KULINTANG STATESIDE: ISSUES ON AUTHENTICITY OF TRANSFORMED MUSICAL TRADITIONS CONTEXTUALIZED WITHIN THE GLOBAL/LOCAL TRAFFIC

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ABSTRACT

A resurgence of interest in the Philippine gongs and drum tradition called kulintang took place in the United States from the late twentieth century. It is performed in its traditional style but has also seen several transformations. This study examines the popularity of the kulintang among Filipino American academics, artists, and the youth. It seeks to answer questions about the authenticity of traditions, as they are transported into an unfamiliar territory and given new forms of dynamism by individuals or groups for their own immediate needs to locate their identities.

The concepts of authenticity and the traditional are becoming more and more slippery in this globalized age. When situated within the phenomena of transnational movements of people and swift exchanges between cultural practices, it becomes impossible to adhere to a fixed definition of what are authentic and traditional without essentializing the culture bearers or "ethnic artists."

This paper takes into account the present transnational and global conditions in answering the questions of "what is authentic" and "what is traditional" in music. It acknowledges the inevitability of redefining these concepts as personal needs change in historical and cultural contexts, and how individual choices for creativity and self-identification are limited and affected by transnational flows. The paper calls for a pluralistic view of the kulintang tradition, as it is bounded by the authenticity of its new bearers.

Keywords: *Kulintang, Filipino-American Music, Transnationalism, Globalization, Authenticity, Tradition*

Kulintang is by far the most well-known indigenous Philippine tradition in the United States.[1] This study examines the popularity of the kulintang among Filipino American academics, artists, and the youth. It seeks to answer questions about the authenticity of traditions as they are transported into an unfamiliar territory and given new forms of dynamism by individuals or groups for their own immediate needs to locate their identities. The study is based on my dissertation on an emergent youth musical culture in Tacoma, Washington called *Tunog-PiLAM* (Costes 2005). A section is also devoted to other instances of kulintang transformations in different contexts among Filipino Americans.

My methodological approach to this study has been influenced by the New Ethnography developed within the field of cultural anthropology—an approach that bears the influences of cultural studies theories of culture and responsive to the challenges of the new global system.[2] In this new global system, local subjects become as much as global and transnational, and localities become disrupted by notions that view it as relational and contextual, rather than scalar and spatial (Appadurai, 1996).

This study also employs ethnomusicological theories of "music in culture" (Alan Merriam 1964) and "music as an activity" (Small 1987, 1998). Both approaches are consistent with my aim of writing in the new ethnography: that Merriam's theory draws connections between the musicological and the ethnological and Small's *musicking* emphasizes music as performance, thus foregrounding the importance of the circumstances surrounding the production of sound as music.

To contextualize the study, I created a narrative weaving my personal involvement with the Filipino American community whenever relevant, specifically the introduction of kulintang to the youth group Tunog-PiL-AM. Renato Rosaldo (1989, 1993) once said that "social analysts can rarely, if ever, become detached observers;" following this logic, I would like to point out that, as a social critic, I am very much connected to the Filipino American community and, therefore, subjectivity in the analysis is a possibility. This is also a way to distance from the classic academic studies that appear to be detached from their subjects from which the resulting study claims to be an objective report to seek validity. Thus, I would like you, the readers, to consider the facts presented here and understand the multiple perspectives that went into the reading of the phenomenon which I would call *Kulintang Stateside.*

CLAIMING OWNERSHIP: WHOSE TRADITION IS THE KULINTANG?

Most Filipino-American learners of kulintang actually rediscovered their "cultural roots" almost at the same time or even before I did. The youth in Tunog PiL-AM, for instance, were only nine to fifteen years old when I introduced the kulintang to them during the time that I was completing my graduate work at the University of Washington. I was seventeen when I first immersed myself in the beauty of my own music: first, by admiring and hearing; then, later on, by actively performing.

But this claim of "own" music is also problematic in the Philippine context for the kulintang has always been associated with the Muslim communities of Southern Philippines, specifically Cotobato and Lanao. Professor and ethnomusicologist Robert Garfias remarked to me in an interview that "change is inevitable but the kulintang is not really theirs (Filipino Americans with ancestors who are non-Muslims). I think they are closer to the hill peoples with individual gongs playing in interlocking patterns; more collaboration and cooperation. The Muslims, on the other hand, they have a hierarchical society thus the layered sound in the kulintang. They have different playing styles" (personal interview, 27 April 2003).

The kulintang tradition, however, is not associated with any Muslim rituals or traditions, but a part of the pre-Islamic indigenous gong and drum traditions in the Philippines.[3] It is said to have survived in the largely Muslim Mindanao because of the island's successful resistance to the Spanish colonizers between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries.

With regards to learning the kulintang, the difference among the Filipino Americans and between the youth group and me is the source of knowledge of the tradition, and how thorough the methods of transmission were. There is also the difference of motive for learning aside from curiosity. As a music scholar, the depth of interest would naturally be different from mere curiousity.

With this background, I wish to contextualize the ensuing analysis on the various ways that kulintang is owned by its current practitioners in the United States. It will also be emphasized that the discussion to follow is a combination of personal views and facts on the kulintang and its hybridities in the hands of Filipino-Americans, specifically Filipino-American youth. Through this

narrative, my own presence and contribution to the emergent style of this youth ensemble will be accounted for, thus drawing together three perspectives: ethnographer, subject and reader.[4] It is my intention to bring out the different ideologies that are pertinent in talking about the issues of authenticity and the traditional in this specific music practice. The reading of the situation based on the facts gathered may also be understood as coming from my own experiences as a learner and practitioner of the kulintang.

FIRST GLIMPSES: THE KULINTANG'S JOURNEY TO THE UNITED STATES

Traditional music and dance from the Maguindanao, Maranao and Tausug peoples of Mindanao Island, Southern Philippines

The Performers:

Danongan Kalanduyan is a master musician, ethnomusicologist and cultural consultant on Muslim-Filipino culture, and he is the only master artist of Maguindanao kulintang music in the United States. (www.kulintang.com/pke)

However, due to the work of master musicians, such as Master Danongan Kalanduyan and Usopay Cadar, kulintang music has had a revival of sorts. They are responsible for bringing kulintang music to the shores of the United States during the late twentieth century in an attempt to use the music to help connect contemporary Filipino-American culture with ancient tribal traditions.
(en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kolintang)

Here are a dozen or so kulintang ensembles in the United States associated with university ethnomusicology programs or Filipino cultural organizations, including several in California, where Filipinos are the largest Asian population.
(www.actaonline.org/grants_and_programs/apprenticeships/1999/kalanduyan.htm)

Master musician and ethnomusicologist Danongan Kalanduyan is the only expert on Southern Filipino music living in the United States. In " Global Village," Spark catches a glimpse of the master at work, as he teaches a class on Maguindanao, Maranao and Tausug tribal music and dance at San Francisco State University.
(www.kqed.org/arts/programs/spark/profile.jsp?essid=4324)

The Tufts Festival of Southeast Asian Music, sponsored by the Department of Music, presents music and dance of the Philippines and Cambodia, featuring kulintang, on Sunday, 23 November at 3 p.m. Also part of the festival, the Boston Village Gamelan will perform on Saturday, 22 November at 8 p.m. Both performances are free and will take place in the Granoff Music Center's Distler Performance Hall.
(tuftsjournal.tufts.edu/2008/11_1/features/02/)

A Yahoo or Google search nowadays under 'kulintang in the United States' will receive 28,100 hits. There are also numerous video clips posted in YouTube of Filipino Americans playing the kulintang. The above quotes were just among the recent top searches, but there are more performance announcements, workshops and Filipino-Americans performing on the kulintang, fusion or modern music mixed with kulintang, etc. There is no argument that the Philippine kulintang is the most well-known indigenous music from the Philippines in the United States. But this phenomenon proliferated only in the latter part of the twentieth century and, by the early 2000s, its popularity accelerated with the increase of Filipino Americans taking up kulintang as an instrument and writing scholarly studies about it, legitimized by graduate degrees from prestigious universities such as the UCLA and University of Hawaii.[5] Efforts by these kulintang learners and scholars to impart what they know to the younger generation also helped in its rapid spread in popularity. Kulintang has become very popular in the United States, so that there are probably more kulintang players there than in the Philippines.[6]

In all the search hits, there is one name that pops up in most entries—Danongan Sibay Kalanduyan. All other Filipino-American kulintang performers will mention their association with Danny or *guro* (teacher), as he is fondly called by those who know him. In a lot of ways, performing kulintang in the United States will need a stamp of Danny's name to earn credibility and legitimacy. Danny is a master musician of the kulintang, and one of the remaining few Maguindanaons who trained in the traditional way of performing on the instrument. He is a consistent champion in local village competitions when he was still in his youth. Danny is, by far, the most prolific player of the kulintang whom I have met, and, indeed, Filipino-Americans are very fortunate to have him as their mentor. According to him, it was only after he became the 1995 National

Endowment for the Arts (NEA) National Heritage Fellowship Awardee that his popularity among Filipino Americans escalated. At present, Danny is considered as the only master musician in the kulintang tradition in the United States.[7]

I would like to note, at this point, that the style that Filipino-Americans learned from Danny is quite different from mine, since I was trained at the University of the Philippines with the methodologies of ethnomusicologists Felicidad Prudente, Kristina Benitez and Aga Mayo Butocan—the only Maguindanaon university resident artist there in the early to midnineties. When listening to the pieces of Filipino-American kulintang players, however, there is not much difference with the ones I have learned, making it really hard to pinpoint styles. It seemed like either Danny obtained some of the materials of Aga Mayo and the University of the Philippines or the Filipino-Americans who went to the Philippines obtained the materials for themselves. It is only when Danny himself plays that I am treated to an improvisational style which is very new to me. The most important element of improvisation in the kulintang is yet to be demonstrated by kulintang learners from the Philippines and the United States.[8]

Kulintang music was the first Philippine indigenous music that was introduced to the Filipino Americans. The University of Washington was the first institution in the United States to have a kulintang ensemble as part of its Visiting Artists Program. Prof. Robert Garfias started this program in the midsixties to provide an opportunity for UW students to learn the musics of the world from master musicians. Each year, two artists are invited by the university to provide musical lessons in their areas of expertise. In addition, some international Ethnomusicology graduate students are asked to teach the music of their national traditions, if they have developed mastery of them. I was a beneficiary of this program under the second category.

Through the John D. Rockefeller Third Fund grant (JDR Fund), Garfias brought Usopay Cadar, a Maranao scholar-musician, to the United States in 1968; and, later on, Danongan Kalanduyan, a Maguindanaon master musician in 1976. But this musical introduction initially did not have any influence among Filipino American communities comparable to that of the visiting dance troupe called *Bayanihan*, which started travelling to the U.S. as early as 1959, and which was the group that primarily painted a vivid

image of the Philippine Muslim south in the minds of Filipino Americans through stylized kulintang music and dances (Gonzalves 2010; Gaerlan, 1999; Trimillos, 1985).

Visiting performing troupes from the Philippines remain the models for Filipino American cultural groups and the Bayanihan is, perhaps, the most prominent group to have affected the way Filipino dance and music are understood by Filipino Americans. The Bayanihan is a folkloric dance troupe that achieved international prominence in 1958 in their overseas debut at the Brussels Universal Exposition (Lardizabal, Guillermo, Santos & Feleo, 1987). Some studies on the Bayanihan stated, that during the Marcos era in the Philippines, the dance troupe have allegedly been used to elevate the government's reputation abroad. According to Barbara Gaerlan (1999), the Bayanihan was used to promote the political agenda of the Marcos dictatorship during the Martial Law as an effort to soften the negative image of the Philippine government in foreign countries, especially Islamic ones, in the way the indigenous peoples of the country were incorporated into its politics. The Bayanihan became world-renowned, astonishing the western world with the talents of Filipinos.

The problematic aspect in this pioneering group, as criticized by Gaerlan (1999), Talusan (1999) and Cadar (1970), was the way the indigenous traditions were rendered theatrically, appropriating in the process the traditions they meant to represent. Talusan (1999) noted specifically how the southern kulintang music was appropriated to the point that it was robbed of its essence. Music, in traditional cultures, maintains its own integrity and structure, but in the Bayanihan dances the kulintang was composed and arranged in order to emphasize the dance with the music serving as mere background. As the group's composer herself stated: "In Bayanihan we strive to be faithful to the original traditions. But since Bayanihan is also theater, indigenous and folk music is raised to a theatrical level. This is accomplished by creating accents–by means of instrumentation, tone color and intensity–to enhance the music" (Kasilag, 1987).

One of the primary spaces, wherein Filipino Americans recreate the 'home' that is the Philippines is through dance. Music became incidental to dance, not because they do not have any interest in it but simply because the models that they emulate from the distant motherland tend to relegate music as a background to dance.

The Philippines remain the main source for cultural needs among Filipino Americans, and transnational linkages to the country become a vital part of their common identity. Anything that comes from the Philippines feeds their cultural hunger, and internationally recognized performing troupes are regarded as legitimate sources of the traditions. Especially for the American-born young people, learning the dances became a vehicle for getting closer to the heritage that they only hear about from their parents. As Gonzalves (1997) observed about the popular Pilipino Cultural Nights (PCN) on college campuses, where the youth perform Philippine history through dances copied from the folkloric dance troupes from the Philippines, "Those highly successful dance presentations have translated as a model for younger PCN organizers eager to demonstrate the authenticity of Philippine cultural symbols" (175). It is important to reiterate that these "models" present exoticized versions of Philippine cultures, designed to please the Western gaze. And so Philippine culture that most Filipino Americans will proudly copy contributes to this orientalizing process (Said, 1978), at the same time essentializing what are Filipino and Filipino American.

Filipino Americans did not remain copycats of Philippine folkloric dance troupes, however. These groups, although bearers of spectacle and appropriated traditions, triggered the consciousness among Filipino-Americans about their cultural roots. What started as curiosity, amazement and copying evolved into new traditions, using the kulintang as a medium of the unique expressions of their hybridities. Most university-based or university graduate-led kulintang ensembles still try to remain true to the tradition as practiced in Mindanao. However, I have seen how they have also ventured boldly into fusing their kulintang skills to experimental situations.

For example, ethnomusicologists Mary Talusan-Lacanlale and Bernard Ellorin, with their Pakaraguian Kulintang Ensemble, played for the famous Apl.de.Ap—a Filipino-American member of the hip hop group "Black Eyed Peas," to record kulintang music for his upcoming solo album. Mary Talusan also collaborated in live performances with e:trinity, a Filipino American artist who pushed electronica's boundaries to include sounds from Asia, including the kulintang. His debut album's carrying single was called "Sinulog 2000" which included kulintang music from his visit to the Philippines. e:trinity's music also included samplings from pop music

from the Philippines, such as Jolina Magdangal and Lea Salonga, as well as music as performed by the Bayanihan and the Kontra-Gapi.[9] There is also Ron Quesada, a student of Danny at San Francisco State University, who describes his music as kulintronica combining music styles he has learned, such as electronic music, live looping, electric guitar, oktavina, ukulele, with the kulintang as the main melodic instrument. He has released two mixtapes—Agung Dream (2006) and Year of the Gong (2008)—and has planned to have a full-length album debut in 2009.[10]

In the contemporary music and jazz scene, Electric Kulintang started to claim its own niche. It is a husband-and-wife duo that mixes the kulintang with computer sounds and actual ambient sounds collected from fieldwork in the Philippines. Filipino-American Susie Ibarra and her Cuban-American husband Roberto Rodriguez released their debut album *Dialects* in 2007, and have performed extensively since then around the United States as well as internationally. They claim their music to be genre-defying, and their music is described as "Filipino Trance Music" or "Filipino Triphop" (Elliott, 2008; Lee, 2007).[11]

On the indie rock side of the Asian American music scene, Eleanor Academia has been making waves with her Oracle of the Black Swan (1998) album. She regards the kulintang as a percussive instrument that could work well for her hard-rock predilection in music-making. She has also produced the first traditional kulintang album in the United States with Danongan Kalanduyan and Aga Mayo Butocan in Kulintang: Ancient Gong/Drum Music from the Southern Philippines (1994), funded by the National Endowment for the Arts.[12]

All these experimentations with the kulintang would either maintain its full structure, as the artists fuse it with other instruments or would utilize the sound of the gongs and kulintang rhythmic/melodic elements for artistic and creative purposes. A lot of the fusion also involves western instruments or technology, while other expressions maintain as close as possible to the traditional five-player ensemble, with dances they have also learned from either Danny or Usopay. Some known traditional kulintang groups are Pakaraguian formed in 2003 by UCLA Fil-Am Ethnomusicology students; Mahalo-halo, which plays mostly Maranao style, as advised by Usopay Cadar; and Danny's own Palabuniyan Kulintang Ensemble (PKE).

The important questions to ask now are: (1) what happens to the kulintang tradition when used in different ways, aside from its original context?, (2) can we still call the music they play as authentic with these innovations, even though they maintain the integrity of the kulintang's musical function? Is this still the language of kulintang?, (3) why is there a need to transform the kulintang, and what benefit does it give to both the kulintang and the new emergent music?, and (4) are the Filipino- American traditional ensembles really traditional? What is traditional?

To address these questions, I would like to turn to a case study of the Tunog PiL-AM ensemble of Tacoma, WA—the group I had the privilege of meeting while looking into the processes of transformations and creation from its beginnings.

THREADING THE CROSSROADS OF THE GLOBAL/LOCAL TRAFFIC: TRANSFORMATIONS AND CREATION OF AN EMERGENT FILIPINO AMERICAN MUSIC TRADITION

Tunog PiL-AM (Tunog Pilipinong Lumad ng Amerika or Sound of the Filipino Natives of America) is a group of 15 young people, 12 to 23 years old, from Tacoma, Washington.[13] The count varies as members change from time to time. There are, however, core members of nine who have been with the group, since its inception in October 1999. Thus, I have known the members since they were in their early teens, and have seen the changes in their interests about the kulintang over the years. The direction that the ensemble took produced a musical phenomenon unique to Filipino Americans. In a lot of ways, Tunog PiL-AM is different from the emerging traditions using the kulintang, because this is the only youth group consisting of members at a very young age that fuses kulintang music with other Philippine indigenous traditions. The emergent style is not electronic or western instrument/genre-based, but an expansion of the kulintang ensemble, using only Philippine instruments.[14]

Unlike the other Filipino American groups I mentioned previously, since the members of Tunog PiL-AM were very young, the group's ability to promote on its own encountered a lot of problems. As a result, the original members' desire to take their art further and travel to other states did not really materialize.[15] Since the ensemble is also an offshoot of a local Filipino nonprofit organization, the Filipino-American familial-based community

thinking also limited the aspirations of the general membership to expand and be more inclusive of other non-Filipino communities. When the ensemble became independent from its organizational host, the Pilipino American Youth Organization (PAYO), the intention was to have a Fil-Am nonprofit organization which would be different from the usual parent-run ones. The new organization, called Filipino American Youth Centre for Culture and the Arts (FAYCCA), which I helped found, was meant to be youth-led. But the theory did not live up to the practice, and the young members who were used to having the parents take care of everything became overwhelmed. We knew it would take getting used to, but after three years, just when some restructuring was already in place, a new chapter in the members' lives took place. I, as their musical director, had to move to Singapore and a lot of the members had to go to college, enter military service or work. When the original members entered college, most of them took a different direction in their lives and regarded their Tunog PiL-AM days as simply a memorable experience and encounter in their tender teen years. These were not passive years, however, as their experiences with the group left a significant mark in their identities as Filipinos in the US. The members who were left and had a desire to continue encountered difficulties in getting the community to support their endeavours, which is largely due to the past politics involved in the formation of the group within the Tacoma Filipino American organizations.[16]

Tunog PiL-AM is worth analyzing more closely than the other older Filipino-American kulintang-based groups, since the circumstances surrounding the transformation of their style is based on the following factors: (1) this is the only youth group of this kind to date, (2) the musical director is not initially influenced by Danny Kalanduyan and not Filipino American, and (3) this is the only group that transformed the kulintang genre, using only Philippine indigenous musics. We will find that the motive for forming the group is also slightly different from the more academic-influenced ensembles; it is rooted deeply in the Filipino American style of nonprofit community organizations. With these differences, we can expect to look deeper into the problem of appropriation of traditions through modernization. The creative expression is blurred by the fact that the music can sound very Filipino enough to the uninitiated, because of the pure use of indigenous instruments and the presence of a director/composer who is not Filipino American. The young ages of the members also made them

susceptible to merely following instructions from an adult. So is Tunog PiL-AM a good representative of the sound of the Filipino natives of America?

My answer to this would be, yes, it is not only a good representative of the Filipino American sound but is also historical. For although the style for the moment has not been continued, it has successfully marked a new chapter in the history of kulintang's development in the United States.[17] It is evident that Tunog PiL-AM is an excellent example of a manifestation of direct transnational encounters and their effects on musical change or creation. It is a phenomenon that cannot be realized, without the necessary players and historical opportunities in place. The style is different and the direction it has taken may not be the same from the more adult individuals cited in the previous section, but that is because this particular Filipino-American community has learned kulintang with me, a university-trained kulintang practitioner, and the interests of the young members are very different from the more mature players. There are, however, several similarities that we can find between the Tunog PiL-AM situation and the more scholarly and artistically based ensembles which directly affected the development of the kulintang in the United States. First, the interest to delve deeper into the kulintang and Philippine traditions had been triggered by someone or some group from the Philippines. Second, this interaction resulted into different styles creating the different profiles of Filipino-American kulintang players.

The context of the familial-based Filipino-American organizations, and the initial intention of simply performing to look "cool" on stage is very far from those who have approached Danny Kalanduyan, with the purpose of studying the kulintang not just for performance but for academic pursuits or to make it a source to expand their artistry. Filipino-American organizations are significant sites, where imaginings of the Philippines as a home materialize. As a concrete manifestation of imagined homes, the relationships within an organization, like the FAYCCA, have become reflections of the Filipino concept of family. This familial foundation remains to define most of the Filipino-American organizations, especially in Tacoma. The creation of Tunog PiL-AM is an attempt of the youth to step outside of this box, and take more control of their identities as they are represented through cultural performances.

My entry into the picture, even after Danny and Usopay taught kulintang at the University of Washington some twenty and

thirty years, respectively, before me, proved to be an eye-opener to the stagnant music and dance scene in this state. Just the same, as with the rest of the United States, the traditional kulintang had been embraced slowly and had to wait for the generation who would genuinely seek their roots. The instructors and parents who were the mentors of this youth group all espoused the spectacular model of the Bayanihan. When I played the kulintang for a group of about eighty to a hundred young teenagers in a school gym, I saw their faces lit up. When they actually learned to play them (initially in the traditional five-player ensemble), none of them left the group until its expansion to the Tunog PiL-AM sound. One of the members told me later on when asked what attracted them to the group: "It is not ordinary that we hear gongs and those drum beats and patterns. I have never seen those instruments before (Mira Caintic, age 15, personal communication, 09/03)." Many more statements like this were expressed by not only group members, but their Filipino parents as well.

This irony of learning only the stylized forms of Bayanihan dancing despite the presence of the traditional kulintang in the United States from the late sixties has a deeper root in the history of the Philippines, specifically the dynamics between the catholicized majority and the Muslim minority,[18] as well as the complexities of the new global age, opening up choices for subjective identification.

Arjun Appadurai (1996) brought to our awareness the significant roles that media and migration play in the production of modern subjectivities. He specifically mentioned how electronic media transformed the field of mass mediation, and how "they offer new resources and new disciplines for the construction of imagined selves and imagined worlds." Certain problematics ought to be considered in looking at this central role of media and migration in the creation of imagined selves and worlds. First, it is important to note that, although electronic media and movement of ideas and people opened a pool of resources for individuals' production of subjectivities, this act of selection, although seemingly free, is not a privileged choice. The "choices" available are also controlled and manipulated; and hard as it is to accept, we are still playing in the battlefield of hegemony and ideology, meaning, our choices are also dictated by something beyond our control. Thus, the word "imagination," rather than "free will," is more appropriate to describe what we subjectively make of our identities.[19]

In all this, the point is not to privilege those who control the media or modes of travel, rather, I would like to point out the fact that the choices available in the market do not have to be those of the privileged. There are numerous manifestations, wherein the underprivileged disrupts this monopoly, and thus put out choices in the supermarket fashioned after their needs. These choices actually become "alternatives" that further illuminate the fact that hegemony is not absolute, that it is a terrain of contestation where power struggles are challenged and enacted (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985).

Several assumptions within the global/local traffic are challenged in the Tunog Pil-Am situation. The first of these is the assumption that the First World and dominant majority are more cosmopolitan and privileged than the Third World and subordinate minority. Although this is, in most cases, a fact, in the Filipino American youth situation, the so-called Third World is the one who has to travel and migrate in order to influence their musical creations.

Unlike the adult and artist/scholar learners of the kulintang, the youth members of Tunog Pil-Am rarely have a chance to visit the Philippines, and do not have first-hand experiences to learn indigenous cultural traditions. It took immigrants who have some knowledge of the dances, traveling performing groups from the lowland and visiting scholars to impart the distant heritage which the youth are yearning for. Moreover, because of the scarcity of resources on anything Filipino in the United States, including recorded indigenous musics performed by legitimate sources,[20] anything that is able to fill this cultural void is welcome and immediately embraced as "authentic" Filipino. Choices within the Philippine cultural supermarket are, thus, very limited, and usually saturated by commercially produced musics performed normally by the famous Bayanihan Dance Troupe. Most musics available on the Internet and infrequent Filipino record stores (almost nonexistent in Seattle and Tacoma) are mostly Western-influenced Philippine pop. The World Music section in mainstream record stores, like Tower Records, is not presenting that much choice either by having no category for the Philippines at all. Even popular neo-ethnic groups in the Philippines, such as Joey Ayala, Grace Nono and the University of the Philippines-based Contemporary Gamelan Ensemble of Prof. Edru Abraham called Kontra-Gapi, groups who have toured extensively around the world, have hard-to-find CDs[21] and are virtually unknown to most world music aficionados. Considering master musician Danongan Kalanduyan has been residing in the United States for more than thirty years now, it is

also surprising that his music has been unheard of by most Filipino-Americans.

Given this situation, the limited choices available to the Filipino-American youth, with regard to their cultural heritage, leave them no alternative but to embrace whatever becomes accessible; and, in the case of the youth in this study, these limited choices have paved the way for creativity and more imaginings of what Philippine culture is, interweaving it with the immediate culture they know, which is American. Tunog PiL-AM then is a product of all these complex circumstances, and a culmination of the encounters these youth have with transnational elements which cross their particular global/local traffic. The irony that may be evident in the sound—which, to some, may resemble neoethnic groups in the Philippines; while, to others, may be more like an appropriated version of the Philippine kulintang—is a product of choices presented to them in the Philippine cultural supermarket as brought about extensively by transnational movements of peoples and goods. The product, which is Tunog PiL-Am, is, therefore, conscious, as much as unconscious, in such a way that their choices are limited to what these youth at this point have been given.

GLOBALIZATION AND TRANSNATIONAL TRAFFIC: CREATING AND MAKING CHOICES FOR IDENTITY FORMATION

There is another angle to this transnational traffic, and that is the way these choices have become *the* choices in the first place. Here is where hegemony becomes prominent within the seemingly free exchanges brought about by globalization. Although the Third World, as represented by the Philippines, appears to be the one reaching out to the First World, represented by the Filipino Americans, the reality that the United States continues to have a strong cultural presence in the Philippines has influenced the musical forms that transnational migrants carry with them to the Filipino-American diaspora.

For example, the Kontra-Gapi of Edru Abraham is a catalyst in pushing Tunog PiL-AM to reinvent their kulintang playing when the PAYO organization which housed the ensemble, sponsored their trip to Tacoma in 2000. The Kontra-Gapi is a perfect model for what they would like to accomplish: more instruments, more modern and more performers on stage. But the Kontra-Gapi itself is a localized global form, even though they are legitimized as "authentic"

source by Tunog members because of their origin. For even though Kontra-Gapi claims to be seeking "to free Filipino musical consciousness from the strangehold of Western-oriented pop, and from the shifting notion that only specialists have the ability to create music,"[22] the group also features western tempered tuning on their kulintang gongs, Western drums and is known for its eclectic and experimental style, where all musical styles and idioms, including Western pop, become sources of inspiration. But although Philippine traditions, as introduced by the Kontra-Gapi, were influenced by Western standard, to a certain extent, they were still products of an historical encounter with specific local resilience. The global/local encounter is not one way entry; localization is a strategy employed to resist domination, although predominantly slithering in the cracks of the global.[23]

These localized global forms are concrete examples that debunk the fear of homogenization caused by rapid globalization, and the existence of transnational corporations and policies in Third World countries. However, this is not to undermine the negative effects of these new forms of imperialisms to the general economic and political conditions of developing countries like the Philippines, but such forces also strengthen resistance and search for common nationalist ideals even in an imagined state.[24]

In music, the world music phenomenon demonstrates how local resistances thrive within new musical forms which strategically blend the old and the new. Erlmann (1996) explains this, "Aesthetics in World Music" as resistance by the centrality of synthesis of global elements, which produces a totality that is not organic, but something borne out of the play of differences. The world music aesthetics, then, reflects the ideology of global culture, which, for Erlmann, is cannibalism between sameness and difference, and fetishism of the local by the global. Meaning, the interaction between the global and the local, is marked by struggles and resistances between the two elements. In the Kontra-Gapi, this cannibalism between sameness and difference is very much at play. The resistances are more evident in the music of the Kontra-Gapi in such a way that the orchestral setup, derived from the west, was made to adapt to the demands of Philippine instruments or, more correctly, to the demands of Southeast Asian orchestra-like ensembles like the gamelan.

In much the same way, this encounter with the Kontra-Gapi and me as an instructor who is not Maguindanaon—coupled by the intention to step out of the Bayanihan-like box by the Filipino

American youth—prompted the transformation of the kulintang and the creation of a musical style that is Tunog PiL-AM. The style blurs the globalized local and localized global forms in such a way that the local elements of the traditional kulintang have been globalized to the more extensive Western orchestral sound, and, finally, localized to reflect the ideals of the young members of Tunog PiL-AM about Filipino American music. The product is their sound alone and will not be possible, without the transnational encounters that are unique to them.

LOST IN TRANSLATION: REFLECTIONS ON THE SURVIVAL OF THE KULINTANG TRADITION IN THE UNITED STATES

Usopay Cadar has once remarked in an open email to kulintang scholars that the essence of the kulintang tradition is its improvisational quality, and that anything not tantamount to this is harmful to its development. Although Cadar strongly objected to any type of unwarranted innovation in the tradition, he also acknowledged that certain adjustments would be acceptable, if done in a "purely teaching, purely teaching-related, or purely experimental music setting."[25]

Authenticity, or the question of "what is authentic" in a tradition, has long been a point of debate in scholarship. Postcolonial scholars argue about the mythical nature of authenticity. The concept carries an implication that can overwrite the actual *complexity of differences* within an ethnic group. Ironically, declaring something is authentic "freezes" the tradition, and essentializes the bearers of the "authentic" tradition. However, authenticity, just like ethnicity, can also be used by indigenous peoples "to evolve an effective strategy of recuperation and resistance" (Griffiths, 1994) against outsiders who try to represent them, in their own ways, as authentic. An important question we can hope to answer is whether the transformations on the kulintang by various Filipino American groups and individuals are doing more harm than good to its improvisational essence and, thus, undermining its authenticity.

The phenomenon unfolding within the Filipino-American communities is not very different from the cannibalism discussed above at play in the "world music" phenomenon. The elements that most of the artists and groups draw from have been made available to them in the cultural supermarket, as constructed by transnational and global flows. There is nothing organic in most of

the creations, but they are more of transformations into hybrid forms marked by personal subjectivities. In discussing whether or not they are authentic, it will depend from which perspective we are pointing to in our query. If we are talking about whether or not they are authentic in the way kulintang is played in Southern Philippines by indigenous groups, then they certainly are not. But if we are talking about whether or not they are still authentic kulintang only played in a different context, then they are. The problem is the association of "authentic" to a specific ethnic group's way of using and combining the gongs into a musical ensemble. If we will push this further, we cannot say that kulintang is unique to the Philippines since it has several similarities to the melodic, horizontal row of gongs of its neighbouring Southeast Asian countries.[26] But, yes, the kulintang, as a five-man ensemble with all its internal developments, is unique to Southern Philippines and, thereby, authentic to the people who practice it.

To make the discussion on authenticity clearer, I would like to make an analogy as to how ethnicity is perceived through my own experience. As a Filipino, I am one of the many who has a mixture of Malay, Chinese and Spanish blood. Judging by my looks alone, it often makes it difficult for even the Filipinos to identify me as one of them, especially outside the Philippines. This problem was compounded when I lived away from the country for nearly thirteen years now. Every time I would visit the Philippines, people, from the plane to the taxi drivers, would just give me that humble smile Filipinos would normally reserve for foreigners. I did not know what caused this, but often Filipinos would always speak to me in English first, and would be genuinely surprised when I answer in fluent Tagalog. Is it really the way I look? Maybe not. After all, a lot of Filipinos are more Chinese- and Spanish-looking than I am. But could it be that being away for so long, and being married to a Japanese husband changed my overall impression to people? Even in Singapore, people expected me to be more Chinese than Filipino and will express that I don't look like Filipino, which is strange because they could look Filipino to me.

Unconsciously, individuals constantly transform to an extent when in a different environment for a long period of time. The transformation is not deliberate, but a reflection of the influences of the current cultural choices being made available to them. As I always believed, who we are in this rapid globalized and

transnationalized age could not be contained by a simple ethnic marker or citizenship. It is the whole package that defines our authenticity as a person, and it is more important to express that individuality rather than containing our subjectivities to a specific ethnicity.[27] Although a sense of belonging is vital to an individual, it is the acknowledgement of differences which ought to define an ethnic group. In my experience, apparently just speaking Tagalog is not enough to convince some people that I am an authentic Filipino. Some taxi drivers assume that I am a foreigner who happens to learn the Tagalog language really well. Some express silently, through actions, that they consider me foreign to my own country, even though I am Filipino. This lost essence can happen even to the most native of people and thus looking at the context is quite important in defining authentic identities. The question here is, do these perceived changes make me less Filipino?

I will now carry this analogy to authenticity in kulintang music. For even if they are played in the same patterns as in Maguindanaon or Maranao kulintang, in the hands of Filipino Americans and even university-trained Filipinos, they still sound very different no matter how carefully they are rendered as close as possible to the original. In addition to Usopay Cadar's remark, it is not just the improvisatory character that makes up the kulintang's essence, but its overall sound quality as brought about by factors surrounding the performance. It is not just the language of kulintang either, since, for example, those who were born and who grew up in the United States, like Filipino-Americans, are still perceived as different from the mainstream; and those who can speak fluent Tagalog (including those who stayed most of their lives in the U.S. or elsewhere) are still considered foreign by most Filipinos. For instance, Danny Kalanduyan's development as a master kulintang musician is different from the Maguindanaons who have stayed in the Philippines.[28] The Maguindanaons who went to a university setting, such as Aga Mayo would be different, too, in terms of their growth as an artist. Even their methods of transmission will slightly be changed and influenced by their new setting.[29]

Now, if changes are implemented, are the traditions no longer authentic? What about the Filipino- Americans and Filipinos who learned the kulintang outside of Cotabato or Lanao? Will learning simply by rote help them acquire all the nuances needed in order to play the "authentic" way? Are sincere intentions enough to capture

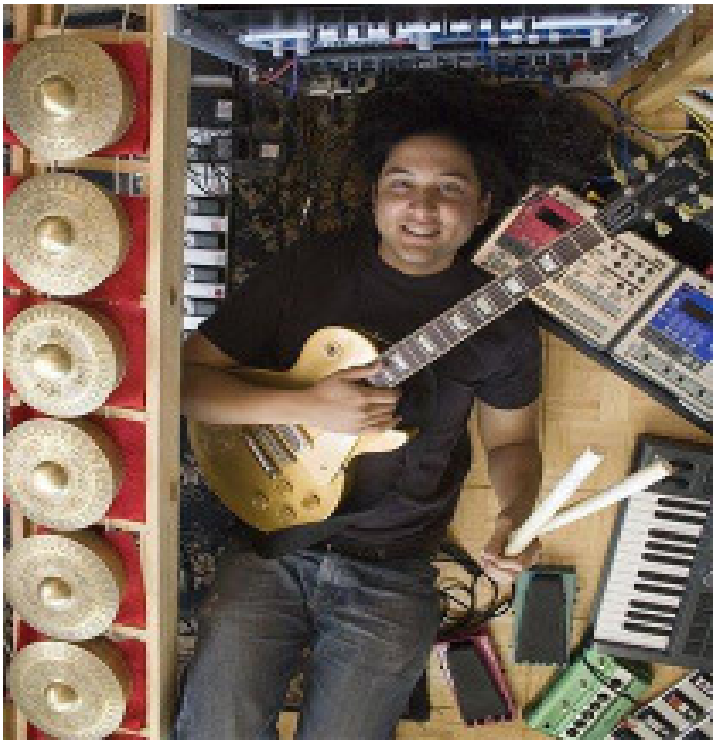
the "authenticity" of the kulintang outside of its village context? It is possible to come as close to the original, but the essence (defined here as the overall peculiarities surrounding the kulintang as an activity), which is bound to its context, can never be captured.

The artists, who combine the kulintang with their music, either play them unchanged with the other mediums or they just use some of its techniques and patterns to fit their creative needs; do these make the kulintang inauthentic? Are they killing its improvisatory essence? There will always be markers of difference from whichever way we look at things. Ethnicity-wise, it could be facial features, language, mannerisms, etc. Sound-wise, it could be the way the pulse and emphasis are rendered, the quality of tones and the way of combining them, presentation on stage as performer, etc. Thus, it is more important that we acknowledge what Stuart Hall has explained as the "politics of ethnicity predicated on difference and diversity":

> That is to say, a recognition that we all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture, without being contained by that position as "ethnic artists." We are all, in that sense, ethnically located and our ethnic identities are crucial to our subjective sense of who we are (1996:447).

Kulintang used in these different musical contexts is still consistent with its improvisatory essence. It is only that the overall style of improvisation (and innovation) has changed in response to the specific needs of the Filipino Americans who are coming to embrace it as their own. It is more important that these innovations are acknowledged as such: a diversity within the kulintang as it is applied in different contexts and used for individual emancipation. Part of the major reasons of the successful survival and dissemination of kulintang outside of Mindanao are due to the innovativeness which the new practitioners bring to it. These are *kulintang traditions* bounded by the authenticity of its new bearers.

Tunog PiL-AM



Ron Quesada, Kulintronica

ENDNOTES

[1]The Philippine kulintang is an ensemble of 5 instruments: the kulintang (row of 8 bossed gongs laid horizontally on a rack), the *agung* (2 large, hanging bossed gongs), the *gandingan* (4 large, hanging bossed gongs), the *babandil* (a small gong hit at the rim; timekeeper of the ensemble) and the *dabakan* (the only non-gong barrel or hourglass-shaped drum struck with thick wooden sticks).

[2]Within contemporary ethnography in anthropology, the publishing of the book *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (James Clifford and George Marcus, eds. 1986), has exhorted the discipline to develop new forms of representation, which includes multiple voices; and to view ethnography as an institutionally, historically and politically situated writing genre (James et al. 1997).

[3]Maceda (1998) and Cadar (1996) discussed how the kulintang is not related to the Muslim practices of the major ethnic groups (Maguindanao, Maranao, Tausug) which practice it. See also Costes (2005) for a discussion of the relation of Philippine gongs to the Southeast Asian gong culture.

[4]Van Maanen (1995) conceived ethnography as a "storytelling institution" (3). In the same vein, Renato Rosaldo (1989) also argued against the classic ethnography's notion of the "lone ethnographer" and timelessness of writing; he argued for personal narratives that attend to the improvisations of everyday living.

[5]Although I wrote about kulintang in the U.S. for my dissertation as well, I would not count the University of Washington as yet because I am not Filipino American in the strictest sense, and the other two who received graduate degrees from my university were the disseminators of the traditions: Danny Kalanduyan and Usopay Cadar, both natives of the Philippines like me. Kalanduyan and Cadar are now citizens of the U.S. Rising Fil-Am scholars performing the kulintang include Mary Talusan-Lacanlale (UCLA), Eleanor Lipat-Chesler (UCLA) and Bernard Ellorin (University of Hawaii).

[6]According to master musician Danny Kalanduyan, even the people from his own village are surprised to see an American-born Filipino playing more proficiently than their young people; seeing Filipino Americans play the kullintang inspires the Maguindanaons themselves to go back to their roots (Kalanduyan, personal interview, 2004).

[7]Usopay Cadar, a Maranao kulintang mentor, is prominent as well, especially in the Maranao traditions. However, he is more known as an accomplished scholar in ethnomusicology than a prolific kulintang player.

[8]A collaborative research by ethnomusicologist Pamela Costes-Onishi and music theorist Hideaki Onishi deals specifically in the issues and problems of improvisation in the kulintang. The study is based on an extensive analysis of improvisations on the Tagunggo by Danny Kalanduyan, within the span of ten years of his performance career. This study has now expanded into the analysis of improvisation on the kulintang by other master musicians, such as Kanapia Kalanduyan and Aga Mayo Butocan, and includes observations on how the kulintang has been taught to students outside the tradition. The objective is to revive this idiom of improvisation in learning the kulintang.

[9]Please see e-trinity.org

[10]Ron Quesada has a group at Facebook under Kulintronica.

[11]Please visit the group's official home in the net for more information: www.electrickulintang.com

[12]Her official home in the web: www.eleanoracademia.com. Please see also "Stage Presence" (T. Gonzalves, ed.) for a full interview on Eleanor Academia and her philosophy on her musical arts and kulintang.

[13]The age range was the most recent when I completed my study and tenure as director of the group in 2005.

[14]A CD had been produced while I was Director of FAYCCA. It is called *Tunog PiL-AM* (2004) and can be special-ordered through the group at members.shaw.ca/faycca/cdproject.html.

[15]The group managed to get performance engagements in Oregon and parts of California, but not as extensively to other states as they had hoped.

[16]For the full story on this politics, please refer to my dissertation, Costes (2005).

[17]The last time I visited the United States on March 2009, the current acting president of the group told me they performed three times with the few members they had and using the CD we produced in 2004 to fill in the missing sounds. As a nonprofit organization, FAYCCA is still active in the State of Washington.

[18] For a more extensive discussion on this, please refer to Costes (2005).

[19]Gordon Mathews (2000) described this notion of "freedom of choice as an illusion," within what he called the cultural supermarket. As individuals, we are out there shopping for our identities, confronted by various choices in formulating what will be me or you or him or

her. This act of shopping, in a sense, becomes our quest in searching for home, or the displaced idea of wholeness or truth, that the precultural supermarket has promoted. The present global/local traffic, as accelerated by development in electronic media and technology, splintered our complacent "homey" identities. In a way, it opens doors to challenge the dominant/subordinate and other dichotomies, but, ironically, it still inscribes the individual within boundaries made available by the media.

[20]Danongan Kalanduyan has recorded several CDs on the kulintang, including an instructional video. However, the distribution reaches only the ones who are already interested in the kulintang. The recordings have not reached most familial-based Filipino-American organizations.

[21]There are websites that offer sample clips of these groups: mog.com/music/Joey_Ayala, www.univie.ac.at/Voelkerkunde/apsis/aufi/music/kgapimus.htm, www.fiql.com/playlists/joey_ayala_great_songs/, www.gracenono.com/

[22]mypage.direct.ca/d/dennise/kontra.htm 2003

[23]Wilson and Dissanayake (1996:5) stated: Globalization, paradoxically, has led to a strengthening of local ties, allegiances and identity politics within different nation-state formations, even though what may emerge is what Stuart Hall calls that more "tricky version of 'the local' which operates within, and has been thoroughly reshaped by 'the global' and operates largely within its logic."

[24]Historians of Philippine Studies would agree that a sense of nationalism in the Philippines was triggered largely by the colonial presence in the islands (Abueva, ed. 1998, 1999). Prior to Spain's conquest, the autonomous *barangay* units based on kinship had remained intact and no comparable cultural empires that flourished in other Southeast Asian countries that would have developed a sense of shared culture emerge; this "enduring cultural fragmentation of Philippine society" would make it susceptible to colonialism and affect the sense of nationalism, until the present (Gonzalez 2000).

[25]see chapter six of Costes (2005).

[26]Some affinities of the kulintang to the Indonesian gamelan: SARONAI—prototype of the kulintang; eight metal keys strung together for children to practice on; and similar to the Indonesian SARON in appearances. KOLENANG – a Sundanese single-row gong instrument; BONANG in West Java; TROMPONG in Balinese, same function as the melodic instrument in the ensemble; a "t" must have been added by the Maranaos for easier vocal articulation, thus, KOLENTANG/KOLINTANG.

[27]Eleanor Academia expressed a similar experience in her interview with Gonzalves (2007): …A nonface that could look like I was from many different cultures, depending upon how I dressed, acted, wore face paint and spoke. Your true Identity is found in the depth of your soul and can't be taken away. Your expression of it is how you choose to present yourself to the world. I am mistaken for a lot of different cultures. I almost always end up giving an explanation of "what a Filipino is," and so forth (57).

[28]There has been a controversy back in 1999 about his unison kulintang playing. See full discussion in Costes (2005).

[29]Danny Kalanduyan teaches the *saronay* to a group of students playing in unison in one class. Aga Mayo Butocan devised a notation system for her students at the University of the Philippines. Both methodologies are not traditional.

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