tool to convey and promote state ideology. Regardless of whether it was good or bad, it was the first time that the state invested in culture and arts in visible ways, and presented a clear vision of "national" arts and culture. Then first lady Imelda Marcos established and inaugurated two national theaters—the Cultural Center of the Philippines in 1969 and the Folk Arts Theater in 1974—which have provided venues for both international and local artists. Imelda also actively organized cultural events that created many performance opportunities. Although she was often accused of extravagance, she played a significant role in the development of culture and the arts in this developing country where the priority has always been given to economic development.

In her speech at the inauguration of the CCP, Imelda mentioned the identity crisis of Filipinos after the long history of colonization and stated:

> we are young and struggling to understand ourselves, trying to construct noble meaning of our race. It is the purpose of the Center to enrich the minds and spirits of our people and to foster among other people a true understanding of the Filipino self. (Maramag 1982, p. 35)

She intended to foster pride in Philippine cultural heritage, and encouraged local artists to create new Filipino arts by utilizing native elements and themes within the framework of western art. Philippine folk dance thus became one of the ideal examples of such art work.

Under the patronage of Imelda Marcos, conscious hybridization of western/high arts and indigenous/folk arts were carried out in search for national identity of Filipinos, and Bayanihan became one of her favorite dance companies as she liked grandiose and spectacular performances with world-class artistry. The more grandiose and spectacular Bayanihan's performances became, the more Imelda favored the company. Accordingly, Bayanihan became more theatricalized and inclined to be more western oriented or cosmopolitan. Under this circumstance, Bayanihan has

established its reputation and dominant status in the field of Philippine folk dance, and the "Bayanihan model" of Philippine folk dance became dominant. In 1982, Bayanihan became a resident company of the Cultural Center of the Philippines.

Post-Marcos period: "Filipinization" movement

When Marcos was ousted in 1986 through the EDSA People Power Revolution, the CCP, a brainchild of Imelda, was internally reorganized and came up with new orientations. In previous years, the CCP has geared to be more western oriented and elite centered, regardless of Imelda's populist appeals. Only selected artists could mount the stage of the CCP, Obusan admitted. But the new policies emphasized "Filipinization," pluralism of aesthetics, and democratization. The new CCP began to encourage Filipino artists to create and develop original works and new art forms "deriving primarily from indigenous traditions and secondarily from foreign offerings," while embracing and understanding cultural diversities of Filipinos to promote the "pluralism of aesthetics" in the performances of CCP resident companies (Sta. Maria 1999, p. 34). Under this new cultural discourse and new policies of the CCP, the Ramon Obusan Folkloric Group was elevated to the level of resident folk dance company of the CCP in 1986.

The ROFG was founded in 1972 by Ramon Obusan, a former researcher-dancer of Bayanihan since 1964. Familiar with methods in anthropological research, he became one of the earliest critics of Bayanihan as he witnessed his researched dances being made more elaborate and theatricalized, divorcing them from the original dances found in the field. Although he admitted that Bayanihan's presentation was beautiful and effectively propagated Filipino dance culture, he began to feel that there must be another way to achieve the propagation of Filipino culture—in a manner that faithfully represents the dance close to the form as he originally saw it in the field. For this reason, he departed from Bayanihan and founded his own dance group that tries to mirror Filipino traditions and culture as close as possible to the original form of dance based on vast amount of

data and artifacts that Obusan and his group have accumulated through continuous researches. However, as Obusan recalled, it was not easy to compete with Bayanihan at the time because Bayanihan was the favorite dance troupe of Imelda who preferred grandiose and spectacular performances (ably delivered by Bayanihan), and almost every folk dance groups followed Bayanihan.

The ROFG's rise provided an alternative dance style and staging approach to Philippine folk dance, and the discourse has seemingly shifted to hybridization of "modern" and "traditional" elements in Philippine folk dance. The oppositional trends that the two dance companies represent have added new dynamics or "tensions" to the field of Philippine folk dance where the Bayanihan style once held dominance.

Bayanihan and ROFG contrasted: Two traditions of hybridization

The dance styles and performances of the two companies have evolved through the years, but basic representational strategies of Bayanihan and ROFG can be roughly explained by the concepts of "essentialization" and "particularization," to borrow the terms of Shay (2002, pp. 14-17). In Bayanihan performances, cultural details or unique locality and identity of different ethnic/cultural groups appear to be generalized and reduced to represent one essentialized nation or a single national character. On the contrary, the ROFG uses authentic details of movements, costumes, and music to particularize a unique culture and identity of each ethnic/cultural community, emphasizing a multicultural nation. These distinctions between the two folk dance companies can be best observed in dance movements, dancer's physicality, costumes, and staging approaches/technologies.

Dance movements

As I have mentioned earlier, Bayanihan applied basic ballet posture and foot-and-arm positions even to ethnic dance movements. Since local

dance movements have been "balleticized," to borrow the term of Shay (2002, p. 15), the dancer's body is always consciously pulled up, the chin is kept up, the toes are frequently pointed regardless of what dances and ethnic/cultural communities the company represents, and the graceful body lines emphasize refined and flawless movement.

On the contrary, Obusan dancers change their body postures and attitudes according to dances and ethnic communities that the group represents so as to reflect a traditional manner of dancing as well as local aesthetics. The ROFG tries to lessen the effects of ballet and carefully imitate the movements of local/native performers not only by looking at patterns of dance steps and hand/arm movements of the original but also by trying to capture the posture and attitude of native dancers.

To the untrained eye of the audience, Bayanihan and ROFG might look similar, but if one actually goes through the process of learning dances, the differences become quite clear. The ROFG dance is quite tough to execute because the body parts that a dancer uses and moves, or the kinesthetic senses that a dancer has to develop, vary according to dances, and the group is meticulous in executing even small, nuanced movements, which might not be seen from the audience. One will know that the Bayanihan dances are much easier to execute because they are based on balletic form that is the basis for many of the western-derived dances, thus blurring the distinctiveness of local dances.

Take, for example, the "Pangalay" dance of Sulu. In the ROFG, the so-called broken-arm movement unique to the dance must be properly and beautifully executed. The broken-arm movement, common to Thai and Balinese dance styles, emphasizes a curve of the fingers and arm. The more curved and arched the line of the arm, the better and more beautiful it is. Flexibility of the joints is of utmost importance, but for those who do not have enough flexibility, it is a difficult task. The mincing/shredding (choppy/shrugging) movement of the shoulder also requires to shake the shoulder up and down, either the right shoulder or the left, sometimes as fast as possible and sometimes to the beat of the music. If it is both shoulders, it will be much easier; but if separate shoulder and faster, the

movement becomes more difficult. However, in Bayanihan, the skillful movements of the hands and arms and nuanced tenderness of the dance, when balleticized, become reduced to simple, large circular movements that are sharply executed with disruptive accents. The nuanced and minute movements are made bigger, and engulfed by the form of ballet.

The ROFG dancers are also taught to embody "natural" grace as exhibited by local performers. Therefore, their dance movements look so natural but seem to have no dynamics and, in short, might give the impression of being "ordinary" or "unprofessional," thus unattractive to the general audience. This is misleading because their natural and seemingly effortless "non-artificial" movements actually result from continuous training and practice, and it is, in fact, more difficult to achieve "ordinariness." I have seen many Obusan dancers who have acquired or internalized different kinesthetic senses of "other" ethnic/cultural communities in their own bodies and made them into something their own.

Dancer's physicality

The Bayanihan dancers have similar faces and body shapes since dancers are carefully screened and selected to conform with the company's standards in terms of height, body shape, skin complexion, age, and facial features—meaning, they must subscribe to a certain standard of beauty. When the similarity in physique is combined with their uniform movements and costumes and their precision on stage, a somewhat visually appealing image is created.

On the contrary, Obusan dancers are unsorted. As Obusan stated:

> other groups present the Filipinos as such strikingly beautiful people that it resembles a beauty pageant. I don't go for that kind of show.... My dancers have typical faces of typical Filipinos. (Balce 1998, p. 55)

In the Obusan group, there are various types of faces with all sorts of body types: mestizo and *moreno* (fair- and brown-skinned), tall and

small, thin and fat, and little kids to dancers in their 40s. Today, Obusan has Batang ROFG (ROFG kids) group, each member of which is trained to become a "musician-dancer" who can both dance and play music since early age. This wide range of physical types and ages is effectively put to use in portraying "real-life" people, enabling the group to produce a wider range of dance repertoires and productions. For example, in staging a Tausug (Jolo, Sulu) child wedding ritual, the stage is filled with a large number of children who perform different kinds of "Pangalay" dance. The children's unlearned dance movements are perfect for creating an illusion of a real ritual in the field.

Costumes

As I have mentioned earlier, the Bayanihan costumes are especially redesigned for stage use, and well fitted to dancer's body to emphasize the body line. The company has modernized and modified costumes by blurring cultural specificity of each ethnic group, and this often makes it difficult to identify the respective ethnic communities they represent, but their costumes still retain some essence of certain ethnic/cultural groups and capture the look of traditional attires.

In the ROFG, costumes, hair and body accessories, and hand props are also kept in their original or traditional forms as much as possible, and the respective costumes are used for ethnic/cultural communities. Some of them are antique pieces collected by Obusan, while other items are reproduced by the locals/natives of the area being represented—for example, weaves that they produce for commercial purpose. The ROFG sometimes duplicates the original based on careful research and close imitation. Naturally, many of the group's costumes are not specially designed for stage use and for the dancer's body. Therefore, certain techniques are required to put on and take off a complete set of costume and accessories within the short period of time allowed for changing outfits in between dances, and dancers also learn techniques in properly manipulating on stage the "non-stage-adapted" costumes, especially elegant Filipina gowns with long trail at the back.

Staging approaches/technologies

The Bayanihan's performance is beautifully interpreted, restaged, and presented for its artistic and entertainment quality. Bayanihan has sought to consistently execute exciting and thrilling performances to attract an international audience used to seeing sophisticated and entertaining theater productions. Acrobatic and gymnastic movements are more frequently incorporated to heighten excitement. One good example is "Sayaw sa Bangko," a dance performed by a couple on a bench.

Bayanihan's contemporary "Sayaw sa Bangko"

The original version was danced on only one wooden bench, about two feet high and eight inches wide. The benches are typical furniture pieces associated with the lower classes, simply constructed, not ornately designed, and used in daily life both indoors and outdoors. A couple stands atop the bench and would change places either by passing one another through the narrow width of the bench, or with the man supporting the woman as she jumps across. The man also twirls the woman around, and the dance is quite exciting because of the festive music, the lively movements, and the display of balance and skillful partnering of the couple. Bayanihan heightened the excitement of this dance with their recent re-choreography, which involves dancing on top of a pyramid of seven benches arranged to achieve a height of four levels, with dancers jumping artfully up and down several levels or jumping on, and over, benches in an exciting acrobatic display that requires balance, grace, athleticism, and precision.

In the mid-1990s, the company began to show its "changed and changing identity," to borrow the terms of Trimillos,[15] which indicates a departure from the previous Bayanihan. As Helena Benitez, the founder of Bayanihan, stated:

> Bayanihan has both to remain constant and to change and adapt. It has to remain constant and true to its mission of showcasing the best of Philippine culture and artistry. But it has to do this by making the changes needed to meet the preferences, expectations and

> requirements of an audience of a different century, an audience nurtured in high technology and the information age.[16]

The company began to experiment with new approach to its choreography, production design, costuming, and overall concept, presenting Hollywood-like stage effects and introducing new technology (such as projected images, lasers, and computers) to their productions to keep up with the world trend of theater arts and to reach out to the younger generation. In doing so, what used to be a classic dance repertoire of Philippine folk dance was recreated into a new-looking dance, like the Bayanihan's "Maglalatik," one of the iconic dances of Philippine folk dance.

"Maglalatik" dance: The Bayanihan's treatment

"Maglalatik," a popular number of the rural dance suite, is a unique dance that involves male dancers with coconuts shells attached to various parts of their bodies that are tapped by shells in their hands to the beat of music while vigorously dancing. The dance is fun and exciting because of the quick movements of the hands from the clicking on shells strapped to the knee, then to the hips, the chest, and the shoulder blades, in rapid succession. The accompanying clicking sound adds a festive flavor to the experience. This is a popular version of "Maglalatik" performed by the ROFG and other folk dance troupes. But Bayanihan decided to heighten the excitement even further. Unlike the typical entrance for "Maglalatik," which involves male dancers cheerfully entering the stage as a group, the Bayanihan version starts dramatically: a solo male dancer stands on the dark stage with a spotlight on him. Sometimes, smoke is used as an additional effect. He starts clicking coconut shells in slow motion and in silence without any music accompaniment. Then he gradually increases his tempo, eventually clicking faster and faster, until the rest of the dancers accompanied by lively music burst into the stage. The transitions from silence to lively music, from darkness to a bright stage, and from a lone dancer moving slowly to a larger group moving vigorously, achieve a dramatic and captivating theater experience.

In Bayanihan's performance, individual dances are generally shown one after another as a dance piece, detached from the larger cultural context and functions of dance. The ROFG also uses this standard delivery format, but Obusan has tried to recontextualize a dance event by bringing in the larger cultural context where a dance is originally embedded. Dance is often presented within a larger ethnographic narrative—such as wedding, death, childbirth, circumcision, healing ritual, or feast—and a community or village scene is usually reproduced on the stage. Thus the group's dance is technically not a dance piece but rather a dance drama.

Since lots of ethnographic information/knowledge is embedded in their performance, the group recently calls this kind of performance as "Informance"—a combination of two terms: "information" and "performance." Take, for example, the Yakan wedding called "*pagkawin*" of Basilan, Sulu. In chronological sequence, Obusan was able to show the whole process of the wedding in 15-20 minutes while highlighting different phases of the wedding ceremony—such as the preparation of the bride and groom, a parade to the bride's house, the villagers' preparation of the wedding venue, the wedding rite and a feast—without putting in any complicated choreography and theatrical movements. ROFG's recontextualization of the Yakan wedding proceeds in the following manner:

The "Pansak" dance of the Yakan people

On the stage, a fully dressed Yakan groom is being attended to by a female assistant who applies traditional makeup on his face. She puts white dots and lines in various patterns all over his face. The groom wears his kris or sword on his waist to complete his preparation for his wedding. Preceded by the colorful *panji* and *tipas-tipas* banners, a parade of male warriors and Yakan ladies who are carrying food covered with a decorative *tutop*[17] starts out, followed by the groom, who is standing on the shoulders of male attendant and followed by a black umbrella holder. After the parade, the *tumahik*, or warrior dance, is performed by males using a

spear and a rounded wooden shield. Then the bride in a decorated *usugan*, or small, houselike carrier, parades in with her female attendants. She is carried out of the usugan by a male attendant and brought to the ceremonial place. Then the wedding ritual starts. The groom takes plain rice with his fingers, and tries to feed the bride, but she turns it down. He tries again, but she turns it down again. The third time, she accepts his offer and shyly eats the rice from his fingers. Now, he puts a white towel on her shoulder, but she throws it on the floor. He tries again, but she throws it likewise. The third time, she accepts it, and starts dancing "Pindulas," a sort of "Pangalay," which is characterized by the broken-arm movement and angular movement of palms. Everybody on stage celebrates the couple with *pansak*, which literally means "to dance." While dancing, the couple together plays a musical instrument called *tuntungan*, a unique percussion plank with a jar-shaped resonator.

A performance by the ROFG is thus culturally specific, hence a narration or voice-over is often provided before or during the performance. Although the group also uses modern technologies, the purpose of their use is mainly educative and to provide additional information and guide so that the audience can properly interpret and understand their performance and gain deeper understanding of little-known Filipino traditions. Recently, the ROFG has adopted audiovisual presentations, showing video footages of Obusan's fieldwork, which provides a visual image of the original that the group researched.

These performances are, however, usually staged only for its seasonal performances at the CCP, and thus mainly designed and meant for the national/local audience, especially those who are based in Manila—that is, Christian-Filipinos. For their seasonal performance, the group has produced various programs that deal with specific themes such as ritual roots ("Ritual Roots: Unpublished Dances of the Philippines Series 5," 2006), life cycle ("Pag-inog, Pag-indak, Pagdiwang," 2009), and rituals of leadership and prestige ("Pamunuan: Karangyaan at Kadakilaan," 2010). Through these theme-specific dance productions that do not employ the typical five-suite representational format, the group tries to look back

into the traditional customs, values, and aesthetics of "other" fellow Filipinos as well as their own to search for what can be called "essence"—deep-rooted and shared by all Filipinos regardless of differences in religion, culture, and language.

Different perspectives of national identity, multifaceted effects of hybridity

As we have seen, Bayanihan has progressively theatricalized Philippine folk dance by incorporating "new" and "modern" things to keep up with the world trend of theater arts and to reach out to a wider audience. In the process, internal cultural differences among ethnic/cultural communities are blurred to create one essential national character. In particular, the use of basic postures and positions of ballet as the basis for performing all local dances has produced a sense of unity among all different dances, further contributing to the creation of a common sense of Filipino-ness. On the contrary, the ROFG has rather traditionalized Philippine folk dance by going back to distinctive local tradition and aesthetics, and incorporating more "traditional" elements. The group's strategy of emphasizing cultural difference and specificity has shaped and defined cultural identity of each ethnic/cultural community, which reorients to multicultural society of the Philippines. Through closely looking into old traditions of various ethnic/cultural communities, the group seeks to reconstruct the essence of "Filipino-ness" that withstands historical/cultural changes. This idea is based on the assumption that an "original" or "pure" Filipino culture previously existed, and this must have been better preserved in indigenous culture, which is less influenced by western culture.

The concern of the ROFG for purity or authenticity may be understandable, given the historical process in which Philippine folk dance was produced and developed. In a country like Indonesia, for example, the so-called traditional or classical forms of dance were well developed and well established before local artists embarked on experimenting with new or modern elements or technologies. The artists may be well aware of what

is traditional or classical and what is not. Local dances in the Philippines, however, when popularized in the late 1950s, were already modernized and innovated when presented in a program prior to the establishment or codification of solid cultural base or traditional forms of dance. In other words, the Philippine folk dance started with highly theatricalized form of dance. In this context, the ROFG has tried to restore and codify traditional forms of dances looking into the dances found in the field, although technically these "original" dances might not be traditional and authentic anymore. However, the presence of the two dance companies provides the idea of theatrical and traditional performances and thus effectively reconstructs a classification of "modern" and "traditional."

The Bayanihan's version of hybridity, which is aesthetically pleasing but unable to sustain cultural authenticity, however, has sometimes generated criticism, especially from local communities as well as a small circle of dance scholars and newspaper critics who regard it as too theatricalized and commercialized. But, with its innovative and creative performances, the company has constantly gone out on international tour and won several international awards to prove the "world-class" artistry of the Filipino to the outside world. The company's success in an international sphere subsequently brings national pride back to Filipinos, from which a sense of Filipino identity is drawn.

After Bayanihan was officially designated as the "national" folk dance company in 1998 through Republic Act 8626, it seems that the roles of Bayanihan and ROFG have diverged. Their different performance styles with varying traditions of hybridization now serve different sets of audiences and exist for different needs and purposes of the state and the nation. Bayanihan more frequently appears in international events hosted by the state, and more often goes out of the country as a cultural representative of the Philippines, whereas the ROFG focuses on performances within the country and specializes in "specific" folk dance productions to produce and provide cultural knowledge on Filipino traditional culture for educational purposes. In other words, Bayanihan has come to represent Filipino hybrid identity to the world through the creativity and artistry of

contemporary Filipinos having the ability to combine western/foreign arts and local dance forms to create a unique Filipino art work. The ROFG shows the hybrid identity through heterogeneous cultural composition of the nation with emphasis on the artistry of Filipino traditional artists who have developed their own unique cultures through years by incorporating various external cultural influences, from which a sense of Filipino identity grows. The two aspects of Filipino hybrid identity produced by the two dance companies are thus used by the state for different purposes and shown differently for different audiences: Bayanihan for the international audience, and the ROFG for the national or local audience.

Conclusion

In the Philippines, the concept of hybridity is an important constituent of national identity and aesthetic style, and also a useful strategy to symbolically contain all different cultural communities. Some scholars (Alonso 2004; Kuortti & Nyman 2007) discussed and warned that hybridity, when linked to nationalism or state power, might be seen as a hegemonic, neocolonial project that tries to expand the cultural values of the dominant group—in this case, the dominant hegemonic values of Christian Filipinos. However, as we have seen, the idea of hybrid identity represented and communicated by the two folk dance companies is not authoritative and monolithic. They have developed two contrasting traditions of hybridization that show different perspectives toward the idea of nation and a sense of national identity. Bayanihan, a pioneer folk dance company of the Philippines, has mainly drawn its idea from western or universal theater/stage arts and progressively theatricalized by incorporating "new" and "modern" elements into local dance forms. On the contrary, the ROFG has mainly drawn its idea from local dance forms and theater by going back to the original source, and has incorporated more "traditional" elements in its theater performance. Today's academic discourse on hybridity emphasizes that all cultures are hybrid, thus there is no "pure" and "essential" culture. But to a country like the Philippines whose "original" culture is hardly traced and defined, the idea of purity, or rather the desire

for purity, may still be important. A dance company like the ROFG still seeks to trace the roots of Filipinos to or draw "Filipino-ness" from old traditions and local aesthetics existing in the country whereas Bayanihan tries to draw a new sense of "Filipino-ness" from its innovative and creative performances, which prove the world-class artistry of the Filipino. These two aspects of hybrid identity are then creatively and effectively used by the state according to different demands and needs at international and national levels, and depending on what image/idea of the Philippines it wishes to propagate.

Notes

1 There is no unified or official term for this specific genre of national folk dancing in the Philippines, and it is sometimes interchangeably called just Philippine dance.

2 The Spanish-influenced suite is sometimes called "Maria Clara" suite because of the westernized costume named after a heroine of a famous novel, *Noli Me Tangere*, by the Philippine national hero, Jose Rizal. This suite shows Filipino versions of jota, polka, waltz, fandango, habanera, etc., which were introduced to the lowland Philippines during the Spanish period.

3 Lumad means "native" or "indigenous" in Visayan, one of native languages in the central part of the Philippines.

4 "Tinikling" is a very popular Philippine folk dance. Named after the *tikling* (heron) bird, it is a game dance in which dancers dart in and out of clapped bamboo poles without their feet being caught.

5 "Pandanggo sa Ilaw" is also a very popular Philippine folk dance, in which dancers balance oil lamps on their head and palms while dancing.

6 The Philippine Women's University is one of earliest institutions that advocated the revival movements of folk dances and songs initiated by the University of the Philippines in the 1930s.

7 The other participating countries were Pakistan, Indonesia, Burma, Malaya, and Thailand.

8 The Bayanihan delegation presented 35 folk dances and songs in two weeks.

9 The delegation was supposed to use a piano for accompaniment of their presentation. Lucrecia R. Kasilag, the head of the delegation, asked festival organizers, but they did not have a piano for an "Asian" cultural festival; only the guitar was available (de Guzman 1987, p. 81).

10 This is Bayanihan's interpretation. Other dance troupes, like Sining Pananadem based in Mindanao State University–Marawi, interprets that "singkil" means, in local language, to entangle the feet with disturbing objects such as vines or anything in your path.

11 *Bae* is a local title used for a noble woman in Maranao society. It is often interpreted as "princess," but strictly speaking, the word has no equivalent term in English.

12 Personal interview with Hoffer, July 2003.

13 To note, there are several interpretations of the "Singkil." Obusan interprets "Singkil" as a wedding dance performed with a brief ritual at the beginning. The "Singkil" of the Philippine Barangay Folkdance Troupe, based on Aquino's research, portrays a prince dancing with scarves instead of a sword and shield.

14 Other popular touring companies are the Philippine Barangay Folk Dance Troupe, FEU Dance Group, Filipinescas, and Leyte Kalipayan Dance Company (then Leyte Filipiniana Dance Troupe).

15 Taken from a review by Trimillos of Bayanihan's performance in Hawaii in 2001, which appeared in "Bayanihan Déjà Vu" written by Belinda Aquino for the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (December 19, 2001).

16 Taken from a souvenir program.

17 Tutop is a dome-shaped colorful food cover made of bamboo leaves.

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