

Syncretic Choreography in Philippine Dance Theater: Danced Narratives of Interstitiality and *Kapwa*

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“The heart of Philippine dance’s future lies in the hands of Filipino choreographers.”

—Basilio Esteban Villaruz, *Evening Express*, 1980

The Philippines’ indigenous and colonial influences make the nation-state’s movement practices as diverse as its heterogeneous ethnolinguistic groups and traditions, and as pluralized in modality as its indigenous, colonial, and Asian influences. While aesthetics of American modern dance and of classical ballet seem imprinted and sedimented in the bodies of work of concert dance companies in Manila, there has been a dynamic and continuing practice of ‘Filipinizing’ ballet and modern dance since the mid 20th century. Certainly, altering the historically Euro-American dance form undergirds a borrowing and theatricalizing of choreographic phenomena or structured movement systems from Philippine ethnolinguistic groups in the service of ballet or modern dance. But for works that are choreographically syncretic, ‘Filipinizing’ is more an artistic articulation of difference and of being Filipino than a project of explicit cultural appropriation.

In this paper, I borrow ‘syncretic choreography’ from postcolonial ‘syncretic theater’ as a conceptual term to unpack cultural interaction, tensions, and translation within any theatrical work with a hybrid nature.¹ Christopher Balme (1999) describes syncretic theater as a process in which

“culturally heterogeneous signs and codes are merged” to decolonize the stage (p. 1). I posit that the merging of Philippine folk dance and American modern dance codes of theatrical performance can “fashion a new form of theater in light of colonial or post-colonial experience” through the “creative recombination of their respective elements, without slavish adherence to one or the other” (p. 2). The intertextuality of syncretic theater can function to establish tension between “meanings engendered by texts in the traditional performative context and the new function within a Western dramaturgical framework” to create new ways of articulating meaning (p. 5).

Homi K. Bhabha (1994) expands the idea of newness birthed from difference and locates this process within individual experiences, drawing from literary texts to illustrate how cultural interactions produce hybridities and differences. Such interactions are framed as the interstice or “the overlap and displacement of domains of difference” (p. 2). Blurring the lines between demarcations of cultural specificity, he suggests that the “interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (p. 4). Performing through the “in-between” spaces of identity “initiate[s] new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation” (p. 2) that challenge us to think beyond “singularities of ‘class’ or ‘gender’ as primary conceptual and organizational categories” (p. 1). To look beyond fixed identities is “to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences” (p. 1). The articulation of cultural difference is stimulated by identities and experiences that belong in the interstice—between the borders—and “becomes a space of intervention in the here and now” (p. 6).

Similar to ‘interstitiality’, the term ‘liminality’ is used by Victor Turner in his oft-cited *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1974) to describe pivotal moments within an individual’s life. Liminality is the interim moment of rituals where those being moved are between two ordered worlds and have the capacity to reformulate alternative social arrangements and norms within that moment. According to Turner, liminal thinkers such

as poets, writers, and prophets provide root metaphors by which to describe life and reformulate performances of “programs” that structure life.

My other intention is to build on Sally Ann Ness’ article on Agnes Locsin’s *Igorot*: “Originality in the Postcolony,” and Basilio Esteban Villaruz’s essays on Philippine dance theater. Ness notes that the Filipinization of ballet has been “a multifaceted cultural movement and not simply a post independence political by-product” (1997, p. 68). To her, the choreography of *Igorot* constructs a hybrid visual object between the Cordillera image and ballet, an emancipatory act that restores dignity to the marginalized in an international space and “moves toward an emancipatory nationalistic ‘postcoloniality’ in its erasure of a colonial stigma” and its use of ballet as “exploitable technology” (1997, p. 72; p. 76). By arguing for a “nontraditional awareness of ballet” that disfigures the ballerina image (p. 78), *Igorot* undoes hegemonic traditions of ballet and decolonizes the genre in the Philippine context.

I refer to Villaruz (1997) who looks “inward” to locate the *kaluluwa*, the Filipino soul in dance or “the spirit or essence of ourselves” (p. 30). The Filipino soul resides in the *loob* (inside), and is comprehended when presented “outward” through the physical body. Villaruz maintains that even in choreographic transformations that decolonize European dance forms, “[t]he Filipino soul can still be seen through these imported choreographic dresses” because these “have been used to express our own choreographic literature, using myths and legends, historical and contemporary subjects” (1997, p. 32). Through the inventiveness and ingenuity of modifying dances from colonial heritage, “colonial domination has been changed through choreographic transformation” (1997, p. 32). In much the same way that ballet is exploitable technology, Western dance forms serve as linguistic tools to theatrically convey past and present Filipino narratives. Thus, the Filipino soul can remain intact and agentive.

Following Ness, I understand choreography as an ethnographic practice that reveals a world where people move (1992, p. 11). Choreographed movement, whether an artistic creation or a creation of a specific culture,

reveals “the tensions and fluencies, harmonious or discordant, that exist habitually or instantaneously between people or between humans and various elements or aspects of the world around them” (p. 13). Specific choreographies, as narratives of experience, tell how dance forms and vocabularies originally from the ‘other’ become ‘nativized’ but also ‘resisting’, i.e., as transformed into Filipinized forms and from Filipino experiences. Ness and Villaruz suggest ways in which Western codes of movement are utilized as vehicles to convey Filipino experience and postcoloniality. I build on their work through a process-oriented approach toward Filipinization that highlights how this postcolonial strategy emerges through an artistic experience of the ‘other’ as well as through interaction with fellow Filipinos.

I contextualize the choreographers’ backgrounds by providing a (fragmented) history of Western concert dance in the Philippines and theatricalized Philippine folk dance and their interactions within historical points in Philippine dance² in order to examine how the syncretic choreographic choices of Alice Reyes, Agnes Locsin, and Al Garcia are influenced by experiences of interstitiality. I also situate each of these choreographer’s choreographic philosophies and experiences to denote how pieces represent ontological questions of dance and look at how syncretic choreography also involves a sense of self in relation to others, illustrated through collaboration with artists and dancers and the use of Philippine literary texts, myths, and ritual structures to establish Filipino-ness. I argue that a sense of *kapwa* necessitates a negotiation and a change of codes and bodies with regard to performing the Filipino identity.

The concept of *kapwa* proffers the possibility that Filipino identity is not only constructed through difference but also through a sense of community. As identified by Virgilio Enriquez (1986), and as described by Jeremiah Reyes (2015), *kapwa* is part of a Filipino virtue system that is broadly defined as the relational “shared self”, “shared identity”, “self-in-the-other”, yourself “together with the person” (p. 149). I describe *kapwa* here as active, agentive, and operated under the concept of *loob* or the relational will that is directed towards other people. This system includes

the principles of *kagandahang-loob* (goodwill) and *pakikiramdam* (relational sensitivity), among others. To Villaruz, it is the soul that is our *loob*, and the internal passions and motives of a self can be expressed outwardly through dance, which includes different colonial dance forms (2006, p.30). The choreographic process itself can also be framed as a nationalistic practice and not merely a Filipinized, syncretic output.

The Nation in Philippine Dance

The practice of ballet dancing was introduced in the early 20th century at the onset of American colonization in the country. Ballet was one among many forms of theater performance in the country, which included the Spanish zarzuela that had some dancing but was not primarily a danced form. According to Villaruz, Maestro Appiani taught European dances from the middle to the end of the 19th century. In 1901, the Liliputians were the first performers to use the word 'ballet' to name their kind of theatrical dance. In 1915, claiming to be a member of the Imperial Russian Ballet, Paul Nijinsky performed in Manila. In 1922, the ballerina Anna Pavlova performed at the Manila Grand Opera House, and four years later, so did the Denishawn Company, one of the pioneering groups of American modern dance. Evidently, American colonization prompted an influx of Western dance forms at the same time that it established schools and initiated performances in both classical ballet and modern dance.³

In the 1920s, the United States also funded Philippine folk dance research. Francisca Reyes-Aquino's dance research received funding from Filipino nationalist and American-educated Jorge Bocobo who was then the president of the University of the Philippines. Bocobo believed that young Filipinos should demonstrate and embody their repertoire to "validate" the country's existence as an independent nation-state. For the dissemination and "preservation" of Filipino folk songs and dances, he turned to Reyes-Aquino for its achievement (Gonzalvez, 2010, p. 40). With Bocobo's support and for the purpose of dissemination, Reyes-Aquino created the first repertoire for performing Philippine nationalism through

her catalogue of dances that sought to textually depict and compositionally recreate the dances she had seen throughout the Philippines. Her extensive research in folk dance continues to inform if not influence dance theater choreographers who endeavor to instill Filipino themes in their ballets. Trained in drama and dance, Leonor Orosa-Gocquingco was foremost in the integration of folk dance and theater as a theatrical whole (Villaruz, 2006, p. 235). Hers was a kind of Philippine choreography that “insist[ed] on native sources and deep feeling” (2006, p. 235) and where folkloric dancing and subject “merged” with ballet choreography and theater (2006, p. 234).

This “merging” is neither new nor unique to the Philippines. During the Romantic period, ballet in Europe also saw significant moments in integrating folk dances, used distinctly as character dances, that served to establish a movement dynamic contrast between *danse d'ecole* (classical ballet) and other European dance forms to denote the presence of folklore and ‘folk’ people (see Marianne Smith, 2000). In the late 19th century, Russia became the center of ballet performance and innovation. Czarist rule supported and recognized the use of ballet to spread European culture in Russia, and at the same time, to introduce Russian nationalism and culture to the world. Russian folk dances and music (i.e., Tchaikovsky) added to the texture and vocabulary of ballet through the works of Marius Petipa, a French ballet master, and Lev Ivanov, his Russian successor and assistant. The 20th century Ballet Russes saw Russian folklore represented in ballet, avant garde, and neo-classical dance works were seen in the choreographies of Vaslav Nijinski, his sister Nijinska, and Michel Fokine (see Carol Lee, 2002).

The first ballet performance staged at the Cultural Center of the Philippines was Dance Theater Philippines’ *Mir-i-nisa* in 1969.⁴ Choreographed by ballet teachers Felicitas Radaic and Julie Borromeo under the direction of Eddie Elejar, the ballet was also the first Filipino ballet in three-acts (Cultural Center of the Philippines, 1994, p. 53). To prepare for the show, Elejar sought the advice of fellow Bayanihan dancer Alice Reyes who had just returned to Manila after completing her studies in the United

States (B. E. Villaruz, personal communication, September 23, 2016). After *Mir-i-nisa*, the Cultural Center of the Philippines commissioned the Alice Reyes and Modern Dance Company and the Hariraya Ballet to create similar dance works. The Alice Reyes and Modern Dance Company premiered its first production on February 21, 1970 with dancers from the Bayanihan, the University of the East, and Dance Theater Philippines. After the group solidified itself as a company through the Summer Dance Workshop, the years that followed saw the Cultural Center of the Philippines dance commissions given mainly to Reyes' company. Later, the company became one of the Cultural Center of the Philippines' resident ballet companies and was renamed Ballet Philippines. The company nourished Philippine dance through the creation of a vast repertoire, the training of dancers by invited international dance teachers and dance masters, the establishment of a school, the performance in international and local tours that represented Philippine dance, and the appropriation of funds from the wealthy towards the support of developing performing arts and artists.

The Choreographers and Their Milieus

To fully appreciate the choreographic works in this study, it is important to understand the environs that surrounded the artists who produced them.

Alice Reyes was born in Manila to a family of dancers and musicians who worked closely with Francisca Reyes-Aquino and the Bayanihan Philippine National Folk Dance Company. Her father, Ricardo Reyes, was a pianist for Reyes-Aquino before joining the Bayanihan, while her mother was a voice teacher and head of the music department at the Philippine Women's University where the Bayanihan was based. Although Reyes was too young to recognize Reyes-Aquino's significance as a child, she does remember how Reyes-Aquino was a constant figure in her parents' work:

Because my father and my mother were with the UP Dance group that she [Francisca Reyes-Aquino] had organized, they had travelled all over the country with her. So my father and my mother were very close to her

... I grew up with her. She'd be teaching folk dance at the Rizal Memorial, and I'd go there bored to death [because] I was a little girl waiting for my father. (A. Reyes, personal communication, October, 1, 2016)

Dancing the folk dance with her father for much of her childhood was “something that [she] just did” (Reyes, 2016). When the Bayanihan invited the father-daughter tandem to participate in the Brussels State Fair and later with the Bayanihan company, she took note of the “incredible range of our folk dances” (Reyes, 2016). The Philippine folk dance repertoire—ranging north to south from the Cordillera to the Muslim suites—performed in one program, left the world in awe: “People from all over who had seen the Bayanihan, and therefore [our] folk dances for the first time ... were just stunned. They were just stunned, because we had all these ‘exotic’ folk dances. We really conquered the world” (Reyes, 2016).

Founded in 1957 at the Philippine Women's University, the Bayanihan debuted at the 1958 World's Fair in Brussels and gained international acclaim in subsequent numerous world festivals. Like Reyes-Aquino, the Bayanihan prided itself as cultural bearers of Philippine dance, conducting research in the field in order to “take ancient lore straight from the people” (L. Urtula, as cited in Gonzalvez, 2010, p. 75). This participative learning from various ethnolinguistic groups was essential to impede the loss of “the original flavor and feeling of the dance” and to prevent offending “the sensibilities of the ethnic group from which the dance originated” (Gonzalvez, 2010, p. 75). However, Lucrecia Kasilag, the Bayanihan's founding composer and arranger, acknowledged that the Bayanihan folk dances could never be fully authentic—not due to inevitable recontextualization and differences in movement qualities, but because “the group's work consists of taking indigenous and folk music and raising it to a theatrical level” (p. 79). While both Reyes-Aquino and the Bayanihan recognized the importance and value of Philippine folk dance, Reyes-Aquino had understood and acted upon the need to document and disseminate traditional dance for nation building; on the other hand, the Bayanihan moved to research and performance to

validate the existence of “modernity.” The Bayanihan’s influence spread across the nation and influenced a new breed of Philippine folk dance teachers.

Agnes Locsin was born in Davao to photographer Jose Severino Locsin and dancer Carmen Dakudao Locsin. Having studied with Leonor Orosa Goquingco, in 1949, Carmen Locsin founded the Locsin Dance Workshop, one of the pioneering schools for ballet instruction in Davao City. Agnes Locsin learned Philippine folk dance at an early age because she had worked as an assistant to her sister Bing, a Bayanihan dancer, who taught folk dance at the Philippine Women’s College. A choreographer at her mother’s school at the age of 15, the young Locsin’s choreographic “Filipinization”, unsurprisingly centered on storytelling:

I just mixed because that was what she did—ballet steps, [with] arm gestures. I didn’t know modern dance. I called my dances ‘jazz ballet’. I did not know that I was doing modern dance ... But here [in Davao] I was already a storyteller because my mom was. (A. Locsin, personal communication, June 5, 2016)

The “Filipinization” of ballet had been a particular imperative in her mother’s school recitals because of Goquingco’s influence, and because its creation was always assigned to Locsin. For some summers, she would accompany her mother to Manila and dance at summer dance workshops at the Cultural Center of the Philippines. Later, she would receive a BA in English from the Ateneo de Davao University where she would meet Joey Ayala, a musician with whom she has had a prolific collaborative relationship.

The Cultural Center of the Philippines as an institution sought to embed nationalism in dance. Ferdinand Marcos was elected president of the Philippines in 1965, was re-elected in 1969, and declared Martial Law in 1972. Under his presidency and dictatorship, and with First Lady Imelda Marcos, institutions of art were established. These institutions

sought to promote Filipino artists but, in truth, served the opportunistic ambition of the Marcoses. Art historian Pearlie Baluyut (2012) writes that this patronage in institutions such as the Cultural Center of the Philippines and the Philippine High School for the Arts aimed to develop the “Filipinos’ strong sense of national pride and identity” (p. 10). To the general public, this patronage, made more conspicuous by the repetitive presence of “A Message from the President of the Republic of the Philippines”, seemed to automatically brand the dances at the Cultural Center of the Philippines as “nationalistic”.

Branded as “‘the state’s gift’ to the Filipino people” (Baluyut, p. 20), the Cultural Center of the Philippines supported Marcos’ view that the Filipino “must get back to his roots, his culture ... the distinguishing mark, the source of identity that stems them apart from other people” (as cited in Baluyut, p. 30). This envisioned identity, however, was also to be cultivated and mobilized through “cultural development” programs that trained and disciplined Filipino artists and audience members. While Bocobo and Reyes-Aquino mobilized their own idea of Filipino identity through dance, Marcos took it upon himself to guide the performance of a singular Philippine national identity. With this ideology, heterogeneity in the Philippines was to be fashioned and packaged to form a Filipino identity performed at the Cultural Center of the Philippines where it was to be elevated and esteemed to equal the global artscape such that whatever was performed there problematically excluded the “presentation of indigenous culture” (p. 34).

Al Garcia was born in Tacloban, in the Visayas. He describes his hometown as a province where dancing is “alive” (A. B. Garcia, personal communication, September 29, 2016). The city of Tacloban would regularly participate in national competitions involving “dance drama” based on *kwentong bayan* (stories of the province). Garcia found himself auditioning to join the Leyte Dance Theater of Jess de Paz.⁵ He would later enroll at the Philippine High School for the Arts, moving to Laguna province in Southern Luzon, in close proximity to Manila.

Syncretic Choreographies of the Filipina/o Artist

As introduced in the intersections of Reyes-Aquino, the Bayanihan, the Cultural Center of the Philippines, and the Philippine High School for the Arts in these choreographers' histories, institutions of power controlled the performativity of Philippine culture and identity. However, I maintain that, while probably true, these choreographers also resisted institutional essentialist views on Philippine dance and nuanced its performativity by articulating their subjectivity, thus creating syncretic dance forms that neither sought to "elevate" nor "authenticate" Philippine folk dances.

The artists' experience of interstitiality is integral to creating syncretic choreographies. Moreover, these Filipinized pieces were also created with Filipino collaborators and structured through the dramatic use of rituals, both of which denote a sense of *kapwa*. All pieces, as included in Ballet Philippines' repertoire, exhibit similarity, follow certain aesthetic traditions, and appeal to an audience with institutional demands from administrative leaders.

Meanwhile, the experience of difference is concretized not only in the composition and integration of different movement vocabularies in one body. Aside from being an effect of Filipino identification constructed through difference, syncretic choreography involves an articulation of the Filipino self in relation to other Filipino bodies, ideas, and narratives, which serve as metaphorical devices for the choreographers' statements about difference and being Filipino. This newness arises not only through personal experience but also through a sense of *kapwa* which involves an anchoring of the experience and of the dance on existing literature, oral narratives, and similar practices by other Filipino artists. Thus, identity construction does not only operate through difference but also through similarity and a sense of self in relation to the other.

National Artist for Dance Alice Reyes' *Amada* (1970) and multi-awarded choreographer Agnes Locsin's *Encantada* (1992) are two masterworks within the 500-work repertoire of Ballet Philippines that exemplify a choreographic

syncretization of Philippine folk dance and modern dance.⁶ Folk dancer Al Garcia's *Tau-Luwa* (2016), presented by Ballet Philippines' junior company, is located in a relatively recent artistic history and context.

Amada

Amada, Reyes' graduation piece at Sarah Lawrence in the United States, premiered during the company's first production.⁷ The ballet is based on Nick Joaquin's short story "Summer Solstice" and features commissioned music by Lucrecia Kasilag, Roberto Chabet, Salvador Bernal, and Katsch SJ Cato. Cato designed the set, costumes, and lighting, respectively. Reyes danced the title role for her thesis and years later with the Cultural Center of the Philippines Dance Company. It proved to be a historic collaboration as Reyes, Kasilag, and Joaquin would later be honored as National Artists of the Philippines.

"Summer Solstice" is a short story included in Joaquin's collection *Prose and Poems* published in 1952. The story revolves around the *Tadtarin* festival held in summer. Initially against the St. John's Day festivities, especially because of the participation of her maid, Doña Lupeng (in the ballet, *Amada*) grows curious of the celebrations that her husband Don Paeng (in the ballet, Don Rafael) ridicules. Enticed by her husband's cousin to come with him, she eventually takes part in the festival and is transformed into a woman who is able to subvert the hierarchy between husband and wife as well as express passionate fury. The main conflict lies in the question of whether men should openly testify their love, respect, and adoration of women. In the end, Don Paeng crawls across the floor and kisses Doña Lupeng's foot as proof of his adoration of her.

Four years before this presentation, in 1966, with a scholarship from the Music Promotion Foundation of the Philippines, Reyes went to Colorado and New York to study with Hanya Holm and later with Bessie Schönberg. She received an MFA in Dance in 1969. Its program's definition of "modern"

took its cues from American modern dance philosophies as practiced by Hanya Holm, José Limón, Alwin Nikolais, and Martha Graham, which in sum is a universal dance form more connected to personal expression and real life. Working with Holm, Reyes recounts,

I was trying to grasp the essence of modern dance as she [Hanya Holm] embodied it, as she taught it, and as she created in her choreography ... There was no conscious bringing of, 'I'm a folk dancer so I should do etc.' I came there because I had a scholarship and I was very open to what was there. (A. Reyes, personal communication, October 1, 2016)

For Reyes, the Holm and the Wigman School allowed an artist to use his/her own interpretation and subjectivity in choreography within a framework of American modern dance philosophies. She says, “[Holm] came from the Wigman’s school where there was more of a belief in giving you the foundation of the philosophy of dance, and then you carry it on your own style” (2016). Meanwhile, the graduate program under Schönberg helped her form her personal style. At Sarah Lawrence, Reyes started to work with materials and movements in Philippine dances, rhythms, songs, and stories. She notes, “[A]s I went on to graduate school, that’s when the ethnic came up because I realized, that’s where I should go.” Critically reflecting on her movement practices and their use for creating movement motifs, she realized that “there was so much in [Philippine dance] ... It was there, so why should I go [for another mode and dance style]” (2016).

*Amada*⁸ opens to dark and sinister music punctuated by strong cymbals. A man, Don Rafael, dances with strengthening and slashing movements. A group of dancers bows to him and follows from behind him in a procession. Don Rafael’s gestures produce strong sounds from the percussive use of his body and from the orchestra’s response to his gestures. His musical theme is heavy and powerful with movement motifs similar to that of the *Maglalatik*, a popular masculine folk dance in which men clap with coconut shells, some shells held and others attached to parts of the body.

The woman, Amada, enters, dancing with a lightening and freeing quality, with some instances of strengthening and binding, directed within a framework of space delineating sagittal, horizontal, or vertical planes, and front, side, and back points within a kinesphere (i.e., the whole space or sphere that a body occupies, best illustrated in Da Vinci's Vitruvian Man). These qualities allude to both the "continuous and smooth" and "sharp and percussive movement", movement principles Schönberg had explored in her composition classes. The binding tension is clear when Amada extends her legs in either *arabesques* (to the back) or *à la seconde* (to the side), and arms in contralateral positions. The "continuous and smooth" is performed with folk dance gestures such as the *kumintang* (rotating of the wrists), and the *salok* (a turn in which one arm propels the body downward and the other upward during the turn), which could also be read as a *soutenu*. During the *kumintang* movements, her feet either extend in *à la seconde* (raised to the side), or grounded in fourth position, establishing the lower half of the body as balletic. Her gestures are reminiscent of the typical Maria Clara dances where arms frame the face with occasional *épaulement* (positioning of arms in relation to the upper body) for flourish. Amada is choreographed to embody the epitome of the Filipina woman. Contrastingly, "the sharp and percussive" is achieved with claps that seem to allude to the *jota* (a Spanish-influenced dance done with castanets).

Amada's predominant mode of movement is in space, whereby she swings her arms and legs on the sagittal plane reminiscent of the Holm and Limón aesthetic, and occasionally manipulates her skirt in ways that harken to a woman's typical hand placement in Spanish-influenced Philippine folk dances, or in the *flamenco*. The extending legs, rather than demarcating space with static extensions, move with gliding swings that delineate full range of spatial mobility more than the length of the limbs.

A *pas de deux* follows where the tensions and contrast between the man and the woman's movement-themes, their masculine and feminine undertones, are dialectically realized. His hand is always above her,

overpowering her as she moves under his control, exhibiting the typical heteronormative power dynamic of Philippine folk dance.

Three women enter as the music changes to a faster rhythm, and two men are seen watching them in fear.⁹The women slash their arms ending in slaps on the body directed at the sagittal plane, with a spreading and enclosing shape that effectively depicts strength with the coming in and going out. They stomp and *pas de chat* with their bodies bent forward, arms in front of the waist, mimicking *Magtanim Ay Di Biro*, the Planting Rice dance of the Bayanihan (an occupational dance that shows bodies bending forward as though planting rice). Amada starts imitating the rhythm and quickness, performing some movements from her previous solo, but only quicker and more urgent, swinging her straight limbs energetically farther than before. Don Rafael notices and manipulates her into their *pas de deux* motif. He is more adamant, his body used as a percussive instrument, doing occasional pirouettes, as if to imply his annoyance at her and his stubbornness. She runs off stage and leaves him.

Although folk dance elements are distinctly used, Reyes states, “I was not really picking from this one and then—no. That wasn’t the way it worked. It was just something that either the moment or the music called for, the development of the scene” (2016). The use of the *kumintang* alludes to the Spanish era, while the *Itik-itik* denotes a “movement of strength” in an “a terre” (to the floor) manner (2016). She describes how using the Philippine folk dance was second nature to her:

You know I think that it is definitely a defining thing in me in that I did so much folk dancing with my father, with the Bayanihan, that it’s just in me. The rhythms, you know, the gestures. (2016)

In fact, Schönberg’s choreographic philosophy, which developed through her pioneering work in creating a dance composition curriculum for higher education, was largely dependent on her concept of kinetic thinking, which involves accepting that “the dance student [possesses] a

kind of second-nature awareness that the elbow thinks, the knee thinks, the shoulder thinks, the sternum thinks, the tailbone thinks, and is much more reliable than the head in a given situation for certain needs” (Schönberg, as cited in Noble, 2005, p. 122). This notion of the body thinking is paradigmatic to how performance studies discourses frame the body as the locus of embodied knowledge “passed on through expressive cultures” (Taylor, 2003, p. 17), such as in the learning of folk dance. Thinking here then means thinking through and with the body, recalling as it were past ways of moving, representing, and interpreting.

The next scene is the ritualistic summer solstice rite, the *Tadtarin*. In Nick Joaquin’s short story, the *Tadtarin*’s mystery is, as Doña Lupeng (in the ballet, Doña Amada) describes it:

I do not know. I can only *feel* it. And it *frightens* me. Those rituals come to us from the earliest dawn of the world. And the dominant figure is not the male but the female ... These women worship a more ancient lord.¹⁰

People stomp their feet, slap their bodies and jump. The swinging of arms that initiate a folding and unfolding of the frenzied body indicate their strength. A woman takes the lead in the dancing, as another becomes the ritual’s sacrificial body. When the sacrificed body dies as the frenzied dancing escalates, the men and women cover their heads and perform a keening ritual: their bodies rocking back and forth as they hum in a crescendo which ends in a scream. The sacrificial woman is alive once again.

The *corps de ballet* jumps with the energy initiated by bent elbows punching the sides of the body, reminiscent of the *Itik-itik* (which was originally a movement that represents the bird’s wings). From the *kumintang*’s daintiness, Amada is compelled by the *Itik-itik*’s quick and rhythmic angularity of binding movements that becomes a study of strength. They jump, clap their hands as their arms and bodies become heavier and grounded, the energies focused downward. Don Rafael enters to try to plead with the sacrificed woman, now revealed to be Amada. He pleads with her

to come back to him, arms slashing and punching. Amada now dances with tension, slashes, and slaps, swinging her arms on the sagittal plane ending with a punch-like quality. The ballet ends with Amada standing on the only platform, bending her back, palms up, and bouncing as her back gives way to gravity while her chest resists it.

The range in *Amada's* choreographic interpretation of weakness, strength, frenzy, and empowerment shows the performative dimensions of Philippine folk dance where various movement qualities create characters that are intriguingly Filipino, but also present dancers with binding modern dance energies of unending full-body mobility and athletic tension. The presence of both is evident in the use of Philippine dance movement motifs interspersed or sometimes combined with modern dance dynamics, style, and form.

These qualities are performed to depict the story of empowerment, not only because the choreography calls for clear changes in intentions and dynamics needed in the plot, but also because Reyes as choreographer and director is able to draw out such energetic commitment, tension, and precise musicality from her dancers.

The dancing is amplified by the whole stage-scape of the music, lights, and set. The spectacle, which for a mainly ballet-centric audience is apparent in elevated lines and multiplied turns, lies in the liberties in moving that the body was directed to do—quickenings, strengthening, throwing, shaping, making sounds.

Reyes chose Joaquin's "Summer Solstice" specifically because it was relevant to her circumstances in New York—women's liberation was emerging then. As a piece that was part of the first-ever program of Ballet Philippines, it could be said that *Amada's* aesthetic is formative to the company's aesthetic tradition of presenting a different style of Filipinization. Villaruz's review of the piece thirty years later¹¹ notes its longevity in interest and continuing relevance, citing that in "tale and temperament", it is "very" Filipino and, "with Kasilag's serviceable music," is "rawly appealing and

mythically meaningful". Indeed, much of Ballet Philippines' choreographic tradition involves collaboration between Filipino musicians, set designers, and lighting designers. According to Reyes, she started choreographing the piece by clapping out rhythm according to her sense of music before "giving" the musical structure to Kasilag. During the first few productions of the piece, the original dancers recall that Kasilag herself would bang on the piano with her foot as other dancers plucked the strings of the piano to produce the aural soundscape.

Evidently, *Amada* was given shape by Joaquin's story, particularly lush with the exotic (Furay, 1953), and centered on a woman who starts to recognize the potential power of women over men. To craft a choreography that could be understood easily, Reyes chose to limit the main characters to three, excluding Guido and Amada (the cook) and retaining or refashioning the characters of Don Rafael and Amada.

The significance of the Tadtarin ritual as the impetus for change was retained in the adaptation because of its physical nature. The character Guido sees the Tadtarin as a "remind[er] [to] us men that once upon a time you women were supreme and we men were the slaves." When Doña Lupeng (Amada) contradicts his statement, Guido counters with a phrase used for the first Program Notes: "The queen came before the king, and the priestess before the priest, and the moon before the sun." Later, Doña Lupeng challenges her husband saying, "How I behaved tonight is what I am. If you call that lewd, then I was always a lewd woman and a whipping will not change me--though you whipped me till I died."

The Tadtarin was choreographically devised through its likeness to the *Pasyon*, a Philippine Catholic practice staged to recall the suffering of Christ. The ritual scene served to convey the Bacchanalian feel that the short story incites in Doña Lupeng "[w]here the dancing and the music and the rhythm just kind of swept everybody off and put them in a trance" (A. Reyes, personal communication, October 1, 2016). The "keening and the humming" in *Amada* effected an eerie atmosphere that enticed the archetypal Maria Clara figure toward a transformation of gender norms.

This narration illustrates the challenges Reyes encountered when, in the 1970s, she decided to stay permanently in Manila to found the company. She claims that performing the title role was her way of expressing anger at institutional conflicts. The *Tadтарin* also symbolized how “one idea can transform and empower” a whole paradigm (A. Reyes, personal communication, October 1, 2016), as reflected in how Ballet Philippines’ first summer dance workshop birthed a larger initiative for Philippine dance, particularly in professionalizing dance and in nourishing more Filipino choreographers.

In 1987, *Amada* was restaged for the program “Portraits of the Filipina” by Ballet Philippines, primarily because of its “increasing prominence in the international scene”. Its success can be measured in the number of its productions, its wide range, and that its “most prominent [pieces in] the Filipino works ... integrate the Western technique into Filipino movement, theme, design, and inspiration to produce a distinctly Filipino dance form”.¹² This thus justified the inclusion of ‘Philippines’ in the company’s name, Ballet Philippines. More importantly, ‘modern’ was changed to ‘ballet’. Reyes states that she used ‘ballet’ as an overall term for dance.

In the years between the 1970s and the late 1980s, the company staged classical ballet works and trained dancers in both ballet and modern dance. For Reyes, the inclusion of an international ballet repertoire was necessary for two reasons: for professional artistry and professional sustainment. She remarks:

Why limit yourself to ballet, or to modern ... No, I think that the body should be developed so that it is capable of doing whatever one wanted to do with it. Now if you want to do just modern dance, that’s a choice. But then I saw the company as a repertoire company that could dance the whole gamut ... [P]art of it was also because you needed to raise money, so you did *Swan Lake* so you could do [*Crisostomo*] *Ibarra*, *Amada*, and things like that. You did *Swan Lake* for 18 performances so you could fund some other pieces. (2016)

The intervening years, between *Amada* performed by the Alice Reyes and Modern Dance Company and the *Amada* performed by Ballet Philippines, saw the influx of numerous American and European dancers, dance masters, restagers, and choreographers invited to work with the company, as if to validate its professionalism and global competitiveness.

Encantada

In 1989, Agnes Locsin became the Artistic Director of Ballet Philippines' junior company, Ballet Philippines 2, producing a stylistically distinct repertoire from the main company and training a young group of dancers, i.e., the "Locsin babies", to be extensively attuned to her aesthetic and technique. The repertoire she created for Ballet Philippines 2 is 'neo-ethnic'¹³—a term suggested by longtime collaborator musician Joey Ayala in 1986-1987—and would be presented to various audiences around the world. In 1994, Locsin resumed its artistic directorship, a position she held until 1996. The term 'neo-ethnic' was vital in creating a new genre and new way of looking at dance. As Locsin recounts:

Wherever we go, they took us in and said, "atin 'to." [This is ours.] They were so proud of the dances even if they were not dancing. They were so happy to see Filipino dances: *Igorot, Bagobo, Moriones, Moslem*. (A. Locsin, personal communication, June 5, 2016)

Recognizing the impossibility of replicating the 'indigenous spirit' on different bodies with different experiences from rural cultures, Ayala attests, "No matter how closely you imitate a dance that was developed in a different context ... You're not a planter so you don't have the same muscle formations ... You don't have the same intent ... So *bago na siya* (so it's always already different) inescapably so" (J. Ayala, personal communication, July 2, 2016). In this way, bringing out the indigenous spirit results in a new form of 'ethnic', imagined and constructed through dance and dancing bodies.

According to Ness, the neo-ethnicity of *Igorot* is a decolonizing strategy that respects the Cordillera tradition, destigmatizes the “Igorot” image, and locates ethnicity in the foreground. The “neo” in ‘neo-ethnic’ “exposes the real impossibility of ‘natural’ embodied ethnic identity” (1997, p. 78), and instead depicts bodies as the “‘original’ creations of the choreography” (1997, p. 78). In this way, Ness argues that the *Igorot* is in the realm of globality. However, in its decolonizing function, *Igorot* also inheres a paradox of conflation whereby expressed identities become whole identifiers for Filipino identity.

Locsin understood the nominalizing and identity-assigning necessity in dance when she went to the United States. At Ohio State University where she received an MA in Dance in 1981, she became acquainted with the signifiers ‘indigenous’ and ‘modern’. She notes:

When I went to the States to study in Ohio State, things got identified. So I found myself saying, “Ahh so this is what I’ve been doing.” So the things that I did were defined, and then they gave me tools, and I realized, “God, so rich! The Philippines is so rich with movement that I can *explore*”, because when I was here, I would just kind of mix. (2016)

Still, Locsin maintains that performing a sense of nationalism and defining what it means in dance had been far from her original objective. She states, “I didn’t see myself as being nationalistic ... But I became very Filipino because they did not know what I was doing” (2016). Quite fittingly, she was also trained in the Martha Graham technique and philosophy. Aside from being one of the great pillars of American modern dance (one of the ‘Big Four’ which include Doris Humphrey, Merce Cunningham, and Hanya Holm), Graham is known to have been inspired by American-Indian performativity.

Encantada premiered in February 1992 at the Cultural Center of the Philippines with Ballet Philippines through the artistic directorship of

Denisa Reyes.¹⁴ Joey Ayala composed the original music to the lyrics and libretto of *Al Santos*. National Artist Salvador Bernal designed the set and costumes, and with lighting design by Teddy Hilado.¹⁵

Set in the Spanish era, the central conflict in *Encantada* involves a struggle between the *Kababaihan* (Mountain Women) and the *Guardia Civil* (Spanish Civil Guards) as they battle over the *Estranghero* (Common Man) who steals a symbolic image from the latter. It opens with the *Encantada* (Mountain Goddess) atop the mountain, gesturing with soft graceful hands as she awakens *Kalikasan* (Nature) and the *Kababaihan* (Mountain Women). The women react to her presence as their bodies unfold upward, initiated by the chest and through breaths. Mediated by the *Babaylan* (Shaman), the *Kababaihan* dance to words that praise the mountain goddess: “*diwata ... may ina ng kalikasan ... biyayaan mo kami*” (spirit of the mountain ... the mother of nature ... give us grace). The upward chest is set in contrast to the downward push of a *plié*. Occasionally, bent arms cross forward to initiate spins on flat feet, which enhance the organic quality of the whole motif, while arms thrown outward conclude with an inward movement and energy finishing in a downward press to the earth.

Meanwhile, in a church in the lowlands, people perform the ritual of the mass as they fall, stumble, and kneel to the lyrics, “*Diyos ko, patawarin mo ako sa aking sala* (my Lord, forgive me for my sins).” Disillusioned by the Church and the friars’ degradation of parishioners’ human rights and welfare—depicted through tense tableaux of rape and murder—the *Estranghero* steals an *Imagen* (Icon of the Virgin Mary). Enraging the *Frailles* (Spanish priests) for stealing their only material connection to a higher being, the *Estranghero* escapes to the mountains, is chased by the *Guardia Civil*, and finds refuge with the *Kababaihan*. Shaping their bodies as nature, the *Kababaihan* conceal the *Estranghero* moments after he is wounded. Through the *Encantada*’s powers, mediated by the *Babaylan* or *Shaman*, the *Kababaihan* heal the *Estranghero*’s wounds with water iconically portrayed by the women’s long loose hair. The lyrics to the song read: “*Ang mga kababaihan*

ay dumadaloy sa sinapupunan ng lupa (the women of the mountain flow through the womb of the earth),” as in succession, the women run across the stage and land jumps with ease.

After the healing, the *Babaylan* dances with the *Estranghero* to the words, “Salamat sa araw-araw na dumadaloy at umaalon, gabi-gabi na diriwang nagsasabong ng punla. Araw gabi ang biyaya ng lupa, hanagkan ng diwata, nagsisilang ng himala”. (Thanks to the daily stream and surge, each night celebrates the sowing of seeds. Day and night come the earth’s blessings, kissed by the goddess, birthing miracles). The *Encantada* then strips the icon of its clothing revealing a paganistic idol, one that they seem to better recognize. The *Estranghero* remains with the *Kababaihan* as time passes, signified by the *Kababaihan* creating different phases of the moon with the *Encantada*, completing one shape and moving on to the next. In celebration, the *Estranghero* dances with the *Kababaihan* in a festivity inspired by the *Ati-Atihan* and *Sinulog*.

In the first act of *Encantada*, the rhythm, abandon, and splendor allude to certain Philippine rituals. For example, the healing dance of the *Kababaihan* is reminiscent of the *Pagdiwata* harvest ritual of the Tagbanuas in Palawan. The undulations of long hair echo the long dried hay-like leaves manipulated by the *Babaylan* in flicking and shaking gestures. This allusion recalls Martha Graham’s early views on African American and Native American “indigenous dance” as a “way to help modern dancers define their dance as an American art form”, as Julia Foulkes notes (2002, p. 20). Resisting Denishawn and ballet, i.e., instead of the lyrical, linear, and placed dancing America had with ballet, Graham made use of the “rhythm of disintegration” of “abandon and raw splendor” (as cited in Foulkes, p. 20) in African American dances, and “the awareness of life [and] complete relationship with” the environment in Native American dances (p. 20). For example, Graham’s *Primitive Mysteries* sought to explore the “awareness of life, [and] complete relationship with the world” vital to Native American identity (p.20).

The second act starts with the enraged *Frailles*' violent hunt to find the revered *Imagen*, now in the hands of the *Estranghero*, and in the killing of many innocent *Taong Bayan* (People of the Town). As the *Guardia Civil* make gestures of slashing across their necks, large prop heads fly across the stage to signify the orgiastic headhunting. The *Estranghero* is killed. In retaliation, the *Kababaihan* prepare for war, as the *Encantada* cries a lament. The *Kababaihan*, led by the *Babaylan*, descend the mountains but lose the battle and are raped by the *Guardia Civil*. The rape of the *Babaylan* is evidenced in her body's contorting in angular shapes and moving with wrought tension as she is carried while raised by the *Guardia Civil*. As they reclaim the *Imagen*, the *Guardia Civil* burn the forests, setting fire to *Kalikasan*. The *Guardia Civil*'s hands mimic the movement of fire prompting *Kalikasan* to vigorously shake a flame as their heads are touched.¹⁵ Grief-stricken, the *Encantada* wails a lament; "her tears fall[ing] like rain" (A. Locsin, personal communication, August 26, 2018) extinguish the *Kababayan* and *Kalikasan*. She holds their hands to her tear-stained face as they drop to the floor. The *Kababaihan* and *Kalikasan* are transformed into waves, their bodies crouched, their hands creeping through their hair, their loose hair symbolizing flood. The flood kills the *Guardia Civil*. The *Encantada* once again takes the *Imagen* and dances in triumph and hope. The *Kababaihan* and *Kalikasan* rise and, now joined by the *Guardia Civil* dressed like the *Kalikasan*, celebrate with stomping, laughter, and screaming—recalling again the *Ati-atihan* and *Sinulog* festivals.

Encantada was Locsin's first full-length work to premiere in Manila. Before choreographing *Encantada*, Locsin had produced preparatory works, namely *Moriones*¹⁷ with Ballet Philippines 2, *Apik* with Teatro Amakan, *Hinilawood*¹⁸ with Dagyaw in Iloilo National High School, and *Bagobo* again with Ballet Philippines 2. She continued to explore and polish her neo-ethnic style, and prodded by Denisa Reyes, Locsin started research for *Encantada* in Davao del Sur, Sibulan, Calinan, and Mintal.

From her field research, Locsin acquired "concepts that involve emotions or human sentiments, [where] personal experiences come as a valuable resource" (Locsin, 2012, p. 8). Her main concern then was "to get

the actual feel of the environment [whereby] observation of daily activities becomes a necessity” (Locsin, as cited in Corpus, 2007). She depended on “[her] eyes and other senses to absorb what [went] on around [her]” (Locsin, as cited in Corpus, 2007). After gaining somatic knowledge through participant-observation in the field, she framed movement themes and compositions on storytelling, and explored choreographic use of space, time, dynamics, focus, and variation. While it may not have been widely used then, this method of doing, reflecting, and writing/choreographing is what practice-based research in the arts involves today (see Skains, 2018; Nelson, 2013).

Although Locsin’s compositional classes at Ohio State were experimental in movement, she remembers referencing movement styles from the Philippines. She explored choreographic concepts such as strength by associating this quality with the movements of people from the Northern mountainous parts of the Philippines. She realized that her American education gave her tools with which to explore Filipino indigenous culture. Moreover, her teachers, “did not know what I was doing ... they couldn’t correct me” (A. Locsin, personal communication, June 5, 2016). The reception she received abroad made her realize how rich and how different Filipino culture is, enough to preclude criticism from her American teachers and to be distinct from her American cohorts.¹⁹ While it was an empowering strategy to use difference, she recounts, “I just moved” (2016), which is her way of acknowledging indigeneity as performative and as embodied within the frame of dance composition and dancing or practice-based research.

The main movement qualities in *Encantada* three-dimensionally articulate binding and indirect qualities of Laban Movement Analysis’ Effort mode and weight sensing. Most distinct is the difference between modes of meaningfulness—qualities that allow movements to be meaningfully executed—on which the *Encantada/Kababaihan* and *Frailles/Guardia Civil* are choreographed. The *Frailles/Guardia Civil* movement qualities mainly operate in space delineating lines and moving outward; whereas the *Encantada/Kababaihan* movement qualities operate in the body and effort

modes, mainly moving inward—as deliberately staged by Locsin to counter the hegemony of balletic lines. This distinction performs a colonized and decolonized Philippine dancing body to create a clear contrast between ‘indigenous’ and ‘colonial’. She notes that such ethnic inspired movement performed by the *Encantada/Kababaihan* had to be “as human as possible”, repeatedly stressing, “*Tao ka, tao ka, tao ka*” (You are human). The *Encantada* particularly conveyed meaning through a binding tension in the hands. This tension is an inversion of the *Igorot* dichotomy in which, as Ness comments, the upper is “ethnic” and the lower is balletic. Villaruz recognized these ‘indigenous’ and decolonizing movement qualities choreographed in *Encantada* as “hewn close to the [movements of the] Bagobo” tribe (2012, p. 27). The connection of the center of the body with the ground, the flexed feet and concave shape of the upper body are highlighted over balletic lines and convex shaped upper torso. To recall Graham, ballet was counterproductive in fashioning a particularly American dance and in becoming a great artist. She stated that “[t]o be great, art must be indigenous, it must belong to the country in which it flourishes, not be a pale copy of some art form perfected by another culture and another people” (as cited in Mazo, 2000, p. 162).

The final scene in *Encantada, Pagdiriwang* (Celebration) was inspired by the *Ati-atihan* and *Sinulog* festivals and showed the same passion, abandon, and celebratory energies through movement. In *Ati-atihan*, a constant feature in the dancing is the improvisational dancing of *sadsad* (‘to drag one’s feet’). Patrick Alcedo writes, “dancers in *sadsad* submit their everyday bodies a little bit more to the ground to bounce to the never-ending rhythm and tunes. As if slightly jogging, almost in place, they loosely organize their *sadsad* around three initial heavy steps and a terminating light-foot brush” (2014, p. 39). The *sadsad* stomping quality is a basis for the improvised movements in *Encantada*. Dancers in *Encantada* were instructed to crouch low with torsos forward and knees bent, to stomp on the floor in percussive rhythms, and to fill the stage environment with shouts. Allowing the body to bend forward with the torso close to the thigh and the shoulders moving angularly expanded the *sadsad* in *Encantada*, and placed emphasis on the

angularity and rawness of movement. One step followed this rhythm of the *sadsad*: stomping one foot for three beats, and on the third beat lifting the same moving leg to a high *à la seconde* (raised to the side) with feet flexed.²⁰

The staging of the *Pagdiriwang* is also similar to how Ness describes the *Sinulog* parade in its linear procession, constant improvised movement, occasional choreographed unison and manipulation of the hand-held *Imagen* (Ness, 1992, p. 180). In *Encantada*, most movements were improvised on the spot in direct response to the communal joyous dancing, but there were also movements that were choreographed to show phrases done in unison to keep the audience's attention. While improvising, dancers were aware of keeping movements within the parameters of the neo-ethnic style, as ingrained through classes and rehearsals. While the *Sinulog* had gestures that were directed to far-reach space, which made them easily visible yet mechanical, the *Tindera Sinulog* featured movements that moved "from the center of their physical being" (Ness, 1992, p.180). Throughout the improvised dancing in *Pagdiriwang*, dancers had to keep movements connected to the center, as in Graham and Locsin's technique, and to the ground lest the frenzied movements would go completely "*kalas*" (disconnected and loose). Only at the end when the *Imagen* is raised on the pedestal would the dancers raise their hands upward in far-reach.

Similar to *Amada*, the *Encantada* was choreographed through collaboration with music and text: Joey Ayala for the music, and Al Santos for the libretto. Ayala and Santos were Locsin's collaborators in 1977 for a rock opera they produced in Davao. Because then Artistic Director Denisa Reyes turned down the proposal to redo the opera in the 1990s with Ballet Philippines, Santos was tasked to come up with a new libretto, which would revolve around the Maria Makiling myth. The myth was not going to be presented as a typical love-story, but was to be reimagined as a story of rape to represent environmental and colonial abuse. Santos combined three Maria mountains: Makiling, Sinukuban, and Kakaw.²¹ Their knowledge of Philippine rituals and festivals as well as historical events were helpful in constructing the ritual sections of the *Diwata* song, the healing scene, the

Guardia Civil (the Moriones of Marinduque), the mass scene, and the war (the eruption of Mount Pinatubo). While their combined creative forces and efforts made *Encantada* a powerful and evocative dance, Locsin states that the choreographic process, which started a year before its premiere, was hardly smooth. Because each artist had a “distinct artistic vision and drive”, there was a need to give her the position of director and the right to have the final say. In spite of this position, the trio worked together to produce the script, the music, the scene breakdowns, and the dramatic elements in the choreography.

Another collaborative feature of *Encantada*'s choreography was in the dance-making process with the dancers. Locsin constructed a syncretic theater that endeavored to ‘technicalize’ indigenous ways of moving that were affectively determined. This was meant to devise a method for her dancers to understand her subjectivity and come to embody it with their own. She would teach this structure in class and in rehearsals, but it was not the end goal. A dancer who was part of the Ballet Philippines group who stayed with Locsin in Davao in 2014 to train for *La Revolucion Filipina*, describes Locsin's desired movement flow as an inward to outward to inward cycle:

She wants us to show or embody the energy as coming from the inside, going outside, and back inside. It's a cycle that you have to use so that you can move on to the next movement to establish a flow of movement. (Gia Gequinto, personal communication, September 10, 2018)

This energy coming from the self to a space and back to the self, in a subjective interpretation and personal sense of embodiment, is part of what makes Locsin's choreographies distinctly Filipino. Moreover, the dancer describes her as a good motivator: “She is ... good in explaining how it feels, [so] that you feel you can translate what she wants in yourself. She has that command [i.e., gift]” (2018).

Locsin's choreographic aesthetic is reflexively based on her affective and somatic experiences of indigeneity and felt sensibilities during her various immersions, pluralized as it were through working with her dancers. She utilizes Western techniques as a means to develop movement and train dancers. Locsin used Graham's exercises (particularly the use of contraction) on the dancers to learn how to carry their centers at a "lower" level than in ballet, and to feel the body's emotive capacities in performance. This technique, enabled her dancers to interpret on their own the movement sequences Locsin created based on felt logic.

One of the original dancers related that improvisation in the first few stagings of *Encantada* was lost during its 2011 performance. Locsin, by then Davao-based, was not around during the re-staging process. This illustrates how essential collaboration is—body to body, subjectivity to subjectivity, experience to experience—in Locsin's work. Moreover, it shows how her works are not intended for and centered on the representation of a movement aesthetic indigenous to the Philippines but on embodying and kinesthetically understanding the "Filipino" way of life through research-based practice that is focused on pluralizing ways of knowing and feeling, and as constructed in dialogue with dancers.

While the main impetus for choreography and artistic practice that produces syncretic theater is a recognition of interstitiality, it is concretized and articulated through the understanding of a practice of performativity of the Filipino identity, in relation to other Filipino artists who they work with. Also, this understanding is in context of the founding mission of a Philippine dance theater company that is to create more Filipino works and train Filipino dancers. In the choreographic processes, the relationships of dancers, choreographers, and other artists, there is a continuous negotiation of the Filipino identity, implying that there is no 'one' Filipino identity.

Former Philippine president, Fidel V. Ramos, in reviewing the 1992 premiere, remarked:

“[*Encantada*] distills our past experiences into a coherent statement about the present. With works such as this, we can indeed recapture our heritage and make it strengthen the core of culture that will result in a national ethos and lead us to our renewal as a nation.” (1992)

Ramos’ reading of the piece is an example of how *Encantada* and the neo-ethnic aesthetic are framed and functionally read within the narrative of nation-building and heritage preservation. He speaks of a syncretization of the “past” and present as a means of renewal for the nation and of understanding the present as if to allude to the interstitial space that *Encantada* occupies between nostalgia and modernity.

Tau-Luwa

Unlike Reyes and Locsin, Al Garcia’s training in dance and composition was fostered mainly in the Philippines. Garcia was enrolled at the Philippine High School for the Arts as a Folk Dance major. According to Pearlie Baluyut (2012), the school was established by the Marcoses to produce, in the words of Ferdinand Marcos,

a new breed of Filipino youth [that] would take its turn in making a national dream a reality: “the improvement of the quality of human life and in working for the integrated and total development of the nation.” (as cited in Baluyut, p. 50)

Meant to “produce works of national and international merit” (p. 45), it owes its name to the myth of Mt. Makiling. Imelda Marcos famously described the school in the mountains as such: “Here, then, lies love: the love which moves the artist to create what is noble, what is true, and what is beautiful for all of us” (as cited in Baluyut, p. 48). Garcia’s stories of learning provides insight into Philippine Folk Dance transmission in a national arts education institution.

Before enrolment at the Philippine High School for the Arts and later at the University of the Philippines, Garcia's concept of folk dance was that it was old, outdated, and boring. However, in due course, he would prioritize folk dance, in particular in reference to cultural heterogeneity within the nation-state's geographic borders. Through learning folk dance intensively in Makiling, he came to understand that Philippine folk dance is, alive, constant, changing, and productive of knowledge.

In July 2016, Ballet Philippines Artistic Director Paul Morales invited Garcia to choreograph for Ballet Philippines 2's *Bagong Sayaw* program, after witnessing his success at the WiFi Body Contemporary Dance Festival's New Choreographer's Competition in 2014.²² Garcia's *Tau-Luwa* with music composed by Toni Muñoz, premiered as part of the *Bagong Sayaw* program, which features new works by young choreographers, most of whom were part of the company's roster of dancers. The showcase took cues from Locsin's *Ang Bagong Sayaw*, which relaunched Ballet Philippines 2 in the 1980s.²³

Garcia's structuring of the dramatic plot of *Tau-luwa* piece is inspired by his knowledge of Philippine myths, particularly the narrative convention of life cycles. The structure of presenting a life through the depiction of courtship, marriage, birth, and death was always present in the folk dance narratives he learned as a folk dancer. Thus, the storyline of his piece can be said to be conversant with Philippine myths and rituals. As the Program Notes for *Tau-Luwa* reads:

Set in the southern parts of the archipelago, *Tau-luwa* is a story of an imagined rural community, whose rituals are integral to community life as it signifies the cycle of life and passage of time. In courtship, marriage, and birth, we witness the ways in which these rituals validate each member's existence, and preserve a balance between life and loss especially in times of turmoil.²⁴

Through the practice of embodying performative traditions, Garcia recognized the possibilities and limitations of the recreation and interpretation of folk dances (A. B. Garcia, personal communication, September 29, 2016). He insisted on describing his community as “imagined” because he anticipated the dangers of representation. Thus, he made it a point to acknowledge that his piece is a mixture of both the T’boli and Subanen indigenous groups’ dance culture. The title *Tau-Luwa* is his play on the words *Tao* (Person) and *Kaluluwa* (Spirit/Soul).

Tau-Luwa opens with three men in a corner, crouched on the ground, with *siosay* leaves on their back. The *siosay* is particular to the Subanen tribe. The dancers shake the leaves and undulate their spines as they flex their feet on the side with a quickening and then sustaining rhythm. A woman enters from the other corner, and one man notices her. Three women join in her dancing as the men exit. The women move around the stage performing arm gestures indicative of the T’boli *paganda*, their spines undulating while still crouched, their feet shuffling as they place themselves in position. They jump and turn, their arms and legs wrung outward as they land. They move predominantly in the mode of body, as arm movements and flicks are initiated from a head-tail connectivity.

The men enter and the lead man and woman meet. The women form a circle and they perform a gesture with hands delineating the shape of a heart on the chest and with elbows moving downward in a circular motion. In the outer circle, the men flick their *siosay* leaves. They perform a unison sequence with hands flicking, and bodies binding and freeing. Then each man gives a woman one *siosay*; the lead man gives his to the lead woman.

In the forest, *corps* dancers hold the *siosay* to the side, diagonally upward to portray trees, as the man looks for the woman. They descend simultaneously as he sees her. The music changes as the woman approaches the man, and the *corps* dancers dance with the same successive finger movement pointing upward, and then with a flick of the wrist while crouched. The man and the woman, with their *siosay*, dance together, the music beating faster.

The women reenter, with a reworking of a *malong* (a tubular cloth particular to Muslim tribes in the southern part of the Philippines), veiled over their heads, edges handheld. The cloth is solid in color, bereft of traditional *malong* patterns. The man approaches the woman and they dance together, weaving in and out of her *malong*. The *corps* women make a triangle around the woman with their three *malongs* to denote their harmony (or subservience to the lead woman), within which the woman flicks her wrist and moves the chest upward as the rest dance in unison. The *corps* lead the man and the woman inside the triangle, performing movements of flicking of the limbs and alternating a binding and freeing of the spine. The man and the woman stomp around the triangle. The *corps* women pick up and raise the triangle as the couple makes their way inside it, signifying their union. The man and the woman dance together with her *malong* as a prop through which they weave in and out again, creating shapes and tensions in the cloth horizontally and vertically. The *corps* slowly exits, their *malongs* connected.

As the man and woman dance, the music changes and the *corps* enter, rolling on the floor to signify the passage of time. They move in quickening and sustaining modes of effort, their arms and legs fluid as the couple continues to dance together while manipulating the *malong*. The woman dances with the *malong* wrapped around her legs, with hands holding the edges. Her movements are quickening and sustaining, with the sustaining used to signify its importance to her and its symbolism of their love.

This grouping technique recalls Garcia's high school education, which included learning how to choreograph folk dances through crafting group formations in specific pieces and re-notating recreated folk dances. These choreographic exercises particularly deepened his understanding of the use of space and of creatively organizing bodies in space. Much of his later choreographies involving larger groups indicate how he could make simple movement patterns spectacular with weaving floor patterns and varied use of levels of high, medium, low in space. In *Tau-Luwa*, as the music, composed of gong and drum instrumentation, flowed continuously

throughout the piece, the positioning of dancers as well as their entrances and exits were choreographed to ensure that there would not be a single moment of stasis on stage.

When the music changes again, the *malong* is fashioned into a ball by both the man and the woman. The woman places the ball under her shirt, rounding her belly. The man lies down and holds her feet as his feet support her shoulders, rocking her. The women dance in fluid motions predominantly delineating space with *arabesques* and *grand rond de jambes*. They make a brush-like stroke on the woman's womb, undulating their spines in freeing and binding motions, flicking their heads and wrists toward her to bless her. Ready for their child's birth, the man carries the woman to a corner where the women position their *malongs* to cover her. The men dance in another corner with their *siosay* leaves in a ritualistic moment to anticipate the birth. They sweep the ground with the leaves and throw their arms upward, shaking and flicking them to call to the gods above. They dance with angular arm gestures and stomp the ground rhythmically. Their movements become urgent, with the man waving the leaves upward, with circular movements. As gongs beat loudly and in escalation, he falls to the floor exhausted and lifeless as the woman gives birth. New life has risen at the expense of another life.

Garcia was introduced to the fundamentals of folk dance, while still in high school, from Francisca Reyes-Aquino's *Fundamental Dance Steps and Music*. He familiarized himself with the various positions of the feet and arms from first to fifth along with arm gestures, all while doing a *plié*. Arm gestures were taught not as positions but as gestures with meaning. For example, in *Tau-Luwa*, the lateral-arm movement, in which one arm is raised sideward and the other bent across the chest, means "*Laging pagbigay*" (Garcia, 2016) or the gesture of always giving. He understood that gestures emphasize the meaningfulness of arm movements and interaction with materiality that are imperative in Philippine folk dance. They carry a sense of significance in any piece and with a dancer's attention.

In 2008, Garcia enrolled at the University of the Philippines as a Dance major. He wanted to study other forms of dance, including ballet and modern dance, which were both taught in the program set up by Villaruz. In the university, he was introduced to more complex ways of moving. The modern technique was no longer about staying still as the limbs would move in space but was more “dance-y” with longer phrases and challenging movements, requiring “more things to happen with the body” (A. B. Garcia, personal communication, September 29, 2016). He expanded his movement vocabulary by studying ballet and modern dance extensively, gaining a more nuanced awareness of tools to explore and produce movement. Even while acquiring new and Western movement vocabularies, he observed how folk dancers differed from other dancers. “*Sa umpisa palang pababa na talaga ang movements namin ... yung pull-up naman sa amin hindi masyadong mataas eh.*” (Even at the start, our movements were already directed downward ... the pull-up for us was not too upward either.) (2016).

The only published review of *Tau-Luwa* read such gestures as “accents from different tribes” that “nuance his movements,” favoring “purposeful simplicity over technicolored tricks.”²⁵ On the contrary, these gestural components, those that carry meaning, are far from “simple” as they are articulated not through limbs, as in ballet, but through the dynamic use of efforts (qualities such as flicking, punching, and floating) that challenge the body to be more expressive. Dancers who have been used to “seeing”, doing, and learning dance in terms of space (i.e., ballet), have found it difficult to read into what Garcia expected from them each time he would demonstrate a certain dynamic in a movement in which positions of the limbs were only secondary. His demonstrative identity as a folk dancer has enabled him to deconstruct and defamiliarize the aesthetic fundamentals of ballet that oftentimes become definitive elements of what constitutes dance: the upright body and static linearity of movement.

Generally, Garcia is collaborative with dancers. His stance is that once dance is transmitted to them, it is theirs. He would say: “*sa inyo na*

ito (this is yours).” In *Tau-Luwa*, he endeavored to challenge the dancers’ balletic placement: “*Maglagay pa ng bale ang katawan kasi masyadong safe*” (Make more bends to your body because it’s too safe) (A. B. Garcia, personal communication, September 29, 2016). By “safe”, he meant that the movements were too “stable, not falling and not dangerous” (2016). He would encourage young Ballet Philippines dancers to be awkward while exploring movements and details, but instructed them to later be less awkward and to become more intentional and make larger movements. This way of molding the dancers’ bodies to perform his choreography required off-centeredness and groundedness, a keen awareness of gestures, positions, and movement qualities.

Aside from off-centeredness, movement in *Tau-Luwa* generally entailed a weight sensing, which allowed the body weight to fall and almost release itself. However, this release is not a release of the body’s center but rather the kind of release that a trained body, repetitively instructed to pull-up, can do. This kind of release was also meant to counter the usual balletic pull up. Garcia had been known to comment, “[M] *asyadong upright, ulit*” (It’s too upright, repeat it). Gestural motions were ideally performed with “*piga, piga, piga*” (wring, wring, wring) in mind, and where arms would not be “*patapon*” (thrown). Garcia would also ask dancers to execute higher jumps and travel further into space. However, their dancing had to achieve largeness with naturalness: “[M] *alaki yung movements pero relaxed--labo*” (The movements are large but relaxed—it’s confusing). What Garcia was looking for was, in effect, a performed negotiation between largeness and ‘naturalness’ with meaning, with largeness stemming from an outward flick.

As an independent choreographer, Garcia positions himself as an “outsider”. This outsider status meant choreographing for Ballet Philippines 2 was a “make or break” opportunity. Aside from possible career advancement, he wanted to contribute to the company’s repertoire characterized by folk and indigenous dance sensibilities. This desire to incorporate indigeneity to the repertoire came from his thinking that, “*Sila yung dapat gumawa ng ganun na piyesa*” ([Ballet Philippines] should be the ones to do pieces like

that) (A. B. Garcia, personal communication, September 29, 2016). Garcia continues to explore how and where else his various embodied knowledge can be located and applied. His being a folk dancer among ballet dancers, an 'other' against the mainstream, is paramount to his choreographic identity: "*Naging responsibility na siya sakin yung folk dance* (Choreographing with folk dance has become my responsibility)" (2016). He is intent to "keep going" to ensure that folk dancing would not be relegated to the practice of a nostalgic past but a practice that is constantly evolving.

Conclusion

I demonstrated how personal narratives of interstitiality in artistic identity construction and choreographic practice become distinguishing features in defining a choreographic style embodied in pieces that can be read as syncretic theatre. Reyes, Locsin, and Garcia have constructed dance pieces that are syncretic in nature insofar as different movement codes are merged choreographically and performatively to produce distinct choreographic styles that continue to innovate movement codes in performing a Philippine identity. As syncretic choreographies, they challenge, interrogate, and resist the here and the now of Philippine dance and identity. By working from the interstice, these choreographic statements offer new and innovative ways of being and performing the Filipino self.

While difference provides an impetus for innovation, sameness in terms of *kapwa* links these differences to relationalities of Philippine experience and the Filipino self told through literary texts and conventions in myths and rituals, as well as a collaboration with Filipino writers, musicians, and dancers. In the socializing and embodying processes of dancers, choreographers would have to change, re-shape, and alter the *kapwa* Filipino bodies through choreography. Choreographing works considered, 'Philippine dance' would include a Filipino experience of various dance forms and a construction of new ways of articulating Philippine dance. The process articulates a Philippine dance aesthetic in spaces that symbolize and

seek to enact the propagation of Philippine culture. In as much as relational difference renders identities as interstitial and create hybridized products, relational sameness in terms of *kapwa* also produce syncretic forms, tempered as they are by existing narratives and conventional structures.

Thus, these dances are viewed as products and processes of history, of making sense of spatial mobility in the world, and as experiences of moving in different ways, which can only be constructed and articulated through choreography and collaborative embodiment and representation. These forces come to the fore and become embodied as different narratives of the dancing body; they intersect and interact during dance making and training process, particularly in an institution that bridges 'ballet' and 'Philippines'. In choreographing Philippine folk and ethnic dances in a modern and contemporary dance aesthetic, learned techniques come together in choreographic practice and in the conception of *kapwa*. In much the same way that we investigate literary texts, revolutionary plays, and even large events of community and solidarity, so we must continue to investigate dance, specifically choreographic processes, that articulate and pluralize Filipino identity and experience.

Notes

1. Postcolonial here is both a temporal reality that denotes a time after colonialism, and a critical strategy and practice of reading against and resisting colonial residues embedded in social and cultural practices and ways of thinking (see Aschcroft 1995).
2. Janet Lansdale states that dance analysis must perceive both authorial and ancestral voices. Authorial being voices—be it the choreographer's, dancer's, or spectator's—create and construct works into existence; and ancestral being voices traces the past or pre-existing present, such as the aesthetic of Francisca Reyes-Aquino and the Bayanihan. (see Landsale 2008)

3. Anita Kane and Leonor Orosa Goquingco were among the first to transform folk dance to the Western ballet aesthetic and stage. Kane studied ballet with the Russian refugee Katrina Makarova, and Goquingco with Luva Adameit. (See Villaruz's *Sayaw: American Colonial and Contemporary Dance*).
4. B. E. Villaruz, personal communication, September 23, 2016.
5. Garcia's training with the Leyte Dance Theater involved performing various forms of dance such as ballet, jazz, and folk dance. Ballet was needed because the form of folk dance they would use to choreograph dance dramas was based on Lucrecia Urtula and Cora Iñigo's ballet-inspired interpretations of folk dance. Notwithstanding, his experience there allowed him to open his eyes to folk dance. "*Akala ko yung folk dance dati, mababa lang talaga ... Hindi traditional talaga*" (I used to think folk dance then was superficial ... It wasn't a form of tradition). His ballet classes were linguistically Waray (the language ethnic to Tacloban), where the ballet term for "rise", for instance, was translated to the word "*ikiday*."
6. According to the *CCP Encyclopedia of Performing Arts*, *Amada* is modern dance, while *Encantada* is modern ethnic dance.
7. As a staple of the repertoire, *Amada*'s presence in the archives tracks BP's history from being the "Alice Reyes & Dance Company in a Modern Dance Concert," to being Ballet Philippines.
8. My analysis of the piece relied mainly on the video available at the CCP Library, which was the 1987 version with Edna Vida and Nonoy Froilan. Additional descriptions were added after watching Ballet Philippines rehearsals of the piece in CCP in 2017.
9. In the first version of its premiere in 1970, there were no men in the cast of *Amada*, except for Don Rafael. Later, the men were added, wearing wraps or skirts, as though taking the women's roles or social position.
10. Joaquin, N. (1993.) Summer Solstice. In L. H. Francia (Ed.), *Brown River, White Ocean: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Philippine Literature in English*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

11. Villaruz, B. E. (2000, March 6-7). Ballet Philippines' Progress Comes Up to Hard Choices. *The Manila Chronicle*.
12. Ibid.
13. The term "Neoethnic," an English translation of Ayala's band *Bagong Lumad*, emerged out of a marketing need. It was used "to make it easy for people to put a handle ... so you can hold on to something. That's the practical value of a term, a label or a category" (J. Ayala, personal communication, July 2, 2016). It was efficacious in describing the work that involved people who had backgrounds in jazz and ballet, but wanted to bring out an "indigenous spirit" (Ibid.).
14. Denisa Reyes is one of the younger sisters of Alice Reyes. According to Denisa, she had somehow served as the producer of the show, having pitched the production to the company's Board of Trustees to be granted funding.
15. Bernal depicted the mountain through zigzag stairs made out of bamboo; inside the mountain at the center, sometimes hidden sometimes not, was the band of Ayala playing live music.
16. The burning of the forest is ironic, for while it was meant to advocate the preservation of the environment, it also indirectly refers to the cultivation practice of *kaingin* (swidden farming), which many rural and indigenous populations have practiced for agricultural gain. The negative depiction of forest burning in the ballet, with the *Guardia Civiles* setting the mountain aflame, conceals how some indigenous groups survived economically through *kaingin*. Swidden farming has been one of the main processes of agricultural cultivation.
17. The piece was inspired by the Moriones festival in Marinduque, where men and women wear masks to mimic the Roman soldiers in the time of Jesus Christ. The festival depicts the search for Longinus, a centurion whose blindness was healed by the blood of Christ.
18. For *Hinilawood*, Locsin collaborated with Edwin Duero of Dagyaw, and the Jaro National High School.

19. Such function of dance in Locsin's identity construction, reflects how dance in the Philippines, in Villaruz' words, "has and always will be a dynamic and living way of defining, affirming and empowering the Filipino and his identity" (40b).
20. While the inclusion of the *sinulog* was strategic for the portrayal of a hopeful ending because of its association to celebration and festivity in the Philippines, (especially in the imaginary of the Manila audience), *Encantada's* relationship to *sinulog* goes beyond its effective stage usage. The presence of *sinulog* also signals the shared regard for transforming tradition to contemporary aesthetic in different performance contexts in the Philippines. Although the parade *sinulog* seemed primarily more commercial-oriented than the *Tindera Sinulog*, Ness notes that the participants and organizers recognized symbolic content in the *sinulog* and thus interpreted the *sinulog* as having more meaningful dimensions than "neo-colonial socio-economic considerations" (Ness, 1992, p. 182). It was "a deliberate reinvention of tradition, done not to reenter the past but to reclaim its unique integrity for contemporary purposes" (p. 182). By staging this contemporized performance (Parade *Sinulog*) with movement qualities of the more traditional *sinulog* (*Tindera Sinulog*) form of expression in *Encantada*, Locsin constructs a performance that displays a possibility of contemporary and traditional forms co-existing on stage. This co-existence within *Pagdiriwang* choreographically asserts the mutually empowering relationship between tradition and contemporary forms not only in the ballet, but also in her Neoethnic form.
21. Choreographer's Notes. Ballet Philippines *Encantada* 2011 Program.
22. *Bagong Sayaw* (New Dances), while performed in the CCP, was staged at the center's small box studio theater, Tanghalang Huseng Batute or Studio Theater. An angular platform was placed on the black box floor, giving the space a sense of intimacy while keeping an elevated proscenium orientation. It seemed to convey a negotiation between the usual contemporary dance theater stage, and the mainstream ballet stage.

Since the launching of the junior company, BP2 members/ trainees have been trained in modern dance with Locsin's technique. Later, one of the "Agnes Babies" and BP resident choreographer, Alden Luginasin became the Artistic Director (Luginasin is also from Tacloban and a member of the Leyte Dance Theater).

23. Although after Locsin, BP2 became an incubator for the teaching of Locsin's style, upon Luginasin's leaving, the members became identified less as modern dancers and more as "ballerinas."
24. Program notes for BP2's *Bagong Sayaw*.
25. Jacinto, E. (2016, September 17). Rite of Passage. *The Manila Times*.

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