

## NOTES FOR THE PRODUCTION OF A BRECHTIAN KOMEDYA

RESIL B. MOJARES

*Why this tendency to emigrate, why this  
systematic exoticism in the artistic conception of the  
Filipinos?*

*Wenceslao Retana*

{1} The exoticism of the komedya perplexed nineteenth-century Spanish observers. Steeped in the time's racist discourse on character, they essentialized this tendency (what Wenceslao Retana calls "the veneration of the unfamiliar") as a flaw in the native mentality. Filipino intellectuals, on the other hand, blamed what seemed an aberration on colonialism (as T.H. Pardo de Tavera and, less dogmatically, Jose Rizal did) or romanced it by asserting (as Isabelo de los Reyes did) that Filipinos had in fact naturalized and democratized the form.

What is missed by both critics and apologists is that the komedya's lack of realism is precisely what distinguishes the form and explains its peculiar power. The function of the "exotic" (and its constitutive role in the local) is what Spanish critics and Filipino defenders have not quite explained. [*See Vicente L. Rafael, The Promise*

*of the Foreign: Nationalism and the Technics of Translation in the Spanish Philippines* (Metro Manila: Anvil, 2006). Focused on language and translation, Rafael's reading of the "foreign" in the komedya is ingenious but glosses over other aspects of the play.]

Retana acknowledges that by the end of the seventeenth century, the natives had created "their own school" of the komedya and "developed their own taste, deviating from the Spanish school." [W.E. Retana, *Noticias Historico-Bibliograficas de el Teatro en Filipinas desde sus origenes hasta 1898* (Madrid: Libreria General de Victoriano Suarez, 1909 [1910]).] What this native "school" is Retana does not explain beyond citing, for instance, that the natives had incorporated the "classic" Tagalog war dance into the play's dueling scenes. On the whole, however, Retana and other Spanish observers focused on how dramatic art had been bastardized in the komedya. They complained about the natives' careless disregard for verisimilitude and the "unities" of the European play. They were also disturbed by the play's socially disruptive effects. They disapproved of the komedya's "vulgar eroticism" (such as the "tricks and wiles of women" in getting their man in the play) and worried about how young rural maidens were corrupted by the fantasy of being princesses in some romantic and faraway place.

That the natives had done peculiar things with what the Spaniards took to be their form had so worried Spaniards that, as early as the eighteenth century, state regulations and missionary tracts warned against the goings-on in the unlicensed performances that natives staged "in their own dwellings, farms, lands, or plantations." [Retana, *Noticias*, 42.]

{2} What was most worrisome for the Spaniards were the transgressions in bodily movement, speech, and manner that they may have taken as an unseemly (and dangerous) display of native autonomy. Such transgressive behavior was most openly embodied in the figure of the pusong or trickster. In 1720, the Augustinian

Gaspar de San Agustin already noted the enthusiasm people in Manila and its environs had for the komedya and the figure of the trickster:

They are especially fond of comedies and farces, and therefore there is no feast of consequence unless there is a comedy. If possible they will lose no rehearsal, and in all they pay attention only to the witty fellow who does innumerable foolish and uncouth things, and at each of his actions they burst into hearty laughter. [Gaspar de San Agustin, O.S.A., "Letter on the Filipinos" (1720), *The Philippine Islands, 1493- 1890*, ed. E.H. Blair & J.A. Robertson (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1907), XL:244-45.]

Joaquin Martinez de Zuniga made a similar observation after witnessing a komedya performance in Batangas in 1800:

Each native play has one or two comedians who make the crowd laugh with their witty remarks. The comedians are lavishly dressed, with knapsacks on their shoulders, in which they carry wine and food. They partake little by little while doing funny acts and displaying ridiculous behavior. This makes the crowd die of laughter. Certain contortions of their bodies... threatening one of the characters from behind (pretending to knock the fellow on the head), and other similar gestures entertain the audience so much that many see the show only to watch the comedians. [Joaquin Martinez de Zuniga, O.S.A., *Status of the Philippines in 1800*, trans. V. del Carmen (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1973; first published in 1862), 82.]

It is clear that, even as they lamented the primitiveness of native theater, what really worried the Spaniards was not the komedya's artistic poverty but its social and artistic excess. The comedian does

not only engage in improper behavior, he freely steps in and out of the play and blurs the safe and formal boundaries between illusion and reality. San Agustín says that this “ingenious fellow” can “go and come anywhere [offstage], and even cajole the women before their husbands; and the latter must laugh, even though they have no wish to do so.” He remarks: “It is very necessary that these representations be not harmful, for many of them are printed.” Zuniga is more explicit:

After a comedia, a comedian goes on stage to give his comments on the play, citing its glaring defects, and in imitation of the comedians of Athens, relates the frauds of those who think they can write plays; then he criticizes some of the actuations of the public servants. Everyone laughs including the targets of the jokes who laugh wittingly or unwittingly.

The danger of such excess disturbed Sinibaldo de Mas who reported in 1842 that a comedia was to have been enacted for the town fiesta at Santa Cruz, Laguna, in 1840, in which the alcaide-mayor of the province would be ridiculed for the way he sends people to jail. The governor learned about it on the eve of the fiesta and had the performers arrested. Mas also reported that in Gapan in 1841, a shadow puppet play (*sombras chinescas*) had Spanish employees attacking the priests as all-powerful, greedy, and shameless. “Later, they [the townspeople] stoned the priests at the gate.” [Sinibaldo de Mas, *Report on the Condition of the Philippines in 1842* (Manila: Historical Conservation Society, 1963), 157.]

Such easy, undisciplined traffic between “play” and “life” appears characteristic of local theater. It is curious that observers would castigate as “unrealistic” a theater that so directly intervened in the “real life” of its audience.

This blindness is occasioned by artistic and political assumptions that kept “art” and “life” separate. Spanish observers frequently complained about the carnivalesque character of local performances – loud, makeshift, uninhibited – and lamented the lack of enclosed, proscenium-type playhouses. Speaking out of nineteenth-century (and earlier) premises about what constituted “proper” theater, observers like Retana imagined theater as a self-contained, convention-governed fictional performance, unfolding within its own logic and “unities,” and into which the messiness of the “offstage” should not intrude. Apparently, the natives had a less than reverential attitude towards the form.

{3} The problem observers had with the komedya derives from their failure to recognize a defining aspect of the form: its undisguised artifactuality. There is no attempt at what is called verisimilitude. The komedya does not “immerse” the audience in the “reality” of its representation. It renders the exotic precisely for what it is. The exoticism of the komedya is not the passive, mindless mimicry of the foreign but the purposeful act of exoticizing the foreign, of rendering it as Other (L. *exoticus*, “outside”).

What is cited as its flaw is its aesthetic: the komedya constructs the unreal. The effect of the unreal is created through the entire apparatus of the play: its plot, setting, characters, music, language, vocal delivery, and body movement. Plots drawn from European metrical romances, medieval European settings, alien personages in strange costumes, formal, Hispanized diction, borrowed music, and unnatural body movements – all these serve to mark the form as exotic and thus “distance” the audience from what is represented on stage.

Performance conditions conspire to make of the komedya “only a play.” The voice of the apuntador (who dictates to the performers their lines from his box at the foot of the stage) often booms as loudly as those of the actors; the makeshift stage does

little to conceal the backstage; the ragtag band that provides the music is in the audience's view as well; the primitive "magical effects" are as much a source of hilarity as wonder. In a village production, the people in the audience are not just spectators, they are involved in the making of the play. They participate in preparations for the performance, attend rehearsals, and know the real-life identities of the actors who strut and declaim on stage as kings, dukes, and princesses. Spectators are conversant with the play's formulaic plot and, given its length, watch the play discontinuously or selectively, in a performance space in which other activities intrude or swirl at the edges: people moving in and out, eating, drinking, gambling, gossiping, or sleeping.

Then there is the trickster. Gracioso, payaso, or hazme reir (literally, "humor me") in Spanish, the buffoon is more commonly called by the native names bulbulagaw and pusong. He appears as the prince's foil and shadow and is given folksy, comic personal names like Bugagas, Colele or Talingting. He is cowardly, lazy, gluttonous, and obscene, but also quick-witted, impudent and irreverent. While the court jester is an old, conventional figure in European theater, the pusong resonates with local meanings for an audience steeped in a rich folk tradition of trickster tales.

His role is to invert and "confound" (which is the meaning of bulbulagaw) what is represented on stage. [The Iloko bulagaw, "to play the clown or buffoon," comes from lagaw, "to be confounded or bewildered." Bulagaw may be associated with native words like bulag ("blind," "to practice legerdemain, sleight-of-hand") and bulagaw ("grey-eyed, blond").] He slips in and out of the play, disengaging himself from time to time to directly address the audience, commenting on the characters and the action. He deflates the claims of hierarchy and ceremony with his base remarks on the play's noble personages (often in low, unscripted verse) and by uncouth actions and gestures that disrupt the rigid, choreographed movements on stage. He punctures the

make-believe of strange and distant kingdoms by intruding with his homely references to actual, local places and personalities.

The jester is the free agent, the clown of deconstruction. He stands between the performance and the audience, mediates between illusion and reality, and keeps viewers grounded “outside” the play.

{4} In the Cebuano komedya, for instance, the jester addresses the audience, referring to local places and manners, as the princes are wed in the play: “Hey, you from the city / from Parian and San Nicolas / Are you not coming / to the feast of Don Tamante. // Then, if you are coming, / just enter through the kitchen / Bring along large baskets / and I shall fill them up with fried meat.” (Oroy mga Ciudadnon / parianon ug sanicolason / dili ba camo mangari sa combera ni D. Tamante // Ug con ogaling omari man / diri sa cosina agui lamang / bucag pag dala camo / cay acong pun-on sa adubo.)

Elsewhere, the clown complains of the princesses: “Women without manners / confident that they are princesses / they do not even bother to find out / whether there is enough chocolate / left [for the servants to drink].” (Walay batasan mga babayhana / Nag salig nga mga princesa / Wala lang sila mag sosi / Con duna bay nahabilin nga /sicwati.)

People knew what they were seeing and appreciated the discrepancy between illusion and reality. In the village, wry comments were made about common peasants gaudily dressed up as princes and dukes: “A prince by night, a palm wine tapper by day” (Principe magabi-i, ma-adlaw mananguete.)

{5} What piece of fiction does the komedya build? What fiction does the trickster destabilize? On one hand, it is the allure of the foreign, which, in a colonial context, is politically charged since it

represents the “outside” as the source of beauty, morality, and power. On the other hand, it is the image of the “just kingdom,” a morally satisfying, aristocratic order that triumphs over what is heretical (Moorish infidels), unregulated (monsters of the wilds), and aberrant (individualistic and reckless lovers). These themes are fused rather than separate in the representation.

Such a representation, however, exists in the light of the audience’s common knowledge of the everyday reality that surrounds them. To the extent that it is validated by such knowledge, it is persuasive (and the antics of the trickster are so much “comic relief”). To the extent that it is not, the play can be quite problematic, the trickster is the subversive, and the play slides into dangerous parody.

{6} The komedya is defined by its transparently artificial character, its “low mimesis” and use of pastiche. What elite observers saw as ignorant travesties of geography and history may have been deliberate, uninhibited play, an irreverent pastiche of the foreign, the assertion of the freedom to invent the “world.” (We must not condescendingly assume that nineteenth-century village intellectuals were unschooled in world geography and history, which were basic subjects in late nineteenth-century Latinity schools in the Philippines.) What commentators on the komedya (then and now) have regarded as a weakness or aberration is the source of its utility and power.

As a construct that foregrounds its own artificiality, there is much in the komedya that partakes of “epic theater” in the Brechtian sense. By exposing its own “made-up” character, the komedya turns the spectator into an observer who stands outside the performance and makes judgments about it instead of being immersed or “lost” in the fiction it builds. By “alienating” the spectator through devices and effects that break up the illusion of life-likeness, the play forces

distance and (in Brechtian terms) fosters the capacity for judgment and critical thinking. [John Willett, ed., *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 37.]

This explanation may be overly schematic. It is difficult to reconstruct how an artistic form is experienced by a particular community at a particular time. The experience undoubtedly involves a whole range of affects: delight in artistic invention, pleasure in the aura of European culture and “knowledge in books,” fulfillment of a religious devotion, the rewards of the sociality created by the event, and the fascination with the play’s illusory world (which, because of illusion’s dangers, has to be undermined at the same time).

Filipino critics have overstressed the play’s conservative uses: as a tool of evangelization, because of its Christian-versus-Moorish theme; as theater that validates social hierarchy because of the role of local elites in the production; as a form that celebrates the foreign and fosters a “colonial mentality”; as theater that infantilizes its audience. All these can happen.

I have myself done a study of the komedya that highlighted its conservative function as “a symbolic representation of peasant society,” one that was “grounded in the realities of social and economic stratification and functioned as the ceremonialization and sanctification of existing power relations.” If the komedya worked in this sense, however, it was because I was looking at a particular community in a particular time (the southern Cebu village of Valladolid at the turn of the twentieth century), a moment in space and time when local realities were supportive of the moral world conjured by the komedya. I pointed out however that this was far from hegemonic and that in time the komedya tradition broke down because of the lack of “fit” between the world of the play and the world of the village. [See Resil B. Mojares, *Theater in Society, Society in Theater: Social History of a Cebuano Village, 1840-1940* (Quezon

City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1985); Idem., "Where is the Center? Ideology Formation and the Constitution of a Rural Cebuano Community, 1582-1988," *Philippine Quarterly of Culture & Society*, 28 (2000), 1-78.]

A play is multivalent because it is art (it is not art otherwise) and because it exists in historical space and time. I argue however that a key explanation for the komedya's power (real and potential) lies in the experience it affords for objectifying (and, by this means, taming) the forces of social unease (structures of authority and hierarchy, the threat of what is foreign and not quite intelligible). In this manner, the komedya functions as a medium for interrogating and disrupting dominant forces.

{7} In recalling or reviving the komedya today, we must ask: What function will it serve for the communities that will experience it? What changes will occur in the nature and function of the form as we infuse into it new content, styles, technologies, or take it out of the communities that created it into new performance spaces and before new audiences? Why and how does one sustain the komedya at a time when it has ceased to be a living tradition without subordinating it to the demands of tourism or the state's (or urban intelligentsia's) ideas of a "national culture"?

There are two things that can be done with the komedya outside of "museumizing" it. One is to localize it through a substitution of contents: changing foreign locales with local places or place-names (as Andres Bonifacio reportedly advocated), purifying the language by ridding it of Hispanisms, and introducing local customs into the plot of the play (as Isabelo de los Reyes suggested). [Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *The Revolt of the Masses: The Story of Bonifacio and the Katipunan* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1996; first ed., 1956), 70; Isabelo de los Reyes, *Ang Comediang Tagalog* (1904); typescript copy of a folletin in the Ateneo de Manila University Library, 3, 16, 48.] A simple substitution

of contents, however, is cosmetic if it does not come to terms with the central problematic of the komedya as a theatrical form. We must guard against introducing changes in text and performance that serve to make the komedya other than what it is, or striving for realism in a dramatic form the aesthetic of which is anti-realistic.

The other way is to keep the exotic as an object of parody and burlesque but locate the exotic in the contemporary world. Today's fictional "just kingdom" need not be Grecia, Granada, or Alemania. The exotic—in the sense of what is not us—can be, say, the World Bank headquarters, the boardroom of a multinational mining company, the ceremonial hall of Malacanang Palace, a session in our Congress, or the rites of a Philippine election. [Popular culture 'knows' this. In the common idiom, moro-moro or komedya also means "a deceitful spectacle, a farcical performance," usually applied to the state and its workings.]

In *Noli me Tangere* (1887), Jose Rizal, who was critical of the komedya, had a character propose two alternative plays in place of the old komedya the town leaders of San Diego wanted performed: a "comedy" (comedia) entitled "The Election of the Gobernadorcillo" and a "fantastic drama of a satirical character" called "Mariang Makiling." Rizal does not elaborate but, given his gifts for social satire, what he may have imagined is precisely what I am proposing now.

The theater scholar Rustom Bharucha reminds us: "Our lives can be illuminated through traditional forms, not through veneration or reconstruction, but through a reliving of these forms in a contemporary context." [Rustom Bharucha, *Theatre and the World: Performance and the Politics of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1990), 140.] There is so much that divides a komedya performance in Batangas in 1800 from the production of a komedya in a Manila suburb today. Yet, if the komedya remains a valid and necessary form today, it is because what it seeks to address remains: the



anxieties we suffer from the structures of domination that hem us in, the conflictual mix of dread and desire we feel about the “outside” powers that shape our lives without our consent, and our deep need to render all these in a form we can see, understand, manipulate or subvert.

Theater may not suffice to change societies. It does however (at its best) nourish and preserve that creativity and autonomy of mind and spirit without which we cannot shape the society we truly desire.



## CONTEMPORARY PORTRAYALS OF THE "MORO" IN FOLK DRAMATIZATIONS IN SPAIN, CENTRAL AMERICA, AND THE PHILIPPINES

NIKKI BRIONES-CARSICRUZ

This paper deals with portrayals of the "Moro" in contemporary folk dramatizations of medieval struggles between Moors and Christians, found in village or town fiestas in parts of Spain, Central America, and the Philippines. It is often believed that the standard theme of these performances is Christian superiority, and the "Moro" is always cast in the role of villain and vanquished. While this still holds true for most performances, in a number of places, fiesta committees have decided to break with tradition, and have introduced formats and content that depart significantly from the standard formula.

In this paper, I draw attention to a counter-intuitive notion: that a representation of war and conquest in folk dramatizations of battles between Christians and Muslims has the potential to convey messages of *convivencia* (peaceful co-existence) and nationalism. Through strategies such as deletion (offensive scenes such as baptism

are abandoned), inversion ("Moros" become heroes and victors), revision (alternative endings are shown, such as reconciliation, or a tie), and appropriation (characters are equated to indigenous gods and local heroes), performances are infused with radical new messages. In these modified performances, the "Moro" has acquired complex new meanings and is no longer confined to the role of villain and vanquished. In some contemporary performances, the "Moro" can even be portrayed and perceived as victor, co-equal, and even a national emblem, a representation not of the Muslim "other" but of the suppressed "self."

This study draws upon examples from a selected set of communities and the conclusions drawn here are limited only to the specific places cited. There are hundreds of towns worldwide where variants of the *Moros y Cristianos* are performed, and generalizing about patterns that encompass the whole tradition are beyond the scope of this study. What is hoped here is to suggest that within this family of performances a noteworthy counter-current exists. But why should we study these counter-currents? In line with the aims of peace research, this project is an attempt to identify and articulate capacities for peace between Christians and Muslims by positing alternative ways of looking at the *Moros y Cristianos*, which has long been seen as a symbol of Christian chauvinism. I hope to show, through the examples in this paper, that we can fruitfully re-read what has become a symbol of division and uncover/discover potentials for re-imagining the Christian-Muslim relationship beyond the all-too-familiar "clash of civilizations" framework prevalent today.

Let me briefly explain the terms used in the title of this paper, to clarify the parameters of this study. By "contemporary" I mean the post-Vatican II period to the present. Vatican II in the 1960s infused the Catholic Church with a spirit of ecumenism which allowed for the value of other religions, including Islam, to be acknowledged by the church. This spirit of ecumenism paved the way for folk dramatizations performed during Catholic festivities

to gradually veer away from their traditional message of Christian superiority. I draw from my personal observations of performances in the 2000s, but also make use of examples taken from studies made in the last four decades since Vatican II.

Another key term is "Moro," which I enclose in quotation marks to delineate the fictive "Moro" in performances from actual Moros. When referring to historical Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula, I use the term Moor. And for the Muslims in the Philippines, I use the italicized *Moro*. The portrayed "Moro" is most commonly associated with Muslim groups. But for Anthony Shelton the "Moro" and the "Cristiano" are cultural imaginaries that hide and contain a multiplicity of possible ethnic and religious distinctions. The identity of the "Moro" is therefore not fixed, and could refer to Muslim groups like Berbers and Turks, and also to non-Muslims like Jews and Romans. The "Cristiano" meanwhile, can refer to the Spanish, but also to various native inhabitants of the Americas. For Shelton, these categories have an inexhaustive incorporative capacity, and the representation of these two factions differ from location to location (Shelton 2004, 268).

And finally, what do I mean by "folk dramatizations"? This family of performances commonly known as Moros y Cristianos originated in the Iberian Peninsula in the Middle Ages and was taken to colonies overseas. Variants of the *Moros y Cristianos* cut across different performance genres, such as dramas, dances, re-enactments, pageants, and *masquerades*. It is vibrant in former Spanish colonies, in dance-dramas called *danzas de la conquista*, *historiantes*, *santiagos*, *matachines*, *tastuanes*, or *danza de la pluma*, found in Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Peru, Venezuela, and Mexico. In the Philippines, it comes in variants such as *moro-moro* theater (also called *komedyá*, *linambay*, *arakyo*), or dance-dramas like *palo-palo*, and even the *sinulog*, among others. In this study, I use fiestas de Moros y Cristianos or fiestas, to refer to these folk dramatizations. These performances are local affairs, performed annually at fiestas honoring the local patron saint.

Participation in them is an act of devotion, in fulfillment of a vow called *promesa* in Spain, *manda* in Central America, and *panata* in the Philippines. Villagers volunteer resources to contribute to the performance, believing that doing so is an efficacious means of gaining divine favors or expressing gratitude. They are considered as family and community traditions, something handed down from one generation to the next, with a history that goes back decades, if not centuries, such that they tend to follow well-established conventions.

### From Conflict to Convivencia

The post 9/11 era is an age where tensions between Christians and Muslims are high. In 2005, a Danish newspaper published a provocative series of cartoons with caricatures of the prophet Mohammad. By 2006, violent protests swept across the Muslim world in reaction to the cartoons. In the same year, another controversy erupted over statements made by the Pope regarding Islam, which again, evoked a series of protests. Amidst these tensions, the Spanish Federation of Islamic Religious Entities (Federacion Espanola de Entidades Religiosas Islamicas) called for the prohibition of the fiestas de Moros y Cristianos on the grounds that they have no place in democratic Spain because they are demeaning to Muslims (La Federacion Islamica... 2006). The increased sensitivity surrounding Islam was not lost on fiesta committees all over Spain, and community leaders took steps to adjust to the situation.

In the towns of Bocairent in Valencia, and Beneixama in Alicante, for example, local leaders decided not to perform a particular tradition that may be seen as offensive to Muslims. This tradition has to do with the burning of "La Mahoma." In many small towns in the southeastern region of Spain, the re-enactment of battles involves the procession of a statue of the Virgin Mary by the

"Cristiano" band, with a corresponding procession of the "Moro" band behind an effigy some three feet in height, curiously called La Mahoma. At the end of the fiesta, when "Cristianos" re-capture the castle from the "Moros," the effigy is traditionally burned. Following the Danish cartoon controversy, Bocairent and Beneixama's local leaders decided to forego the burning of La Mahoma. But they are not the only ones to have done so as many other towns in the region had already been abandoning the practice (Sierra 2006).

In the same year, 2006, *festeros* (or participants in the fiestas) from Alcoi were invited to participate in the annual Hispanic Parade held at New York's famous 5th Avenue. More than a hundred *festeros* flew to the US, but without the traditional arrangement of having bands of "Moros" and "Cristianos." The "Moros" were left at home and two bands of "Cristianos" were sent instead. Local officials were quick to explain that their decision was made for purely logistic reasons. The tempo of music used by "Moros" and "Cristianos" differed, and this would have made coordinating the procession more challenging. The chief organizer of the fiesta commented that should they receive another invitation in the future, they would send two bands of "Moros" to New York next time. Despite these explanations given by local officials, speculation was high that the decision to send only "Cristianos" was influenced by the controversies surrounding the Danish caricatures and statements of the Pope (Pozzi 2006).

Whatever their reasons may be, practical or political, what is clear is that the local leaders in Alcoi have shown themselves to be in a reflexive mode. They, like their counterparts in many other towns in Spain, are aware of the politics surrounding their traditions, and are re-assessing their performances. In newspaper write-ups on the fiestas, and official websites put up by the organizing committees of different towns, *festeros* often explain that their traditions are not meant to be offensive. One word that gets thrown around a lot

is convivencia, or co-existence. Among the Spanish, the *Moros y Cristianos* is popularly perceived to be an event that commemorates historical events, and symbolizes convivencia.

One manifestation of convivencia can be seen in the town of Sax where locals traditionally dress up as Turks to represent the "Moro" faction in their fiestas. In February 2007, festeros from Sax deemed it appropriate to invite the Ambassador of Turkey to be the guest of honor at their Festival de Moros y Cristianos. The Turkish Ambassador Ender Arat graciously accepted the invite, and in his speech, he congenially addressed the "Turcos de Sax" as his "*compatriotas*" y amigos ("countrymen" and friends). He even invited some children from Sax to represent Spain at the International Children's Day celebrations held in Turkey. The openness of the Turkish Ambassador is not an isolated case. Positive responses from Muslims can also be seen in other towns in Spain.

In an investigative piece on the fiestas, Carlos Aiemeur draws attention to a number of exciting manifestations of convivencia between Christians and Muslims. One outstanding example is Kader Ibeid, a Palestinian immigrant who has been actively involved in the fiestas for a decade, even becoming a member of the Fiesta Central Committee, a position of prestige and distinction, in Javea town, in Alicante. But he is not the only Muslim to participate in the fiestas. In Villajoyosa, Muslim Saharawi children were invited to parade with the band of "Moros." While in Alcoi, folkloric groups were even brought in from Morocco and Turkey to participate in the fiestas in 1995, and again in 2005. There is also support for the fiesta from official voices within the Muslim sector. Majed Kadem, president of the Comunidad Islamica de Alicante, called the fiestas "very enjoyable and beautiful" and considered them "innocent." These sentiments are also shared by Malik Ruiz, president of the Comision Islamica de España. In the town of Crevillent, where six percent of the population is Muslim, the fiestas have the local imam's blessing.

Imam Mohammad Ben Hayouh was quoted as having said that "the fiesta demonstrates great respect for different cultures." He was able to say this, perhaps because in Crevillent the performance ends with a pact between "Cristianos" and "Moros." Similarly, performances in Alcoi end with "el abrazo de los capitanes" or the embracing of the warring captains (Aiemeur 2006).

Depictions of convivencia can also be seen outside Spain. In Zacualpan, Mexico, the *Moros y Cristianos* culminates in the "waltz of the hands," when both sides lay down their arms and dance in pairs (Shelton 2004, 286). In the moro-moro performance of Baler in the Philippines, the final section of the play is called the *pagkakasunduan* or reconciliation. Interestingly, in the neighboring province of Nueva Ecija in the village of Sinasajan, I watched a performance in 2005 that ended with no clear winners or losers. The local version of moro-moro is called arakyo, and it retells the story of Queen Helena and her search for the Holy Cross. The same story is re-told each year, using the same old script. Clearly, in the script, the play ends in "Cristiano" victory and conversion of "Moros." In actual practice, however, the play ends when the sun sets, regardless of what part of the script that leaves unperformed. An exciting battle scene closes the show, with no winners declared, in what could be interpreted as a tie, or a draw. But, when I interviewed one of the actors of the play, and I asked him who wins in the end, he answered: "Moro." His reply may be due to the fact that he was playing the role of a "Moro" general. Or maybe it is because the traditional "baptism scene" that used to be the finale of the play has been omitted for the last few years, so that in actual performance the "Moros" are shown neither as defeated nor as converted, the alternatives prescribed in the script.

As in Sinasajan, the performance I saw in San Dionisio in Metro Manila, in May 2006, entitled *Prinsipe Reynaldo*, also skipped the baptism scene. Unlike in Sinasajan, where one script

is used repeatedly, the locals of San Dionisio write new scripts and stage a different story each year. The director of the play informed me that it was a conscious decision not to include the baptism scene. He also proudly recounted to me how they've decided to insert into the performance a famous folk dance from the Muslim groups in the Philippine south called *singkil*. These decisions were the result of years of reflection and intense internal community debates on the content and format of their moro-moro plays. The revision of the moro-moro in San Dionisio started in 1962, when local civic leaders updated the scripts and came up with a new play called *Prinsipe Rodante*. In the play, the religious conflict was reworked to suit the ecumenical spirit of the times, and the main theme was not the usual triumph of Christians over Muslims, but the brotherhood of man.

That period in the 1960s was interesting for it was when Vatican II was underway, and the Catholic Church was doing some serious re-thinking. But while the spirit of ecumenism was spreading, so too were feelings of distrust between Christians and Muslims in the Philippines. In 1967, in response to a moro-moro festival sponsored by the Bureau of Tourism, the Muslim senator Mamintal Tamano, then head of the Commission on National Integration, called for the banning of the moro-moro because they created a negative image of Muslims, and were counter to the aims of national integration (Mendoza 1976, 152). An intense debate ensued, with defenders and attackers of the moro-moro coming to the surface. These debates in the late 1960s would have an impact on the thinking of scholars in the 1970s and 1980s. Filipino scholars who studied the moro-moro acknowledged the divisive theme and offensive portrayals of "Moros." They made efforts to steer the moro-moro in a new direction. Most notable are the efforts of Nicanor Tiongson, who wrote extensively about the topic and later, when he became the Artistic Director of the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP), spearheaded efforts to revitalize and improve the moro-moro. It was under his leadership that the villagers of San Dionisio were invited to a writing and theater workshop at the CCP in 1990. One of the objectives of the workshop

was to "replace the threadbare and culturally offensive theme of the conversion of Muslims to Christianity with themes dealing with more significant and/or contemporary issues" (Fernandez 1996, 73). A newer version of *Prinsipe Rodante* was written at the workshop, and in it, the villain is the "Cristiano" Prince Alvarro who usurps power. "Moros" from another kingdom come to the aid of peasants who revolt against their prince and their combined force allows them to overthrow Alvarro and re-instate the rightful rulers. The element of warring "Cristianos" and "Moros" is still present, enough to allow for traditional fighting choreography to be performed, but re-worked in such a way that it also suits the theme of popular revolt. The new plot did not lead to the defeat and conversion of "Moros," and thus required no baptism scene. It also sent a message that "Moros" and "Christianos" can unite to achieve a common goal. Tiongson's intervention has left its mark in San Dionisio. The mission/vision and goals of the Komedya ng San Dionisio (KSD), and the Komedya ng Filipinas Foundation (KPF), two theater groups organized by the villagers of San Dionisio, are influenced by his prescriptions. At the 2006 production of *Principe Reynaldo*, the souvenir program quoted Tiongson's views that "the komedya offers a lot of potential as a media for modern messages" and that "given its colonial history and orientation however, concerted effort...must be made to endow the komedya with messages that are more harmonious with the country's thrust toward national unity..." (*Prinsipe Reynaldo* 2006).

The examples given above show how performances have altered their formats in Spain and the Philippines. We also see a degree of reflexivity among the producers of the performances. From the local fiesta committees in Spanish towns, to theater scholars like Nicanor Tiongson, and civic leaders in San Dionisio, we see a conscious effort to send a message of convivencia in Spain, and national unity in the Philippines. Despite these developments however, we must not lose sight of the fact that majority of

performances still retain the traditional theme of Christian superiority and many Muslims still find these spectacles to be offensive and demeaning. There is also a segment of the Muslim population in the Philippines that struggles for self determination and separation from the Philippine state, and they may not necessarily share the goal of national unity emanating from center.

It is however, worth noting that the selected instances in Spain highlighted in this paper, though they are the exceptions to the rule rather than the norm, point to the fact that better relations between Christians and Muslims is possible. The examples of the Turkish Ambassador in Sax, the Saharawi children in Villajoyosa, the Moroccans in Alcoi, and the Palestinian in Javea, hopefully show that Muslims and Christians can celebrate these fiestas together. There may still be a long way to go before convivencia can be achieved, but the changes introduced today, small as they may be, are hopefully steps in the right direction.

### From "Muslim Other" to "Suppressed Self"

This section of the paper discusses how the portrayals and perceptions of the "Moro" are laced with nationalist imagery. In this argument, two important factors concerning the nature of portrayals and performances comes into play. The first factor is the categoric instability of the factions "Moro" and "Cristiano." For Shelton (2004), these categories have an "inexhaustive incorporative capacity," which means that they can acquire any identity the performers choose, and they often take the form of hybrid characters, composites of heroes and villains adapted from a vast range of sources such as folk legends, national history, comic books, and Hollywood hits. In some cases, subversive characters develop, including protagonists that allude to native gods or pagan deities, or even anti-colonial folk heroes. Another factor is the "malleability of performance," or their "capacity to encode distinct semantic meanings in a variety

of political, religious, and cultural contexts while still retaining its structural form". For Shelton (ibid, 267), this malleability allowed for Iberian Christian meanings to be easily inverted through strategies of foreign appropriation and subversion. This ability to house radical meaning within a traditional structural form allowed these performances to be the tools not only of the state but also of subaltern and militant groups.

Take for instance the *danza de las plumas* of Oaxaca, Mexico. On the surface it is a dramatization of the defeat of Moctezuma by the Spanish forces led by Cortes. For Max Harris (1997), this is only the "official" story. Beneath this public narrative is what James Scott (1990) calls a "hidden transcript." Harris contends that the popular understanding of Moctezuma is not only of a past ruler (defeated by Cortes), but also of a folk messianic figure believed by the natives to emerge one day to defeat the Spaniards and establish Indian hegemony. Legends of the return of Moctezuma to deliver the Indians from Spanish domination abound among the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico. In these dances, Moctezuma and his followers are dressed in elaborate and colorful costumes, while Cortes and the Spanish are dressed in inferior attire. The Spanish also perform simpler dance steps, and occupy the stage for a shorter period. In contrast, Moctezuma and his men, perform elaborate dance steps, and dominate the stage. So even if the story technically ends in Cortes defeating Moctezuma, during the performance itself, it is clearly Moctezuma and his forces that reign supreme. And if we were to think in terms of the folk messianic Moctezuma, his defeat in the play is not really final but just the necessary pretext for his return. Cognizant of the popular understanding of Moctezuma, Harris (1997) suggests that the same performance could be read two ways, "as both a triumph of Spanish Catholicism and a future indigenous defeat of the conquistadors and their successors." He further adds that these dances of conquests can be read as the "simultaneous performance of two conflicting narratives, one endorsing conquest and the other reversing it" (ibid, 107).

Could the same logic be applied fruitfully to the Philippine setting? One of the most popular moro-moro plays performed in various parts of the country is the *Historia Famosa ni Bernardo Carpio*. The story is based on the legends of the Spanish hero Bernardo Carpio. But just like Moctezuma in Mexico, Bernardo Carpio also had another identity. He too was portrayed as a folk messianic figure in the popular imagination of Tagalog peasants. Reynaldo Ilete (1998, 9-10) shows us how the local histories of central and southern Tagalog towns reveal a popular belief—that Bernardo Carpio was their indigenous king trapped inside a mountain, struggling to free himself and liberate his people from the Spanish.

In Central America, the most commonly appropriated Spanish hero is the national saint, Santiago Matamoros (St. James the Moor slayer), who is equated to a number of pre-Hispanic deities and indigenous heroes. For the Concheros (contemporary fraternities that seek to promote indigenous culture in Mexico, and also the name of a dance of conquest), Santiago is popularly associated with Ehecatl, a pre-Hispanic wind god. For the Cora Indians, Santiago is conflated with a nineteenth century indigenous agrarian leader and prophet, Manuel Lozada (Shelton 2004, 290). In the *danza de los santiagos* in Cuetzalan, Puebla, the victorious Christian soldiers called *santiagos* wear masks that identify them with indigenous warriors of the sun, while the defeated heathen soldiers called *pilatos* wear pale-faced masks that identify them with the Spanish conquistadores (Harris 1993, 107). Again, these instances show how the narrative of Christian superiority is accepted, but that of Spanish superiority is rejected. The appropriation of Spanish heroes like Bernardo Carpio and Santiago allow conquered natives to imagine themselves to be on the "Cristiano" side of the equation. But as was shown earlier, in the example of Moctezuma in the *danza de las plumas*, they can also embrace the "Moro" side as a representation of themselves.

In some other cases, it becomes increasingly difficult to think in terms of either "Moro" or "Cristiano." Take for example

the moro-moro play entitled *Princesa Perlita* which was written in 1970 and restaged most recently in 2006 in Metro Manila. In *Perlita* we find protagonists dressed in fabrics inspired by native Southeast Asian or Malay clothing. The protagonists are converted to Christianity early in the play. A cardinal from a foreign kingdom baptizes them and gives the queen, Reyna Malaya, a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The image miraculously speaks to Malaya warning her of an impending attack. The invaders are led by Montenegro, a character who represents Spain. And the cardinal who initially baptized Malaya, and who is first portrayed as a benevolent character, becomes a traitor when he is manipulated by Montenegro later in the story. We see in this play an acceptance of Christianity signified by the appropriation of the Virgin Mary to the side of the protagonists and a rejection of Spanish authority and frailocracy (represented by the manipulated cardinal). Throughout the play, the protagonists continue to wear their Malay clothes. And the hero, who defeats Montenegro in a breathtaking fight scene at the end of the play, is dressed in a way that evokes images of Lapu-Lapu, a local datu warrior whose resistance to and defeat of Magellan made him the country's first hero.

The example just given reminds us to pay close attention to the performative life of a text. Through the strategic choice of costumes, a story line's main message may be subverted. The *Moros y Cristianos* is often seen as a colonial tool, but it can also be the vehicle for nationalist messages. In *Perlita*, even if the protagonists are supposed to have been converted to Christianity, their costumes clearly equate them with pre-Hispanic Filipinos, or with the *Moro* warriors who resisted Magellan. The converts, though they accept Christianity, are shown to be both anti-Spanish and anti-friar. In the same vein, in the Mexican *santiagos*, the strategic allocation of dark colored masks to the protagonists and pale-colored masks to the antagonists casts the *indio* as "Cristiano"/hero and re-casts the Spanish as "Moro"/villain without changing the plot. In the *danzas de las plumas*, the "Moros" represented by Moctezuma and his

men have far more elaborate costumes, more intricate dance steps, and longer stage exposure than the "Cristianos" such that among performers and audiences, it is more prestigious to play the role of the "Moro" even if they are defeated at the end of the story. This means that while "Cristianos" are superior in the text, the "Moro" is superior in the performance. This has been described by Toor in 1926 as the "aesthetic victory" of the "Moro" (Harris 1996,157).

The prestige of the "Moro" role and its "aesthetic victory" can similarly be seen in Baler in the Philippines, where the women who play "Cristiano" princesses are confined in their choice of costumes and stage action to long dresses and dainty movements. Their "Moro" counterparts wear short skirts, and perform challenging footwork, something which the Christians do not perform. The better dancers therefore get the coveted "Moro" roles. For special dance demonstrations, where only short excerpts of the moro-moro can be performed, it is the "Moro" princess who is showcased. In Sinasajan too, the "Moro" role bears a certain prestige for the menfolk. The entry-level role is that of a "Cristiano" soldier, and over time, an actor can work his way up the hierarchy and play the plum role of the "Moro" leading man who is assigned the most challenging choreography.

In Spain, there is clearly a strong desire among festeros to join the band of "Moros" rather than "Cristianos." In Villajoyosa, Alicante for example, there are forty-four bands of "Moros" and only nineteen "Cristianos." This is not unusual, for in many other towns all over Spain, the "Cristianos" are often the minority. Even the costume-makers in Alicante, the epicenter of the lucrative costume rental industry, take extra pride in being specialists in making "Moro" costumes. The desire to be "Moros" may stem from the visual superiority of "Moro" costumes, which are more colorful, elaborate, and have more variety. But another possible reason is that it is the "Moro" camp that gets to rule during the fiestas.

In dramatizing the reconquest, "Cristianos" are defeated at the start of the fiesta and will regain control only towards the end, allowing "Moros" to reign during the fiesta. They dominate the bulk of festivities, from fireworks, gunfire, and lavish parades, and get to have the sensuous clothing and choreography. For Harris (1994), this festive reign of the "Moro" at fiesta time represents the temporary resurgence of that which is suppressed but which cannot finally be suppressed by the church. He contends that the expulsion of the Moors in 1492, and the Moriscos (the Moors who converted to Christianity) in 1609, failed to rid Spain of Moorish influence not only in architecture but also in the blood. As one of Harris' interviewees states, "the Moors are not just a symbol, they are something in us. Look at our faces. Many are Moorish" (ibid, 47).

What Harris reports in his study made in the mid-1990s was also something I stumbled upon a decade later. My Spanish interviewee from Castellon, in the Valencia community, used nearly the same phrase: "the Moor is in our blood, look at our faces." It seems to me that this is a common expression, a popular perception among the people of Valencia. It may have something to do with the strength of regional identity in Spain. Many of those who resist Madrid as a center define themselves proudly as Catalans, as Valencians, as Basques, and so on. In those parts of Spain where Moorish influence was particular strong, this aspect of their history is now embraced and celebrated, for it differentiates them from the rest of Spain—it is their heritage and is central to their identity. This could probably explain why in the maritime district of Valencia, some localities perform "Moro" victory. Miguel Bustos, president of the local *Agrupacion de Moros y Cristianos* relates that they re-enact battles from a specific period in history, the late eleventh century, in the time of *El Cid*, when the area was under siege by the *Almoravides*, a Muslim dynasty of Berber warriors that once dominated Northwestern Africa and Spain (Aiemeur 2006).

The choice of this period in history is an interesting one, for it is characterized by alliances between Moors and Christians in Valencia as they attempted to fend off the advancing *Almoravides*. In history books, Moors are sometimes painted as men of valor, sometimes more courageous than Christians. Take for example this passage from an old account of the fall of Valencia: "The Christians, perceiving that it was impossible to maintain themselves in Valencia, retired from the city; but Alcahir, assisted by the brave general Aben Tahir, Lord of Tadmir, still continued to defend the walls, which he abandoned only with his life" (Conde 1854, 310). This chivalric imagery of Moors is a recurring phenomenon that surfaces every now and then in Spanish historiography, ballads, drama, and novels.

The river of Spanish literary images of the Moor are fed by two streams. One is a hostile current or a "vilifying tradition," while the other current is more benevolent, an "idealizing tradition" that paints Moorish men as loyal, heroic, and courtly people and the women as lovely and virtuous. Israel Burshatin (1985) identifies two points of view in explaining this phenomenon: the "aestheticist" view conceives the Spain as being "so generous to its enemies of eight centuries that it buries the hatchet and fashions them into models of the courtly and chivalric." The "social" view renders literary phenomena as pamphlets of "peaceful coexistence." Scholars who subscribe to the latter argue that chivalric or sentimental narrative in Orientalist garb hides a subversive message for the segment of the population (the New Christians, or converted Jews and Moors) who needed consoling or were intent on dismantling the dominant culture of the Old Christians. The Aragonese lords of Morisco vassals, who patronized *Maurophilie Litteraire*, allowed the proliferation of Moorish "positive role models" to boost the morale of their faithful and hardworking New Christian subjects by generating nostalgic images of aristocratic Moors of the past (ibid., 99).

This reminds us that the trauma of conquest was not just confined to the natives who were subjected to Spanish colonial rule in the Americas and in the Philippines. As the colonial project was underway overseas, the process of establishing Christian and Castilian hegemony was also taking place within Spain. A massive campaign to expel Moors and Jews was undertaken to rid Spain of "tainted blood." There were Moriscos however, or Moors who converted to Christianity, who successfully learned to assimilate by abandoning their traditional dress and cultural identity and intermarried with Old Christian families to escape expulsion. They are an undeniable part of the Spanish body politic. And so when *festeros* in Spain speak of the *Moros y Cristianos* as a celebration of *convivencia* and point to their faces for traces of Moorish blood, could they perhaps be said to commemorate the incorporation of the Moors into the Spanish Christian fold, and to acknowledge the intermingling of Moorish and Christian blood as an integral part of their lineage? Maybe the "Moro" can refer not only to the Muslim "other" but also to the suppressed "self," the "Moro" within.

In the Philippines too, there are signs that producers and performers may be thinking of the "Moro" as the suppressed "self" rather than the Muslim "other." In her study of the *sinulog* in Cebu, Sally Ann Ness (1992, 139-145) shows how nationalist imagery has worked its way into the performance. The opening segment of the *sinulog* shows three principal characters: Magellan, King Humabon (Magellan's Visayan host), and Lapu-Lapu (Magellan's slayer). As the three approach the patron saint, they and all the corps of performers, kneel before the image of the Santo Niño, except for those in the "Moro" column. Lapu-Lapu's rise as a pivotal principal character in the dramatization is a recent development. In 1965, Spanish Kings marched down the center of a three column formation with "Cristiano" soldiers on one side and "Moros" on the other. By the 1980s, the procession of Spanish Kings was gone, and in its place

was a re-enactment of Magellan's defeat by Lapu-Lapu. Through the years, the *sinulog* came to represent a twofold narrative central to Filipino nationalism: the conversion to Christianity and the Muslim resistance. In the *sinulog* we see two portrayals of the "Moro," both in the role of convert (Humabon) and victor (Lapu-Lapu). The image of the two *Moro* chiefs, Humabon and Lapu-Lapu, marching side by side seems to remind Filipinos of an age of brotherhood disrupted by the arrival of the Spanish, sending the message that Christian and Muslim Filipinos share the same blood.

In 2006, while promoting the moro-moro entitled *Perlita ng Silangan* on a local television show, the play's director Soxy Topacio was quoted as having said that the conflict in the story is not about Muslims and Christians, "and the characters are all Muslims, which in truth, we all were, once upon a time" (Mustafa 2006, 13).

## Conclusion

Most textbook definitions of the *Moros y Cristianos* and its variants the world over subscribe to the view that the characterization in the *Moros y Cristianos* is strictly black and white, with the "Moros" presented always in the role of villain and vanquished. It is time to reconsider these basic assumptions. We must fine tune our framework for studying the *Moros y Cristianos* so that they may also account for counter-currents in the conduct of performances. The categoric instability of the terms "Moro" and "Cristiano," coupled with the malleability of performances, shows how the ostensibly simple binary structure of these mock battles hides multiple layers of meaning. It is contingency rather than fixity that characterizes the *Moros y Cristianos*, and herein lies the potential for a theater premised on war and conquest, of being capable of delivering a message of *convivencia* and nationalism.

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