

# ***NAVIGATING A PRECARIOUS BALANCE: The Noel Garrovillo Dance Center's Contemporary Dance as a Commitment to the Community***

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Only the maker (and then only with time) has a chance of knowing how important small conventions and rituals are in the practice of staying at work. The private details of art making are utterly uninteresting to audiences (and frequently to teachers), perhaps because they're almost never visible—or even knowable—from examining the finished work.

David Bayles and Ted Orland,  
*Art and Fear: Observations  
on the Perils (and Rewards  
of Art Making)*

## **ABSTRACT**

If it is difficult to picture a ballet school located in Koronadal, South Cotabato, then perhaps it will even take more than a stretch of the imagination to conceive of how contemporary dance survives in Southern Philippines. The story behind the KAHAYAG Community Dance and Theater Company, later reorganized and renamed as the Noel Garrovillo Dance Center, is a narrative of how, notwithstanding the obstacles faced by dance in the regions, sheer conviction and commitment could keep the art form alive. It is also a story of how a dance director and his company had to resolve their contradictions as Christian artist settlers in Mindanao. This paper discusses how contemporary dance as a flexible and dynamic dance form has allowed them to create pieces that they could consider their "own." From their initial works that borrowed movements from the T'bolis and B'laans, to their current choreographies based on their realities as settlers in Koronadal, Garrovillo's company has continuously worked to make dance part of the local government's agenda on cultural and the arts. As cultural brokers, they are faced with both choreographic and intellectual imperatives. Garrovillo believes that there is a need to strengthen the country's creative industry so that choreographers will have opportunities to create works which are crucial to the life of the nation.

Keywords: contemporary dance, modern dance, creative industry, ethnolinguistic groups, nation, identity

Choreographing dance in a postcolonial nation like the Philippines has always been a challenging cultural practice. The demands of the art form, the choreographer's desire to "play" with it in the context of his/her realities, the material conditions that inform and sometimes even dictate the form of the work created, and the ideological and political considerations that accrue not only around the work but also around the bodies of the performers—all these are embodied in what most people think of as a "light"<sup>2</sup> form of art—dance.

Early this year, the dance community of the Philippines was confronted once again by the distressing possibility of the institution of a national dance company when Senator Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. filed Senate Bill 2679 which proposes to declare Ballet Philippines (BP) as the nation's official ballet company. Having made its name both in the Philippines and abroad, the BP, according to Marcos, has "expressed Filipino art and culture for the past 41 years" (Senate Bill 2679). This prospect has resurrected an old nightmare—that of BP having been for a long time a "favored" company,

which often calls itself “the flagship company” of the country (Villaruz, 2006, p. 206). A nightmare indeed for many dance companies and artists, particularly independent choreographers who have for decades redefined and resignified dance and its practice in the country. For the nth time, the controversial bill foregrounds the many vexatious issues (i.e. the concept of “representation,” access to financial grants, and worse, state intervention) that have troubled the world of Philippine dance.

Over the years, independent choreographers<sup>3</sup> in the Philippines have relentlessly worked to create a space for dance in the country. Contemporary choreographers, in particular, have pushed the boundaries of this space to accommodate diverse works from all over the country. They have won a number of battles, only to be further disappointed by the seemingly cold reception of state institutions. Despite the accomplishments of contemporary dance companies, funding from the National Commission on Culture and the Arts (NCCA) and support from the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) have become uncertain.

These macro realities that likewise loom over the Noel Garrovillo Dance Center (formerly known as the Kahayag Community Dance and Theater Company) are further overlaid with the socio-political and cultural climate of Koronadal, South Cotabato where Garrovillo has been a practising choreographer and cultural worker for more than a decade.

This paper is one in a series of essays I have written on contemporary choreographers in the Philippines, their politics, aesthetics, and the range of cultural positions they occupy. As one of three choreographers in Southern Philippines and Western Visayas—the other two being Agnes Locsin of Davao and Dwight Rodrigazo of Bacolod—Garrovillo has proven that dance, specifically contemporary dance, transcends individual technique. One finds at the heart of his practice, a continuous attempt to navigate the waters of personal politics, body types, cultural identities, political institutions, and economic constraints. The voyage has not always been smooth and waves of realizations have rocked Garrovillo’s passage as he has positioned and repositioned himself and his dancers in a region populated with descendants of Christian settlers whose “own idea of separatism, ably articulated by the most unlikely of allies” does not seem to dovetail with that of their Muslim brothers, while the *lumad* population have sought “their God-given right to their ‘ancestral homeland’ ” (Abinales, 2008, p. 41).

Thus, my discussion will show how Garrovillo has managed to steer through the various aspects that make up his political, social, and cultural milieu. I will problematize how his aesthetics and practices have always been motivated by the desire to discover a dance genre that makes sense not only to himself and his dancers but also, more importantly, to the Southern region.

Located at the Fitmart Mall, Noel Garrovillo's Dance Center offers ballet (for beginners and advanced/*pointe shoes*), ballroom, pop, hip hop, street jazz, and contemporary dance. The posters and pictures on the walls of the studio attest to the activities and programs that have kept both dancers and choreographers busy in the past years. As in most provinces in the Philippines, ballet in Koronadal is the most marketable to parents; hence the number of classes (i.e., one baby class, two children's classes [Levels 1 and 2], two intermediate classes [Levels 1 and 2], one adult beginner class, and one advance class) offered by the Noel Garrovillo Dance Center.

There is, however, a growing interest in contemporary dance as Garrovillo has made it more popular through the performances and workshops of his six dance company members, all of whom are performers and choreographers. Three of them decided to work full-time in the studio, a choice which was not easy to make, considering the difficulties of devoting one's life to dancing, let alone in Koronadal. Also among the "mainstays" of the studio are four apprentices and ten scholars (i.e., out-of-school youth, many of whom are hip hoppers who used to dance in the streets). These dancers from different economic and educational backgrounds have come to the studio with different dance experiences. Because of their various backgrounds, Garrovillo has made it a point to provide them with, or require of them what he believes is the best foundation in dance--ballet. Like a good number of contemporary choreographers in the country, Garrovillo thinks that ballet develops in his dancers the necessary "body line, flexibility, balance, strength, and posture" needed to understand other kinds of dances such as contemporary, jazz, and ballroom (Garrovillo, e-mail to author, 19 January 2012). And though his male scholars, who are mostly hip hop dancers, had initially complained about the ballet classes they had to take, it appears that Garrovillo's policy has paid off. In the contemporary pieces he choreographs, the company members' movements bear some of the clean lines of ballet.

But first, what exactly is this "genre" called contemporary dance? My interviews with contemporary dance choreographers reveal the continuous problematization of the term "contemporary." Yet, even if some of them

refuse to provide a categorical definition for “contemporary dance,” a stance that fits well with the aesthetics and politics of this dance form, the descriptions and theories they posit intersect. For convenience, however, I use the “definition” or descriptions of contemporary dance which scholar, critic, and choreographer Joseph Gonzales presents in his book, *Choreography: A Malaysian Perspective* (2004). He uses the term “contemporary dance” to refer to:

1. All dance forms NOT classical in nature [i.e., not just ballet but dances that are based on established systems of rules like the traditional dances of India and Thailand];
2. Dance styles that encompass the use of codified modern dance techniques such as those of Graham, Cunningham, Hawkins, Limon, etc.;
3. Any reinvention of traditional (folk, court and classical) dance with regard to movement vocabulary, presentation and performance context;
4. Dance that contains and employs the elements and characteristics of the present day;
5. Styles that evolve from or are a result of a fusion of different genres/ cultures and so on (p. vii);
6. [Dance that] is communicative and expressive; it is visual, spatial, temporal, kinesthetic; it is sensual, affective, evocative, dynamic and rhythmic (Dr. Kate Stevens, *Choreographic Cognition—Composing Time and Space* in Gonzalez, Joseph. 2004.); and,
7. [Dance that] is political. It deals with change. [It] allows us to visualize processes through language. By doing so, contemporary dance can help us define the models necessary for us to live in a world defined by ongoing change ( pp. vii-ix).

These characteristics are possible parameters in considering what is “contemporary.” Notwithstanding this convenient list of characteristics of contemporary dance, I am more inclined towards Myra Beltran’s view regarding the nature of contemporary dance:

There is really no ready-made answer for this (what is contemporary dance) because the process of defining contemporary, of defining dance itself, of working with

actual bodies who live and breathe in contemporary times, makes the whole event, the experience, the total act and the total rite of discovering, contemporary dance (Beltran, 2002, p. 2).

Curiously, Garrovillo's aesthetics is a *mélange* of dance vocabularies which he learned over the years. He started as a folk dancer who performed ethnic, rural, and "Filipiniana" (i.e., Spanish) dances, but then realized the advantages of ballet when he took classes at the CCP. His knowledge of dance techniques he learned from Myra Beltran (contemporary dance), Paul Morales (contemporary dance), Denisa Reyes (modern dance), Agnes Locsin (modern dance), Nonoy Froilan (ballet), Steve Villaruz (a range of aesthetics and issues in dance), and Jing Hung Koh (various issues on arts education and the power of creative movement as taught at the Practice Performing School of Singapore). His is an aesthetics informed by different dance traditions which he decided to stylistically rework as he forged his way through the realities of Koronadal.

Thus, the story behind the KAHAYAG Community Dance and Theater Company, later reorganized and renamed as the Noel Garrovillo Dance Center, is a narrative of how a dance director and his company had to resolve a range of issues—political,<sup>4</sup> economic<sup>5</sup>, cultural,<sup>6</sup> and ideological—to arrive at a genre that suited their needs. It is a story of careful navigation by Christian artist settlers in Mindanao through the occasionally rough waters of dance in the South.

The workshops at the CCP, which Garrovillo joined in Manila as a young university-sponsored artist<sup>7</sup>, opened a new world which prompted him to return to Manila after graduating from the university. There were numerous reasons for staying at the center of arts, many temptations that could have lured him to join the larger dance companies in Manila; but he decided to return to Koronadal to produce shows and eventually set up in 1993 the KAHAYAG Community Dance and Theater Company. The name, derived from the Visayan word "kahayag" which means "light"/"radiance," hints at the vision of its founder—to nurture culture and the arts as a source of illumination. Thus, as a community-based organization, the KAHAYAG aimed to:

discover, develop, promote, and sustain the artistry and creativity of the community through research, trainings, performances, and effective management program that

may sustain its mission to its locality and the national cultural mainstream. ([www.Southcotabato.gov.ph/tour/kahayag.html](http://www.Southcotabato.gov.ph/tour/kahayag.html))

Integral to the mission of the organization was the delicate balance it had to maintain between cultural material and aesthetics, artistic integrity and practical concerns, independent and collaborative practices, and local and national concerns. As a non-government organization that partnered with the local government, the KAHAYAG realized that the latter had little knowledge of the organization's projects and programs. There was always a need to make the arts more comprehensible to government institutions, which unfortunately had no clear vision of how the former fit into the national agenda on culture (if the government had one to begin with).

In his first choreographies for the company, Garrovillo was very careful with the materials he used. Together with his members, he went to the T'boli community in Lake Sebu to study their lives and cultural practices; in particular, their dance, music, and chanters. The same judicious approach in getting to know the B'laans, another indigenous group, was observed by the dancers. And from these immersions emerged one of their successful productions, the *Tudbulul*, a narrative dance of the T'boli's great epic.<sup>8</sup>

The early years of the company enjoyed the audience's positive reaction to its choreographies, which were based on movements derived from dances of ethnolinguistic communities in Cotabato. It was this strength of the company that former Director of the CCP Nanding Josef saw when the KAHAYAG joined the Mindanao Theater Festival in Iligan. And it was their success in the festival that convinced Josef that KAHAYAG was ready for the 1996 National Theater Festival at the CCP. He was correct in his estimation of the company, as it was given a standing ovation and was cited as one of the 10 Most Outstanding Theater Companies in the Philippines. This was a turning point for the company members, which led to a crucial period of pondering upon their identity as artists. Upon returning to Koronadal, they were no longer exhilarated at the prospect of continuing to create works whose movements they would have to derive from the T'bolis and other ethnolinguistic communities. Worse for them were the times when the audience thought they were even T'bolis, an identity which the KAHAYAG never meant to appropriate lest they be accused of deceiving the audience for fame and profit. And more disturbing was another dilemma: what to give back to the communities that had been generous in opening themselves to their dance company.

The solution came to all the members of the company who shared similar “ethnicities.” They were all Christian migrants—mostly from the Visayas—and were therefore neither “pure” or “true blooded” Tagalog, “pure” or “true blooded” Bisaya, nor indigenous people of Mindanao. Who were they? What was a culture they could consider their own? What dance could they consider theirs? These were the questions they asked themselves. In short: “Ano ang aton?” (What is ours?). And as they searched for the answers, they found contemporary dance as the most appropriate genre to express their identity; the openness and techniques of the dance form gave them the space and impetus (i.e., ideas such as “movement exploration, improvisation, and innovation”) (Garrovillo, e-mail to author, January 19, 2012) to create works they could call their “own.”<sup>9</sup> It may sound circuitous, but Garrovillo defines “contemporary” as “what you do as contemporary people in contemporary times/society, and as members of an urban community.” If the T’boli’s movements imitate nature such as the flow of water and the movements of birds and monkeys, what then would comprise the movements of the contemporary dancer? What does s/he imitate? One’s trip to a mall? One’s shopping? “Possibly so,” adds Garrovillo.

Although the choreographies of the company have always used the contemporary form—in “Bulalakaw”, a dance drama of an Ilongo Myth; in “Tudbulul”, a narrative dance of the T’boli’s great epic; and in “Ibong Adarna sa Muling Paglipad”, “Sisa”, “Hu-do-boo”, and “Kagat sa T’nalak” ([www. Southcotabato.gov.ph/tour/kahayag.html](http://www.Southcotabato.gov.ph/tour/kahayag.html))—and even before their performance at the National Theater Festival in 1996, the KAHAYAG had already decided to veer away from using the movements of the T’bolis, B’laans, and Bagobos and instead studied the everyday movements of the Visayan migrants in Cotabato.

Notwithstanding his awareness of the theories on contemporary and modern dance, Garrovillo does not really delve much on them as he thinks that it is more important to work on and study the techniques a Filipino choreographer develops. The specificities of Western theories and styles are not as important as the particularities of choreographies by Filipinos. “What is contemporary is peculiar to each choreographer” and “free expression”<sup>10</sup> is what contemporary dance has afforded them. And lest people think that contemporary dance is an “unthinking dance,” and could therefore be created and performed by simply fusing dance vocabularies without much conceptualization, Garrovillo argues that this form has a “dalom” (deep) source. A careful reading of the works and motivations of

both modern and contemporary dance artists reveals that most, if not all of them, meticulously problematized their ideas of dance. These painstaking efforts enabled them to challenge the assumptions behind classical dance, ballet in particular. And as his organization (and later, dance company) has realized, this source gives birth to a particular aesthetic-cultural ethos.

Choosing contemporary dance was also a strategic move, given the cultural context of KAHAYAG. Because contemporary dance offers the space conducive to "explorations in multiculturalism" (Carino, 2005, p. 101), Garrovillo's company provided itself with a flexible and dynamic dance form that has allowed them to strengthen their position as dance artists in Cotabato. Contemporary dance has the advantage of not being constrained by a specific vocabulary or by "cultural encoding contained in language and texts" because the "language of dance is much more flexible" (Carino, 2005, p. 101). Moreover, provided that the elements are responsibly melded by the artist, this dance genre liberally accommodates, a variety of movements from different traditions. With different dance backgrounds, the members of the KAHAYAG found a form that met their cultural and historical needs.

And in their process of choosing a dance genre, the body figured at the center of contemporary dance. As choreographer and critic Vivienne Rogis (2005) explains:

Physical body becomes the geographical place of identity, the process of intercultural dialogue is the space of reflexive identification and the performative act exists in the cultural space of interconnection between the individual and the wider social collective [italics mine]( p. 339).

The dancers' bodies were not only sites of intercultural dialogue when the KAHAYAG's choreographies were based on the movement vocabulary partially derived from the dances of different ethnolinguistic groups in Mindanao. The bodies were at the same time sites of contention as the dancers of the company debated among themselves on how they were to locate their bodies in the socio-historical and cultural context of Koronadal. It is therefore important to look at how KAHAYAG negotiated its tenuous position within a wider social collective.

As a dance company that decided to go contemporary, the KAHAYAG from the late nineties to 2009, was the most visible organization in Mindanao that worked with the Provincial Government of South Cotabato in holding the

Mindanao National Modern Dance Competition (i.e., beginning 2001). The competition started out as the Mindanao Modern Dance Competition with a budget of fifty thousand pesos from the provincial government which had no understanding of “modern dance” (i.e., which for the officials, was hip hop). Garrovillo had to rely on friendship when he called on his co-dancers and co-choreographers from all over the Philippines to join the event. His offer of fifteen thousand pesos to the winner was, of course, not at all enticing, considering the plane fare and cost of accommodation that the participants had to shoulder. Nonetheless, ten groups from Pagadian City, Digos, and General Santos joined. Some of them Garrovillo even trained, just so the competition would have more entries. To the governor’s surprise, the South Cotabato Gymnasium teemed with people who anticipated the performances in the competition. Impressed with the result, the Governor then promised three hundred thousand pesos for the second competition and with this budget, the prize increased to fifty thousand pesos. It was still a small amount, but was nonetheless more promising to the participants.

It was on its third year that the name of the competition changed to Mindanao National Modern Dance Competition and accepted entries from all over the country. And because Garrovillo and the other organizers did not insist on the fine distinction between modern and contemporary dance, the third round had more dance groups—even hip hop and folk dance groups—including Airdance and the UP Dance Company from Manila.

Although the definition of contemporary dance in this paper encompasses modern dance techniques, a more strict distinction between modern and contemporary dance would associate the former with choreographers Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and Merce Cunningham (active between the 1920s and the 1940s); and the latter, with the developments that came after these pioneers of modern dance.<sup>11</sup> Graham stressed “making visible the interior landscape” (Copeland and Cohen, 1983, p. 232); her technique, based on the solar plexus, is known for “ ‘contraction,’ a sharp, quick tightening of the stomach muscles that shoves back against the spine and ‘release’ or the burst of outward-flowing energy” (Robertson and Hutera, 1983, p. 66). Humphrey pointed out that modern dance was “ ‘moving from the inside out’ ”—her technique is based on “the arc between two deaths” where deaths are positions of “stasis,” standing and lying and every movement is a “recovery from these 2 absolute positions” (Robertson and Hutera, 1990, p. 72). And Cunningham, a former Graham company member, disputed the reliance on “inner experience and emotional expressivity”—movement,

according to him, is “an end in itself”— thereby introducing another development in modern dance (Copeland and Cohen, 1983, p. 232). All techniques were more or less reactions to the constraints of classical ballet.

Unlike modern dance, contemporary dance has not been codified, and is thus difficult to categorically define. Although it recognizes modern dance choreographers such as Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, Doris Humphrey, Mary Wigman, Francois Delsarte, Merce Cunningham, Martha Graham, Rudolph von Laban, Loie Fuller, and Jose Limon as its precursors, contemporary dance is more of a philosophy than a set of techniques. Contemporary dancers and choreographers in the Philippines agree that the form is more or less fluid, a continuous exploration of movement and its relevance to the dancers and people of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thus, contemporary dance is open to other techniques found in ballet, modern, and postmodern dance. This is one of the reasons it is the genre of choice of quite a number of young choreographers in the Philippines. Moreover, as the director of the UP Dance Company, Angel Lawengko-Baguilat, explains: contemporary dance continues to evolve according to the needs and realities of dance (i.e., current political, economic, social, and cultural issues) and dancers (i.e., body types and financial constrains (interview of Lawengko-Baguilat by author, 20 April 2010), which makes it a more relevant dance form to young independent dancers/choreographers whose cultural practices are also responses to national and global issues and whose bodies have been overdetermined by specific realities.

Having weighed the pros and cons of limiting the dance genres in the competitions he organized, Garrovillo decided not to nitpick on terms. As long as the competitions familiarize the people of Koronadal with the possibilities of modern and contemporary dance, there is something to be sanguine about. Like a leavening process, these competitions and other efforts of the KAHAYAG have transformed the people’s awareness of modern and contemporary dance in Mindanao. And as the KAHAYAG’s vision was the promotion and development of art both at the local and national levels, the company always saw itself as part of developments in dance and how it is integral to the cultural life of the Philippine nation.

As one of the choreographers, together with Myra Beltran and Paul Morales, behind the creation of the Contemporary Dance Network of the Philippines, Garrovillo shares with his co-founders the belief that contemporary dance has to assert its presence in the country. The annual WI-FI Body organized by the network has seen an increase in the number

of participating groups; KAHAYAG made it a point to join this festival every year. Unwavering though he is in his commitment, Garrovillo is aware of the difficulties contemporary dance has to surmount in the country. Despite the Network's success in getting together numerous contemporary dance groups from all over the country, Garrovillo feels that they have yet to build an audience for contemporary dance; the form has to be more accessible not only to dance enthusiasts but also to the general public. The basic questions he asks himself and other choreographers are: "Why can't contemporary dance have a bigger audience?" "Why can't the WiFi festival have more people watching it?"

Although Garrovillo is an independent artist, he feels that there is a need to go mainstream if this means the popularization of contemporary dance. The thought of going mainstream, which is often disdained by independent artists, does not bother him. Despite the partial funding for his projects and productions from the local government and other government institutions, they continuously have to struggle to make themselves visible. And notwithstanding the earnings and increasing popularity of his dance center, dance, let alone contemporary dance, is still not mainstream. Garrovillo's view is an acknowledgment of the need to balance artistic integrity not only with the need to reach a wider audience, but also with the more expedient concerns of survival. For him, there are times when artists have to be practical and explore several avenues in order to sustain their art.

Contemporary dancer and choreographer Myra Beltran's notion of "independence" and her view of Garrovillo's practice accurately place the latter in the context of postcolonial cultural realities. Beltran shares Garrovillo's view of "independence," which she defines as "not having the support of a cultural institution on a regular basis." Thus, because the notion of independence is "fluid," she explains that mere "collaboration with cultural institutions" does not necessarily negate an artist's independence. Collaborative moves are "part of . . . negotiating with the center." The work of an artist who gets partial support from institutions retains its integrity; it is not tied to the institutions' aesthetics and ideology. In other words, "independence of mind" is still possible. As for Garrovillo's practice, Beltran adds that his dealings with the local government have not yet actually made him "self-sustaining"; he is definitely still independent, still very much on his own. Moreover, no matter how popular the performances of the company have slowly become, the latter "remains on the margins; it is not in the economy of the arts market of the 'center' . . . and has no hegemonic

influence of the practice of art.” Considering the few number of dancers in the regions, Beltran is particularly happy that Garrovillo’s school is earning money and going strong (Beltran, e-mail to author, January 20, 2012).

A healthy combination of idealism and practicality thus characterized KAHAYAG’s (and later the Noel Garrovillo Dance Center’s) vision. Garrovillo explains that while the WiFi festival in Manila specifies that only contemporary choreographies are allowed to compete, in Mindanao it is modern dance that takes center stage. The distinction is borne out of the search for an identity of performers in Mindanao, particularly in Koronadal. Theirs is “neo-ethnic” and modern because what lies beyond South Cotabato should not be duplicated by the choreographers of Koronadal. Distinguishing the choreographies in Koronadal from those in Manila also makes possible a more interesting flow of artists from the region to the “center” and vice versa, an exchange that should result in a more dynamic sharing of resources and talent among artists in the country.

It is interesting to see how the region’s relationship with Manila informed the choices made by choreographers in the South. Although he was already moving towards contemporary dance, Garrovillo acknowledged the niche of neo-ethnic in Mindanao as it was already popularized by the modern dance choreographer, Agnes Locsin of Davao<sup>12</sup>. The term “neo-ethnic” is close to the hearts of Mindanaons as it was suggested by Davaoneno musician Joey Ayala to Locsin, whose works like *Igorot* (1987) used Western staging techniques and the vocabulary of modern dance to expand the possibilities of ethnic movements. Thus, the movement vocabulary of the tribal groups and modern dance in a neo-ethnic choreography inform and even challenge each other.<sup>13</sup> The parameters for the Mindanao National Modern Dance Competition<sup>14</sup> organized by Garrovillo were conscious choices dictated upon by what the “center” had, and what the regions could offer in terms of dance. He had hoped that the exchange between Manila and the South in the space created by the competition could help strengthen contemporary dance and make it more mainstream and accessible to the public.

Like Beltran, who is an officer of the Contemporary Dance Network, Garrovillo had to deal with the bureaucracy as the founder/director of KAHAYAG. He was not only the artistic director of his own dance company but also a two-term member of the NCCA’s National Dance Committee. As an independent choreographer whose organization was inspired by the desire to develop dance as an integral part of the South’s, and ultimately, the nation’s cultural life, it was painful and frustrating for him to witness

the NCCA's partiality to ballet and folk dance. His experiences as both "outsider" (i.e., as an artist from the South and as a contemporary dance choreographer) and "insider" (i.e., as an officer of a state institution's committee that dispenses grants to artists) have exposed him to the discourse and politics of dance in the Philippines. Like other independent artists who have found themselves occupying posts in subsidy-granting institutions, Garrovillo found the opportunity to express his views on dance and state support. One of his disconcerting realizations is that contemporary dance has been misunderstood by some of the NCCA members who are not clear on what exactly this dance genre is. "Ballet is ballet, folk is folk. But what is contemporary?" is how Garrovillo frames the typical question of his co-members. Unfortunately, their confusion is further vexed by the conventional idea of what constitutes "performance", which is that it is a choreographic work mounted in a large venue. The grants given by the NCCA are implicitly based on the view that a performance in a small space is not as "valid" as that shown in theaters, and therefore, deserves a small subsidy. It has become more apparent to Garrovillo that for the NCCA, it is a "waste of resources to support small-audience performances."

The other positions that Garrovillo holds have also given him a wider view of the situation of dance in Southern Philippines. As the president of the Mindanao Choreographers' Network, he has seen the deterrents to fruitful dialogue among choreographers who meet only occasionally as judges in festivals. The archipelagic nature of the country has prevented more exchanges among artists in the South, as they find it easier to go to Manila and Cebu than to cross the islands of Mindanao. An ongoing dialogue among dancers and choreographers in the South has been difficult to sustain due to geographic and financial limitations. Thus, although a strong relationship with Manila needs to be cultivated, there is likewise a need to reinforce the network of dancers and choreographers in the South, considering the similar historical and cultural conjunctures that inform their performative practices.

Notwithstanding the obstacles, there have been moments of triumph. As a member and later president (2008-2010) of the South Cotabato Performing Arts Ensemble (SCPAE), Garrovillo witnessed the persistence of independent dance groups which kept the "Choreographer's Showcases" alive. For four years, the groups performed with few or even no audience at all, and at times, with no talent fees, until they were finally noticed by the local government. In 2005, Governor Daisy Avance Fuentes took note of their efforts to carve out a niche for their art in the cultural life of South

Cotabato<sup>15</sup>. Thus, the Kahayag Community Dance and Theater Company (contemporary dances), the Me'dal Kolon Datal Dance and Theatre Ensemble (folk, tribal and ballroom dances), the Cybercrew (contemporary and hip hop dances), and the T'boli Performing Arts (traditional T'boli dances) became collectively known as the South Cotabato Performing Arts Ensemble, which actively worked with the governor's office to make culture and the arts important components of the local government's "development strategies" ([www.southcotabato.gov.ph/tour/ca.html](http://www.southcotabato.gov.ph/tour/ca.html)).

That same year, the provincial government through the Sangguniang Panlalawigan, in partnership with the Provincial Planning and Development Office and the Arts, Culture, Tourism and Sports Promotions Unit, committed to support the groups with a quarterly endowment fund. Later, two more groups, the Notre Dame of Marbel University's Kariktan Dance Troupe and Extreme Dancers, joined the ensemble ([www.southcotabato.gov.ph/tour/ca.html](http://www.southcotabato.gov.ph/tour/ca.html)).

The close partnership between the provincial government and the performing groups has earned recognition from the NCCA, which awarded Governor Fuentes and Garrovillo (as president of the South Cotabato Culture and Arts Foundation, SCCAFI) the "Culture Friendly Award" during the National United Nations Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organization and the International Theatre Institute (UNESCO/ITI) World Theatre Week in 2009. The *sarimanok* trophy was given to South Cotabato for its T'nalak Festival and other activities spearheaded by the SCAFFI, such as the yearly Culture and the Arts Summit attended by various sectors of the culture industry ([www.southcotabato.gov.ph/home/newsdetails](http://www.southcotabato.gov.ph/home/newsdetails)).

Looking at the range of engagements which Garrovillo has had with the local government and various government institutions/agencies, one may wonder at the degree of independence that he is able to maintain. He does not see any contradiction in his practices; his membership in the NCCA Dance Committee, for example, is on an individual capacity and not institutional. "It is volunteer work," he states. In fact, he finds working with the government an opportunity to push his advocacy in dance (Garrovillo, e-mail to author, 19 January 2012).

Having been in the dance scene for almost two decades, Garrovillo believes that as much as artists find it vulgar to sell their own shows, there is a need to strike a balance between artistic and market needs, if contemporary dance wishes to survive. He also stresses the necessity of keeping the creative

industry alive, a view which looks at dance as an intersection of several interests—those of dancers, choreographers, audience, and ultimately, the nation. Dance is not just an art form as it is constituted by moving bodies with practical needs. Seeing contemporary dance as one among a number of sectors comprising the creative industry allows Garrovillo to place dance in a crucial position in the life of the Philippine nation. Unfortunately, the term “creative industry” does not seem to have taken off in the Philippines.

The term itself has had a contentious history. In 1997, the United Kingdom defined it as “activities which have their origin in individual creativity skill and talent and which have the potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property” (Street, 2006, p. 5). Thirteen sectors were identified to fall under the term: advertising, architecture, arts and antique markets, crafts, design, designer fashion, film, interactive leisure software, music, TV and radio, performing arts, publishing, software (Street, 2006, p. 5). Dancer-choreographer and former Dean of Dance of the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, Susan Street prefers the definition Richard Craves provides in his book *Creative Industries: Contracts Between Art and Commerce*. According to Craves:

Creative Industries supply goods and services that we broadly associate with cultural, artistic, or simply entertainment value. They include book and magazine publication, the visual arts (painting and sculpture), the performing arts (theatre, opera, concerts, dance), sound recordings, cinema and TV films, even fashion and toys and games (Street, 2006, p. 6).

Notwithstanding the number of definitions, Street notes that the term includes people “who are engaged in creativity into mainstream of economic calculation ensuring that governments in most developed countries are focused on the sector” (p. 6).

Based on this definition, it becomes clear why Garrovillo has set his eye on the creative industry in the Philippines. The performing arts cannot not be financially viable; dance festivals have little significance and will eventually die if artists have no institutional support.<sup>16</sup> And notwithstanding the liberal space integral to the creation of works, the absence of state policies or laws which help artists to pursue their passion, will render our nation destitute in creative spirit. It is not impossible for state and art interests to strike a *modus vivendi*. Lamenting the fact that dancers are generally considered

"entertainers,"<sup>17</sup> he explains that the "creative industry is not seen in the Philippines as a strong component [of the nation state]. . . as a source of employment." He narrates how his company has managed to survive over the years by accepting commercial projects to subsidize their artistic pursuits. Sometimes, though, in the act of weighing their artistic/cultural priorities against their economic needs, and realizing how dancers are treated as hired talents, Garrovillo finds himself defensively demanding the recognition befitting artists: "We are not mere performers in anniversaries."<sup>18</sup> Dance Forum Director Myra Beltran, who has substantially contributed to the development of contemporary dance in the Philippines, has also complained about the same lack of appreciation for dance, let alone contemporary dance. She has also noticed that even the most supposedly knowledgeable people in the arts look at dance as a form of entertainment, and consider dancers mere intermission performers, without a specific discourse which they have developed over the years.

To address the dilemmas of dancers and choreographers like him, Garrovillo has in mind a support system for dancers, a program that will address the basic needs of performing artists. If "even beauticians have a network or a support system. . . Why can't we have a cooperative that we could run to for health and funeral support?" he asks. Running parallel to his efforts to strengthen dance as an important sector of the creative industry are his attempts to create "needs" and events to further expose choreographers and dancers to the latest developments in the arts. Outside training, consultations, and events organizing are necessary for dance to reach its full potential in the country.

Interestingly, with the support of his dancers, Garrovillo entered a field which has always been seen as antithetical to the arts-politics. But considering his projects and partnership with the local government, his running for the position of board member of the Province of South Cotabato last May 2010 should not be surprising. The governor, who was then running for Congress, encouraged him because his advocacy had to be taken to the legislature. There was a need for an "insider" to push the arts and culture. And because Garrovillo had always wanted the Local Government Code to include policies on culture and the arts, he considered the governor's suggestion a practical one. In his mind, he was convinced of a promising partnership between the state and artists like him. For example, despite its typical capitalist and ideological/political agenda, a tourism program should not always be eyed with suspicion; a program for South Cotabato

could have a viable culture and arts component. Although the state's efforts to integrate this component renders the various ethnic communities in Cotabato vulnerable to exploitation, there is likewise the possibility of conceptualizing a program that respects the dignity and integrity of these communities.

An example of a partnership between the performing arts and the State is the 2007 MIDOSUJI parade, an international event in Osaka, Japan. Garrovillo was the artistic director of a group of sixteen dancers of the South Cotabato's T'nalak Cultural Dance Troupe (i.e., they came from the municipalities of Tampakan, Lake Sebu and T'boli) which represented the Philippines. The participation of the group was made possible through the concerted efforts of the Department of Tourism, through its office in Osaka, Japan, the T'nalak Festival Culture Dance Troupe, and the Filipiniana Dance Troupe of the University of the Philippines, Diliman. The dance troupe was warmly received by the spectators who enthusiastically applauded the group's street dancing during the parade (Maranaw, 2007, [www.lakbaypilipinas.com/blog/2007/11/11/tnalak-cultural-dance-troupe-joins-japans-midosuji-parade](http://www.lakbaypilipinas.com/blog/2007/11/11/tnalak-cultural-dance-troupe-joins-japans-midosuji-parade)). Successful collaborative projects like this show how responsible artists always walk the tightrope, ever conscious of the inevitable negotiations that happen in keeping dance and cultural practices alive in the Philippines.

Politics, however, was not for Garrovillo. When he lost in the elections, he set up a dance company and housed this in the FitMart Mall. While the KAHAYAG was an NGO, an umbrella organization comprised of several dance companies and performers (i.e., including folk dance and hip hop groups), the Noel Garrovillo Dance Company is now on its own, particularly projecting itself as a contemporary dance group that offers jazz, ballroom, hip hop, and ballet, the last being the "bread and butter" of the company. Using his name to identify the company was a risk; he had reservations about this because, despite his contribution to dance in South Cotabato, not many people actually know him. In fact, the name KAHAYAG is more popular than the man who established it. But his dancers understood the precarious balance that they had to maintain with every step they made—in the dance classes they offered, in the choreographies they created, and in the alliances they made. Unlike Garrovillo, they believed that using his name could be a strategic move; if he decides to run for another political position in the future, he would have a greater chance of winning if his name acquires a recall effect. Perhaps he will make it in politics the next time around.

With a stable pool of dancers and choreographers, the company has been having regular concerts—with tickets for sale—at the Koronadal Convention Center. These are in addition to the monthly dance showcase in the studio aimed to expose more people to the world of dance, specifically contemporary dance.

So far, as director of his own company, Garrovillo has conducted workshops in Butuan, the MidSayap North Cotabato Dance Workshop, which began last August 2010. All of these provide the venue for local choreographers to discuss their works and clarify not just to others but to themselves as well, what kind of dance they want to create and what identity they wish to project for themselves and their companies. More importantly, the exchange of ideas among the performers help them strengthen their repertoire in preparation for dance festivals, both in the region and in Manila.

Garrovillo's company might have stopped using movements derived from the T'bolis, but he has continuously worked closely with the latter. His earlier fieldwork had earned him their trust, thereby convincing the T'bolis that he could choreograph for them. But although he was flattered by their confidence in him, he declined the request and instead offered to help them in other ways. As he would help other artists in taking their performances to the stage, Garrovillo volunteered to help in migrating the T'bolis' ritualistic dances onto a performance area. Because the T'Bolis were not comfortable performing on a proscenium stage, "they decided to perform in a found space (theater performers usually call it found stage) or in one area in the festival ground." He found "ways to provide theatrical effects on it [dance]" by adding lights and improving the sound system/effects. And although he showed them how particular elements of theater could be incorporated in their performances, he did not even attempt to "block" them as this would eventually mean arranging the performers from his point of view (Garrovillo, e-mail to author, January 19, 2012).<sup>19</sup> He mentions the Bayanihan dance company and acknowledges its contribution to Philippine dance, but then quickly adds that "we should move on" and explore the numerous possibilities of dance, may this be folk, hip hop, modern, or contemporary. Without elaborating on the issues that have beleaguered the national folk dance company, it was apparent that he was alluding to the company's problematic prescriptive codification of various "Philippine dances"<sup>20</sup>.

His company members' spirit is kept high by the number of students they have—fifty students, some of whom are enrolled in more than one class. During rehearsals, Billy Sotillo, one of the choreographer-teachers, proudly points at two relatively new ballet students and says that they have shown much improvement in so short a time. Both the hip hop class and ballet rehearsals exuded the energy and enthusiasm of students who always look forward to attending their classes. To ensure the attendance of financially handicapped students, the company has made them scholars; their costumes are also provided free during performances. But what strikes one who watches the classes is the number of boys who are part of the ballet choreography by Garrovillo. Perhaps the students are motivated by the discipline they observe in their teachers who attend the regular classes (i.e., the company members/choreographers take each other's class) and rehearsals (i.e., the teacher-choreographers perform with the students); and the eagerness of a number of mothers who have actually joined the contemporary dance class handled by Garrovillo himself. To an extent, the studio is a microcosm of the community-based projects that the company has been involved in. Out-of-school youth and apprentices are supported by the company, the parents of the more fortunate students, and the friends of Garrovillo whose presence in the studio is strongly felt.

He hopes that eventually, most of his students, particularly those in the hip hop class, will move to contemporary dance. This is what has happened to the company members who initially had their particular dance "specializations." Despite the spadework that has yet to be done to make contemporary dance more popular, the company is quite happy that there is a growing appreciation for the form in Koronadal. There are more contemporary dance choreographers these days and the number of enrollees in their contemporary dance class has increased. Asked if he has noticed the increase in the number of male choreographers in contemporary dance, Garrovillo replies that he has. He speculates that male choreographers have an easier time with dancers as they are more authoritative compared to female choreographers.<sup>21</sup> He also thinks that contemporary dance, which has done away with tights and fancy costumes, could have encouraged more males to choose this dance form. Men are usually in street clothes (e.g., jeans and white shirt), cycling shorts, shorts, and even briefs. Contemporary dance is not at all "feminine." The second speculation has a strong basis because even the female dancers in most contemporary choreographies are no longer "feminine" (i.e., some have an androgynous look and most have well-toned

muscles in both their arms and legs) in the classical ballet sense. They may be elegant and graceful in a contemporary way, but their movements are, more often than not, stripped of the airy delicacy of ballet.

As the company strengthens its repertoire, it also thinks along national lines, continuously engaging in collaborative projects with other artists and sectors. Although the Noel Garrovillo Dance Company is on its own now, no longer enjoying regular financial support from the provincial government, it has not given up on its commitment to South Cotabato's cultural heritage; to promote it without losing sight of the politics and issues that always complicate creative endeavors when dealing with indigenous communities. As they dance to explore the possibilities of the contemporary genre in Koronadal, they simultaneously nurture their relationship with the community, with their co-Christian settlers, and the *Iumads*. Luckily, in Cotabato, as veteran newspaperman Patricio Diaz comments, "the settler-indigene relationship" has been "generally congenial" (quoted in Abinales, 2008, p. 64).

In his humorous article aptly entitled "Ukay-Ukay: Evaluating and Promoting Choreographic Initiatives in Philippine Provinces," Villaruz (2006) discusses what happens when "communities reassign their own cultural heritage and expressions" to choreographers, particularly those based in Manila. As these communities consult the artists as to how their expressions could be used for street-dancing, the mode of intervention could be a delicate matter—it could be "enhancing or obtrusive." Nonetheless, he emphasizes that "community resources and traditions" must be used (p. 57). Theatre has been ahead in doing this as the festivals at the center have witnessed the talents of the regions. Although dance has been delayed in networking in the regions, it has slowly caught up with the trend—teachers and choreographers have visited the regions as judges of street-dancing competitions; and "lately as facilitators of choreographic workshops, they have been exposed to the creativity there, the uniqueness (and urgencies) of the contents, techniques and styles, and the scene's problems of appropriating indigenous cultures for representation in folk and contemporary dance" (p. 59). For Villaruz, the possible dangers surrounding the choreographic encounter between the center and the regions should not prevent their healthy exchange of materials and talents. Garrovillo's works and his company's projects are good examples of cautious handling of indigenous materials. Their decision to create works based on their particular subject positions—as relocated artists—is an indication of their sensitivity to the issue of appropriation.

Villaruz adds that the “resources and problems should bring about dances that are ‘native’ to their contemporary times, to be reckoned with in national centers in the north” (p. 59). Clearly, this is what Garrovillo’s company has done—to look for what is “native” to them. In choreographing their identities, they are not just addressing their individual needs to create. They also wish to see the incorporation of contemporary movements in dance festivals. A deeper understanding of the techniques, according to Garrovillo, will make people realize that “local” movements could be combined with contemporary dance movements. He thinks that perhaps people are offended by his frank comments on how some festivals and street dancing fail to articulate what is truly celebrated or what is “local.”

Impressed by the *Dinagyang’s* choreographic success in Iloilo, he has nonetheless expressed his view that there seems to be an absence of an “indigenous” movement or motif in the choreographies. “Is there any tribe in Panay that has a movement featured in any of the dances during the festival?” “Why can’t the choreographers look for a “movement motif,” such as those of the *Pintadas* and incorporate them in their contemporary or modern works?” he asks. Thus, when he was requested to help choreograph for the Pangasinan Bangus festival, he asked the performers if they could incorporate movements related to harvesting bangus in their dance. Garrovillo is just bothered by the pathology of festivals that has resulted in choreographies not quite culturally rooted.

One could say that the dancers of Garrovillo’s company are “cultural brokers” faced with both choreographic and intellectual imperatives. The questions London-based British curator of live arts, Catherine Ugwu (1998), raises could very well be the questions that Garrovillo’s company faces:

How do we as cultural brokers construct genuine representations of difference and attempts to make the unfamiliar understandable on our terms: terms predetermined by a limited frame of reference?

and

How do we as cultural brokers engage with the complexities of difference in a shifting cultural climate and changing world, a fluid world in which we must recognize that meaning is never fixed? (p. 69)

The first question raises a crucial issue in relation to the earlier choreographies of the KAHAYAG, those that derived movements from ethnolinguistic

groups in the South. It is a question seemingly impossible to address because it is vexed by the issue of authenticity (i.e., "genuine" in Ugwu's words). Even before making the audience comprehend what is "unfamiliar" to them in terms of the dance company's vocabulary, there is the dancers' challenge of first understanding the "other" whom they wish to present to the public. (I do not use the word "represent" as contemporary dancers and choreographers in the Philippines do not wish to "represent" any of our ethnolinguistic groups.) The process is akin to, but more problematic than relay translation, because movement is more abstract and ephemeral than the written word.

The second question is one that will always have to be confronted by Garrovillo's company which claims a "native" identity in the South. The decision to distinguish between modern and contemporary in terms of creating works for Manila and Cotabato are rooted in an awareness that choreographies are subject to changing aesthetics.

These appear to be Catch-22 questions. But then what choice is left to a contemporary dancer/choreographer? Ugwu (1998) provides an optimistic view: "We [artists and curators] have the capacity to acknowledge difference without fetishising it, and the freedom to represent without having to be representative—let's use it" (p. 77). There is indeed a thin line between critical appropriation and exotization. This notwithstanding, the responsibilities of creating works would just have to be acknowledged. And for artists like Garrovillo and his dancers, who earlier on had realized that theirs will always be a problem of "tokenism," "fetishism," and "othering" if they continue to derive their movements from the T'Bohis and B'laans, contemporary dance has provided them with a form befitting their "identity."

So, what keeps the company's dancers going despite the difficulties of being artists in a nation that does not consider culture and the arts of prime importance? Sheer passion, the members say. Despite their cultural and even political agenda, the members do not feel any pressure to create dances with political underpinnings. Quite ironic, considering their location in the South, a so-called hotbed of dissent and conflict. But this is not really surprising if one carefully thinks about their situation. As contemporary dance gives them much creative leeway, their choreographies are rooted in what they feel, whether this may be related to the burning issues of the day or not. Their advocacy and dedication to make dance a strong component of the creative industry and an articulation of regional and national identity,

find expression in their other projects. Funded or not funded, their creations will find ways of locating them in the challenging context of Koronadal. With a critical awareness of the position of artists in the South, they will hopefully continue to enable the production of cultural meanings.

Ultimately, Garrovillo says that he wants “to live as an artist. How do I live as an artist? If I don’t, I’ll be a teacher or a full-time administrator.” His company members are indeed artists with national concerns; and like him, they wish to create the conditions that will make Koronadal conducive to both dancers and choreographers. Garrovillo always asks: “What is the use of dance in a community?” The story of the KAHAYAG and the Noel Garrovillo Dance Studio provides the answer. At present, the school offers two scholarships for potential teachers who are eventually sent to the Cultural Center of the Philippines or Airdance, both in Manila. These scholarships have helped Garrovillo’s school “develop more qualified teachers to handle the growing number of enrollees” (Garrovillo, e-mail to author, 19 January 2012). The other kind of scholarship involves talented out-of-school youth in Koronadal. These are young boys and girls who have a keen interest in dance, but who have lost interest in and have thus dropped out of high school. Garrovillo’s school has been offering free dance classes to them. But because to survive as a dance artist in Koronadal means having to be a dance teacher or choreographer, Garrovillo has likewise provided them special training programs on teaching and choreography.<sup>22</sup>

Making themselves visible has meant staging regular performances scheduled in two seasons. The first, from June to December, has the “Contemporary Dance Scene at the Studio”, which showcases experimental works of the school’s choreography students (every Wednesday and Thursday of August and September). They have been aiming for at least one hundred viewers per show. In October, there is either the “Variety Dance Concert” featuring ballet, contemporary dance, jazz, ballroom, and hip-hop; or the “Season Production”, a full-length contemporary dance performance using local stories and folktales. Because these shows are held in a gymnasium, the target audience is between 1,000 and 2,000 per show (Garrovillo, e-mail to author, 19 January 2012).

The second season which runs from January to May involves performance tours and outreach programs to barangays and nearby provinces (held between February and March). The summer workshop and season 2 dance recital are both held in May (Garrovillo, e-mail to author, 19 January 2012).

Embedded in the school's performances and projects is the aim to expose the community to dance. As Garrovillo elaborates on their activities, he states: "we vary the staging of our performances—from a studio with experimental pieces, to a proscenium stage in a gym with a variety of theatrical dance-drama re-tellings of local stories, to basketball courts in barangays." This strategy, they believe, will:

change the people's perception of dance. . . . that it is not only festival street dancing during fiestas; not only dance that they see everyday on national TV. . . . Dance is not only researched folkdance presented as intermission numbers in school programs. Dance is not only in disco bars and ballroom clubs. But there are dances staged theatrically to tell a history or a local story and there is dance touching on daily social issues. . . . ballet can be performed in a basketball court in a remote area. . . . Dance is culture and life. . . . dancers are . . . cultural workers (Garrovillo, e-mail to author, 19 January 2012).

Theirs is an experience of how every performer's movement is a kinesthetic statement of emotion, ideology, and socio-political and cultural agenda. Theirs is an experience of how they are precariously situated as performers in the South, constantly in dialogue with the "center" (i.e., Manila), the region, and state institutions.<sup>23</sup> Theirs is a strong commitment to assert a regional presence and contribution to dance in the face of challenges such as the Bill on the National Dance Company. Theirs is a continuous voyage in a sea of aesthetic and practical concerns.

And to the question: "Contemporary dance in Cotabato?" Garrovillo, proudly says: "And why not?"

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>A considerable part of this paper is based on an interview with Noel Garrovillo at the Noel Garrovillo Dance Center, Koronadal, Cotabato City, Philippines on November 12-14, 2010.

<sup>2</sup>Although the younger generation has an appreciation of the art, as seen in the popularity of TV dance shows and festivals, dance is still considered a “not-so-serious” form of art in the Philippines.

<sup>3</sup>By “independent choreographer,” I mean a choreographer who is not part of a mainstream dance institution. Garrovillo thinks the term “freelance choreographer” could be used but adds that in the Philippine setting, independence involves having a “personal or private initiative with no support [i.e., full and regular] coming from any mainstream institution or agency” (Garrovillo, e-mail to author, January 19, 2012).

<sup>4</sup>The change was a political move in the sense that it was a strategy to make his name better known. Because he was encouraged by his dancers and some people from the arts community to run for a political position, they thought that naming the dance center after him would help people remember his name (Garrovillo, e-mail to author, January 19, 2012).

<sup>5</sup>Garrovillo has no qualms when he says that he uses his “talent, and passion, and experiences so they can have food on the table.” He continues by explaining that “we earn from the work we love to do” (Garrovillo, e-mail to author, January 19, 2012).

<sup>6</sup>Notwithstanding all the practical concerns that informed the decision to change the name of the group, Garrovillo is proud to say that they always strive to do their best—they are constantly “pressured” (i.e., by themselves) to produce cultural works that make sense to their community. Besides, his “name is at stake”, so whatever they do should be reflective of their commitment to dance and their region (Garrovillo, e-mail to author, January 19, 2012).

<sup>7</sup>As a college student at the Notre Dame of Marbel University, Garrovillo was successful in demonstrating his talent when he responded to the school’s search for choreographers. Seeing an artist in Garrovillo, the university sponsored his training at the CCP’s summer workshops—through Bro. Columbanus Pratt, FMS, founder of NDMU Tambuli Singers—when he was in his junior and senior years.

<sup>8</sup>This is the story of a mythological hero whose family lived in the forest of Lemhadong. One day, he gathered the instruments in the forest and together with his sisters, played all of them. The sounds attracted the other people in the forest who, after the “concert,” decided to stay in Lemhadong, thus forming what is known as the T’boli nation. The T’bolis are found around Lake Sebu which has nineteen barangays (<http://www.altamiraworld.net/lemhadong/legend.html>). Mendung Sabal, a chanter, shaman-healer, epic-chanter, multi-instrumentalist, weaver, embroiderer, and settler of disputes lives in Surrallah, one of these barangays. Her music and chant (translated by scholar Myrna Pula) is featured in Grace Nono’s *The Shared Voice: Chanted and Spoken Narratives from the Philippines* (2008) and *Tudbulul Lunay Mogul: T’boli Hero Of Lunay, The Place Of Gongs and Music* (2002).

<sup>9</sup>Garrovillo explains that contemporary dance was greatly inspired by modern dance techniques, such as exploration and innovation. Following these, what he and his dancers eventually came up with was a “dance routine... based on our situations . . . style and vocabulary.” Notwithstanding the techniques borrowed from modern dance, he reiterates that “malinaw na dapat nasa linya pa rin kami ng contemporary” [it should be clear that we align ourselves with contemporary dance”] (Garrovillo, e-mail to author, January 19, 2012).

<sup>10</sup>This is not to mean that all works of individual choreographers are “contemporary.” My interview with Garrovillo confirms the definition/parameters of “contemporary” I cited in the first part of this paper (i.e., that of Joseph Gonzales).

<sup>11</sup>Pina Bausch and dancers associated with the Judson Memorial Church in the mid-60s (e.g., Steve Paxton, Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, and Lucinda Childs) are considered contemporary choreographers/dancers.

<sup>12</sup>Locsin was the artistic director of BP II (1989-1990) and later, of BP itself (1994-1996). She decided to move to another phase in her career in 1999 when she returned to Davao to create works for the arguably oldest studio in Davao, her Mommy Carmen’s Locsin Dance Workshop which was formally founded in 1947.

<sup>13</sup>For Locsin, “the creation of a new work, though ethnic inspired, is simply a creation. It is the choreographer’s responsibility to distinguish between ethnic and neo-ethnic (i.e., a “new” or current creation) ( Interview of Locsin by Ruth Pison. October 24-26, 2010).

<sup>14</sup>The competition was last held in 2009 but Garrovillo hopes to revive it next year.

<sup>15</sup>The groups performed at the Protech Center during the National Arts Month as part of the “entertainment fare of the Kawayan Festival” (Ferrer, <http://www.southcotabato.gov.ph/tour/ca.html>)

<sup>16</sup>Despite the huge success of the Dinagyang and Sinulog which have become part of the government’s tourism program, several festivals in the other regions do not enjoy this kind of support from the government. Garrovillo points out that some local festivals (e.g., the Helubong festival in Lake Sebu) have been “deteriorating in terms of management and staging activities” due to lack of institutional backing (Garrovillo, e-mail to author, January 19, 2012).

<sup>17</sup>Although entertainers are also part of the creative industry and must be duly recognized as such, it seems that the general public is slow to realize this. Thus, the word “entertainer” has somehow become derogatory, referring to someone who is not a professional but who is a “mere” source of pleasure.

<sup>18</sup>Despite their disappointment at how they are sometimes treated, Garrovillo accepts some commercial projects to keep his artistic endeavours going. As mentioned above, he has just been practical in practising his art and making it relevant to the community.

<sup>19</sup>Interestingly, this was the last time he worked with the T’bolis because he felt that there will always be the danger of possibly “destroying and converting their rituals

into some form of commodity." After this collaborative work, he decided to "find his own ritual and make his own art" (Garrovillo, e-mail to author, January 19, 2012).

<sup>20</sup>For a discussion on the issues surrounding the staging of Philippine dances by the Bayanihan, refer to Steve Villaruz's "Are National Artistic Companies Necessary?," "Fugitive Thoughts on Ethnicity and the Obsession with a National Art," "The Role of Dance in Nation-Building: Is the Nation Dancing with Its People?" and "Stage/State-Managing: Ethnicity and Identity in Dance," in *Treading Through: 45 Years of Philippine Dance* published by the UP Press in 2006.

<sup>21</sup>It must be noted that this is his personal observation and does not take into account the earlier strong female figures in choreography such as Agnes Locsin.

<sup>22</sup>Beltran makes a similar observation as regards the opportunities of dancers in the country. According to her, there is really no [dance] academy in the Philippines—"there is no infrastructure", so "performing and training goes hand in hand - that's how all learn. It's not like there is an academy, where they graduate from. . . then they perform. Here, they teach to learn dancing too, to earn money so they can learn some more, and perform some more" (Beltran, e-mail to author, January 20, 2012).

<sup>23</sup>They have continuously found ways to be present during national dance festivals in different parts of the Philippines. They have joined the National Dance Congress, the Wi-fi Body Contemporary Dance Festival, the Sayaw Pinoy Dance Competition, the Dance Xchange, the Philippines International Dance Festival and Workshop, and the Philippines 'International Dance Day. And for every performance they do, Garrovillo's group is motivated by the desire to present the best in their province/region. They have always wished to "bring honor and recognition" to Koronadal and to an extent, help "promote" their place for tourism purposes. They see that dance can and should help in developing their locality (Garrovillo, e-mail to author, January 19, 2012).

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