

Bayan Nila: Pilipino Culture Nights and Student Performance at Home in Southern California

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Abstract

In this work, I interpret Filipina/o-American cultural production and question the bounded nature of ethnomusicology, area studies, ethnic studies, and cultural anthropology. I describe the challenges of ethnographic research on music and performance at “home” in Southern California among college students, who take part in a Pilipino Culture Night (PCN). PCN performers strategically manipulate the symbols of homeland (both the Philippines and the U.S.) through singing, playing instruments, acting, and dancing. I interpret this practice by drawing on existing literature on Asian-American performance and identifying key critical discourses in Filipina/o-American performance offered by the PCN model.

Key words: Asian American, Filipino-American, Performance, PCN, Home

IN THE CLASSIC ANTHROPOLOGICAL sense, “home” is the place the “field” is not: there is nothing to collect and no informants whose practice needs to be explained to others at home.¹ Home is where you write your ethnography, not where you observe action to be inscribed; it is not a place you experience; it is where you translate experience gained elsewhere. You do not have to research home because the immediacy of events there are commonsensical. They are self-evident.² However, once presence in the field becomes more complicated, home is suddenly an unfamiliar *elsewhere*. Once the field worker realizes that the words she translated into her home language do not fit into commensurable conceptual categories, culturally inherent meanings are complicated. Further, once common sense and rationality are questioned and revealed as culturally relative, the formerly pure nature of everyday life at home becomes a complex confluence of judgments and events.

I have been privy to many examples of the unflagging effort and enthusiasm by Filipina/o-American students as they prepare for Pilipino Culture Nights (PCNs).³ My home field site in Southern California is complicated and privileged by such moments of serendipity. I live and work among Filipinas/os and Filipina/o-Americans who have allowed me (an outsider and a non-Filipino) a great deal of access to this particular form of cultural production, which I have been documenting and researching on as a graduate student at the University of California Riverside. In classes, rehearsals, and the world of random asides and passing communications, I have encountered Filipina/o-American student performers who are sensitive to the problems of the imagined, disjointed homeland often presented in the PCN, even as they benefit from these now-naturalized representations of heterogeneity in the Philippines. The PCN is driven by critical identity work that is potentially at odds with the accepted narratives of the genre itself. Criticisms of the PCN are generally aimed at the “dance suites” that present an essentialized, exotic version of the Philippines. Nevertheless, for many student performers, the PCN is a powerful transformative experience that lingers in their memory long after their college days have passed. By employing this performance model as

a means of ethnic self-realization, the participants take on the herculean task of navigating different representations of Filipina/o-America.

This essay is my attempt to understand Filipina/o-American cultural production and to question the bounded nature of ethnomusicology, area studies, ethnic studies, and cultural anthropology. Can we understand Filipina/o-American cultural practices without reifying an essentialized, authentic Filipina/o experience in the diaspora? Does the ethnomusicological method of participant observation hold the answer? More specifically, does this method (borrowed by ethnomusicologists from cultural anthropologists) work well when applied to music and performance at home? I pose these questions because this genre of performance strategically manipulates the symbols of a homeland. At the same time, it blurs the ethnomusicological separation between homeland practices and representation abroad. I illustrate the problems and possibilities of ethnomusicological field work at home by discussing the most promising progress in this effort: the work of performance scholars in Asian-American studies who are forced to face the inherent contradictions of this dichotomy “where they live” (so to speak). After an outline of studies of home in ethnomusicology and cultural anthropology, I discuss the use of the home trope in Asian-American performance scholarship, and draw on existing literature on Asian-American performance to understand the complexities of the PCN. Lastly, I will identify key critical discourses in Filipina/o-American performance offered by the PCN model.

Ethnographic Research at Home

The most readily identifiable methodology of ethnomusicology is fieldwork. The methods of fieldwork are drawn from cultural anthropology, originally modeled on the study of “others” (foreigners, villagers or “quaint subjects”) (Bourgois 1995, 14) who live in the “field,” defined broadly as another place where fieldwork is done. In *Shadows in the Field* (2008), Timothy Rice elaborates that since field presence and fieldwork activities are rites of passage that “make” an ethnomusicologist, the field is not an

area where theories are tested but a place of practice or experience. Shifting definitional discourse within ethnomusicology means that doing faraway fieldwork is increasingly less important than the ends of experience.

Despite this focus on the primacy of experience, ethnomusicologists have been slow to engage critically with the question of home and field because of an institutional reliance on this dichotomy. Cultural anthropologists have broadened this definition by studying “home” in places as varied as nuclear arms research centers and urban drug corners (Bourgois 1995; Gusterson 1996). In cultural anthropology, the relationship of theory and methodology to colonialism and imperialism led to an inquisition of broader, tacit assumptions within the discipline (Asad 1973; Hymes 1972; Ortner 1984). Kamala Visweswaran cites the Dell Hymes collection, *Reinventing Anthropology* (1972), as a milestone in the reform in cultural anthropology. This collection, recalls Visweswaran, was the first to suggest the idea of “bringing it back home” (1994, 101) or “studying up” (Nader 1972). Visweswaran notes the synergistic relationship between the anthropology of home and a re-examination of the discipline’s colonialist role. She writes that

[a]nthropology at home...was not acceptable until the move to decolonize anthropology arose; a decolonized anthropology assumed that a critical eye would necessarily be cast on a whole range of practices at ‘home’ that authorized American intervention in the ‘Third World’” (Visweswaran 1994, 101).

Visweswaran views the provocation of *Reinventing Anthropology* as an unfinished project; it is not about the nature of fieldwork per se but the nature of “homework” (1994, 102). If normative ethnography is “speaking from a place where one is not, where location and locution are tightly bound by a distant imaginary,” (102) then homework is “anthropology in reverse” (104).⁴

Ethnomusicologists’ engagements with the consideration of home as fieldsite have taken a different character. Ethnomusicology at home

materialized after the 1970s, with the establishment of urban ethnomusicology at Columbia (Reyes Schramm 1982; Shelemay 1988). When ethnomusicologists began to study minority ethnic groups in the United States (sometimes from an insider's perspective), the discipline stretched and expanded through a re-examination of subject positions and a consideration of multited and reflexive representations.

Ethnomusicology and Asian America

Ethnomusicologists who addressed the performance of Asian Americans in the late 1980s and early 1990s explored the complicated nature of subject/object positions by dealing with the inconsistencies of traditional research models.⁵ These scholars faced a critical disjuncture between ethnomusicological presentations of Asian and Asian-American music cultures. Researchers focused less on the traditional musical object and more on how music-making constitutes lived experience. Deborah Wong's *Speak it Louder: Asian Americans Making Music* (2004) deals with various contexts for Asian music-making in the United States and problematizes the nature of traditional ethnomusicological enquiry into this area by incorporating an interdisciplinary approach. Following the work of music scholars such as Joseph Lam (1999), Wong distills various intellectual approaches to the Asian music-making experience in America.

To summarize, existing work on Asian musics in the U.S. is characterized by two contrasting approaches. Some scholars treat music as a pocket of traditionality and essentially present the artifact as 'Asian music'. Others take a completely different path by asking how issues of movement and diaspora can be considered through performance practices. These contrasting approaches situate 'the music' in significantly different ways: the first regards the sounds and practices as something isolatable and the second extends the central ethnomusicological proposition – that music is culture – into questions of cultural movement and transformation (Wong 2004, 15–16).

Two important points are established here. First, the performative object of study (e.g., Cambodian dance in Van Nuys, California, or Vietnamese refugee songs in New Jersey) must be considered within the immediate political context of performance. *Why* is the trope of homeland used at *that* moment, and to what end?⁶ Second, the performative nature of that moment requires treatment as a political statement on its own terms—not simply an evocation of homeland, but a new reality created through performance with a completely new set of meanings. The new meanings in Asian America may (or may not) reflect their counterparts in Cambodia or Vietnam.

Ricardo Trimillos adjusts traditional ethnomusicological concepts to the immediacy of the cultural present in his scholarship on Philippines and Filipina/o-Americans. Trimillos is the first music scholar of the Philippines to use skills honed for music ethnography abroad in order to engage critically with issues of Philippine diaspora and Filipina/o-American musical culture. In his article “Music and Ethnic Identity: Strategies Among Overseas Filipino Youth,” Trimillos evaluates “six strategies of ethnic identity” production through music (1986, 10–11). His framework is based on the degree that Filipina/o-American youth use Philippine music in fostering a cultural identity. In his evaluation of these six strategies, Trimillos blurs distinctions among Filipina/o (people) practices, Filipina/o-American practices, and the work of ethnomusicologists of the Philippines (those who study the music of or in the Philippines) in order to create what Joseph Lam would later call a heuristic device to interpret a wide variety of Filipina/o signifiers in the diaspora (Lam 1999). Trimillos creates an all-inclusive framework in order to examine the total activities of Filipina/o youths in the modern diasporic setting.

Trimillos (2001) refines his discussion of Filipina/o-Americans in the United States volume of the *Garland Encyclopedia* series. He provides a wider scope of Filipina/o-American musical practices and reveals a more sophisticated critical framework, which is possibly informed by his heightened involvement with the Filipina/o-American community. He also addresses the diversity of Filipina/o and Filipina/o-American

experiences, “encompassing both American-born descendants of early laborers and families of newly arrived professionals” (1024), and the difficulty of addressing only their music. “(These) music events may be simultaneously dance, theater, and oral literature” (1025). His concluding paragraph to the *Garland* chapter is a dynamic revision of his earlier discursive strategy in “Music and Ethnic Identity.”

Musical traditions and practices for Filipino Americans cover a broad continuum between the imaginary polarities of “pure Filipino” and “pure American” and their implicit Asian/Western dyad. Diachronic and synchronic cultural spaces inhabited by Filipino Americans provide access to and potential for rich and diverse participation in music. They also problematize issues of identity, commitment and belonging (2001,1026).

Thus, Trimillos presents here a more nuanced and dynamic approach than in his earlier work on Filipina/o and Filipina/o-American musical strategies. He divides the subject of Filipina/o-American music into three categories: continuity of homeland culture (which includes *rondalla* groups and other United States practices), reconstruction of a minority homeland culture (*kulintang* and Southern Philippine musics), and the appropriation of majority culture(s) (art and popular music). For diasporic Filipinas/os, the culture of the Southern Philippines is an icon for decolonization even though they themselves may have no ties to the Southern Philippines (1026). Here, Trimillos recognizes the complicated nature of heritage politics and its manifestation in musical practices overseas. The members or descendants of majority ethnic groups in the Philippines practice Filipina/o minority music in the United States in accordance with complex identity politics. The official national doctrine of Marcos-era Philippines held Southern Philippine artistic forms in high regard because they symbolized an unconquered Philippine people (Gaerlan 1999, 271). The practice of appropriating Southern Philippine music was taken further by the dance troupe, *Bayanihan*, and its practices subsequently defined the ways that the music and dance of the Philippines is practiced in the United

States today (255).⁷ Trimillos and Gaerlan thus identify the complex origins of diasporic practices, whose meanings have changed over time.

In any discussion of Asian-American performance, homeland practices and representation should be understood within this dynamic exchange between Asia and America (rather than one practice simply informing the other). Within the Filipina/o context, the history of these practices cannot be understood without a consideration of nationalist efforts in postcolonial Philippines. In her dissertation *Music, Politics and Nation at the Cultural Centre of the Philippines* (2001), Christi-Anne Castro addresses cultural production in the Philippines and its effects on American practice. The Cultural Centre of the Philippines (CCP) was designed to represent a unified nationalist statement. It successfully resonated as a homeland construction throughout the diaspora. Castro writes "... 'Philippines' referred to a country unified by a vague notion of accepted cultural diversity" (2001, 7–8). For community-building purposes in the United States, Filipina/o-Americans employ cultural developments in the Philippines whose symbolic nature is then transferred to the diasporic site. Castro notices that homeland developments such as the CCP are magnified abroad (and their unifying nature is at times exaggerated) in diasporic cultural identity work (13). Filipinas/os in the United States are thus empowered to find beauty and power in representations of homeland practices (which may or may not reflect the daily lives of the Filipina/o citizen) (15).

Until recently, Asian-American performance was largely ignored because those practices, rooted in the experiences of second- or third-generation migrants, were viewed as not "different" enough to merit interest by traditional ethnomusicologists. Or to use Renato Rosaldo's terminology, these processes were "culturally invisible" (Rosaldo 1993, 196). A survey of any canon of ethnographic work reveals the amount of research on non-Westernized or indigenous cultures, as opposed to Westernized or modernized peoples (196). Academics thus map the world's peoples into relative zones of cultural visibility and invisibility (198). Since this constructed nature of difference informs all aspects of anthropological

worth, it would be no challenge to research other less indigenous societies because they are more similar to “us.” This search for cultural visibility informs much research on ethnic minority music in the U.S.⁸ Scholars of Asian-American performance must re-situate both “invisible” and “visible” cultural practices and thereby question the nature of the divide. Asian-American performance accounts are written almost exclusively by those with an immediate concern in the community; they are practitioners or “native” anthropologists who are faced with the much more complicated matter of discussing homeland reconstruction as a dynamic performative force. These new ethnomusicologists are well-equipped to interpret the heterogeneity of Asian-American musical practices in the United States, problematizing the nature of conceiving any community as static and bounded.

Pilipino Culture Nights

In an effort to interpret Asian-American performance on its own terms, I discuss Pilipino Culture Nights (PCNs), an elaborate genre of cultural production that has been staged in high school and college campuses in the United States since the late 1970s. PCNs are generally designed, performed, and produced by students who operate in the context of campus or community groups. Students begin planning the show in October or November⁹ and stage it in March or April. A committee is formed with a chair and a co-chair (generally, both are participants from the previous school year’s production). Each year, the students design their PCN according to the strengths of that year’s organizing committee, participants, and the knowledge gained from PCN workshops and faculty consultation.¹⁰ The following five months, November through March, are spent in meetings and rehearsals that culminate in an intensive week of full dress rehearsals. During this aptly named “hell week” (one week before the performance), the students practice every night for five consecutive days. One can find them walking through meticulous production details, speaking the same line of script over and over again (without giggling this time), spray-painting coconuts for the *maglalatik* dance, or picking the ubiquitous glitter out of

their hair as they hurriedly put the last stitch on an elaborately feathered costume.¹¹

Many PCNs follow a similar format. Theo Gonzalves observes that PCNs consist of two kinds of performance: folkloric materials and theatrical narration.¹² Filipina/o folkloric materials—dance, music, and costuming—are the central and most recognizable component of the PCN (Gonzalves 2001b, 245). The participants present separate semi-dramatic “dance suites” during the course of the performance, intended to represent the diversity of the Philippine nation and the heterogeneity of its culture. With a few exceptions, these suites are present in all PCNs and serve as the ‘traditional’ aspect of the performance. The second category of the PCN is staged drama, or “theatrical narration.” Throughout the performance, a unifying narrative thread is present in short sketches that alternate with sections of dance and music. Gonzalves writes that

[a]t their worst, as I have said, some plays have merely been clumsy vehicles for moving the dance suites along. But when narrations have been more carefully conceived and written, they have done more. (Again, a lot of this depends on the ambitions of those tasked to write and edit scripts.) It is in the theatrical narrations that the PCN is more fully defined as a genre – one not originated nor performed in the Philippines, and later adapted to American needs, but rooted in and reflective of Filipina/o American young folks’ concerns, anxieties and aspirations (2001b, 246–247).

Put together, the sketches and choreographed dances constitute a metanarrative on the transformative experience that occurs through PCN presentation.

To illustrate this, I describe the design and execution of the 2002 Pilipino Culture Night at the University of California Riverside (UCR). The students allowed me to observe the preparation and practice sessions during the 2001–2002 school year and asked me to participate in some of the musical numbers. The 2002 UCR PCN consisted of segments that alternated between dance suites and four three-scene dramatic acts.¹³

Act 1 of the drama began with a group of PCN actors portraying a group of college students on a quest for self-discovery in a fictional classroom. The scene opened in a “History of the Philippines Class.” After he lectured the students on the history of colonial Philippine domination, the demonstrative, overbearing teacher ordered his students to visit the old Filipinas/os in a retirement home in order to learn about their culture. The rest of the Act was devoted to the students discussing the implications of this project as they parodied their teacher who spoke too loudly and stood too close to them. The stage faded to black and the stage crew prepared for the “Cordillera” suite (sometimes called the “Mountain” suite), a theatrical representation of the upland peoples of Northern Luzon. Male undergrad dancers in loin cloths circled the stage repeatedly and each dancer stopped for a short solo at the front of the loop. The musicians of the Rondalla Club of Los Angeles provided live accompaniment with *gangsa* (handheld flat gongs).

Once the dancers exited the stage, the production crew prepared for Act 2. The three scenes depicted Filipina/o senior citizens at a retirement home who told folktales to their young visitors. As the older characters told their stories, other actors represented their memories in separate sketches about the youthful days of the storytellers or their legends and tales in a split-stage format. This was followed by the “Muslim” or “Moro” suite of dances, which was a more eclectic mix than that which preceded them. A *kulintang* player provided accompaniment and the percussive sound of long wooden poles was incorporated into the dance, played by pairs of students who knelt onstage. The scenes portrayed in this semicontiguous suite depicted several mythic Moro princes and princesses in a stylized battle.

An intermission followed and the participants and the audience were all treated to an abundance of food and a short intermission performance that featured one of the actors, who performed a stand-up comedy act that focused on the experiences of Filipina/o American youth. He relied on traditional (stereotypical) Fil-Am humor as he donned a heavy accent and imitated his father who ordered him to “Close the light” and “Turn

off the window.” But the comedian also ventured into the messy nature of identity politics, criticizing Filipina/os who deny their heritage, “Your last name is Angeles? You’re not Spanish! You’re from the jungle, like me!” This reflexive and self-essentializing humor offered yet another version of Filipina/o-American self-representation; the comedian simultaneously ridicules obvious markers of Filipino identity in his own background while criticizing others who de-emphasize ethnic difference.

Act 3 of the drama displayed the fictional students discussing their different experiences at the retirement home. One scene consisted of a fictional school *rondalla* ensemble, played by a select group of students from the *real* UCR *Rondalla Ensemble* (myself included). We performed “*Bayan Ko*,” the nostalgic homeland tale of longing. This was followed by the “*Maria Clara*” suite, which represents the Spanish influence on Filipina/o culture. These dances were accompanied by live *rondalla* music provided by the *Rondalla Club of Los Angeles*.

Finally, the drama was resolved in Act 4. The students returned to school and their teacher was pleased to see that they had learned a great deal about Filipina/o history. I sensed a certain generational tension at this point. Although the students listened carefully to the older people in the previous act and appreciated the empowering nature of their long ago/far away tales, they weren’t completely sold on the values of the story. This same tension (present in the comedian’s stand-up routine) contradicts the home motif identified by Gonzalves. Acts of returning home (to the imagined Philippines through the stories of their elders) in memory are complicated and met with ambivalence by the characters. Act 4 concluded with another performance of “*Bayan Ko*,” and the PCN ended with the “*Rural*” suite (sometimes called the “*Country*” suite) of dances, a collection of animated pieces in which the rest of the students cheer on the participants from the sides of the stage. The 2002 UCR PCN closed with a round of cast introductions and “thank yous.”

The narrative theme, content, and sequencing of the 2002 UCR PCN were typical of many performances I have witnessed during those

years and since. Gonzalves (1995) noted that the unifying “reverse exile” theme is common in the PCN genre; the young Filipinas/os characters do not know their history or culture and must return to the Philippines as a conceptual repository of knowledge (in this case, symbolically, through the stories of their elders). He has criticized the connotations of such a journey: the imagined Philippines is mythicized, unchanged, and often unaffected by the outside world. Some PCN participants feel that the political import is weakened by the repetition of these themes, year after year, and the similarity of the dramatic structure and the overall predictability of the performance. The strongest criticisms of the PCN have focused on the “traditional dances,” which potentially serve to reinforce static, essentialized views of Filipina/o history.

Indeed, the Bayanihan folk dance company—the source of the dances found in virtually all PCNs and a Philippine nationalist project that featured a number of decontextualized and stylized representations of various ethnic groups in the Philippines—has been critiqued in exactly the same way. The dance suites popularized in the Bayanihan and perpetuated in PCNs are the result of a self-conscious nationalist program to define and disseminate Philippine culture in the early twentieth century, generally credited to choreographer Francisca Reyes Aquino. Aquino began to collect folk songs, dances, and games from villages in 1924 as part of a mission to create a national culture of post-Commonwealth, preindependent Philippines, and essentially invented many of the modern national folkloric dance forms (Gonzalves 2001b, 32, 46). In her manual, *Philippine Folk Dances and Games* (1927), Aquino discussed the construction of Filipina/o arts as a proactive means of creating an impermeable base of nationalism against foreign (i.e., American) popular culture (Gonzalves 2001b, 35); that is, she choreographed “authentic” Filipina/o dances in a postcolonial environment.¹⁴ Her repertoire consisted of indigenized costumes and authenticated dances and is a direct ancestor of the dance suites used in the contemporary Pilipino Culture Night (69).

With the foundation of Aquino’s existing scholarship, Lucretia Reyes-Urtula established the Bayanihan Dance Troupe in postindependent

Philippines in the 1950s. Urtula, a choreographer at the Philippine Women's University, created a dance/theatre troupe whose repertoire was based exclusively on the folk arts. These folk arts were "authenticated" by researchers who built upon an existing body of Aquino-inspired ethnographic research from notable Philippine arts scholars such as Lucrecia Kasilag, Aurora Diño, and José Maceda. Urtula's work was guided by two principles: the preservation of the indigenous group's authentic performance and the enhancement of the original material for the stage. This program resulted in the establishment of the Bayanihan Folk Arts Center at the Philippine Women's University in 1957 through a grant from the Philippine government. The mission of this Center was not only to research and preserve Philippine art forms in music, dance, and costume, but also to promote these arts in an international arena. The Bayanihan Dance Troupe was a successful export that achieved international acclaim at the 1958 World's Fair in Brussels, Belgium. The Bayanihan still performs today and has inspired similar groups in the Philippines and in the Filipino diasporic communities.

Thus, the format of the modern Pilipino Culture Night, as it became a prominent feature on American college campuses in the 1980s, was derived from what Gonzalves calls a "kineticized nationalism culled from encounters with native folk art" (2001b, 110). This nationalism is, however, not without its own politic in multiethnic and regional Philippines. In a 1999 article, "In the Court of the Sultan: Orientalism, Nationalism, and Minority in Philippine and Filipino American Dance," Barbara Gaerlan critiques the static, essentialized representations in the Bayanihan dance suites and by extension, the modern PCN. The *Singkil* dance found in the "Muslim" or "Moro" suite, for instance, offers a highly distorted view of the culture of the Southern Philippines. This view has the potential to obscure the history of intranational conflict and subvert the efforts of students who are attempting to celebrate cultural heterogeneity in the PCN by exoticizing "proud sultans" and "mythic battles." Gaerlan interprets this as

“...an attempt to dominate and control Filipino Muslims by making their dances the ‘signature pieces’ of the Philippines’ premier national dance troupe. The Bayanihan appropriates the right to represent Moros and Moro culture without Moro consent. It bases its ‘right’ on its nationalist imprimatur” (1999, 269).

Gaerlan’s critique is a valuable warning against “strategic essentializing” within the PCN. By packaging the Philippines in performance, PCNs freeze intransular and regional relationships in time and create a level playing field that does not necessarily reflect any moment in time (historical or otherwise).¹⁵ This is also evident in the almost exclusive use of Filipino and English in PCNs rather than the numerous dialects spoken by the parents of PCN participants; in one sense, the heterogeneity of performance is homogenized through language and national culture is privileged over the many *cultures* within the Philippines.

Conclusion

In both academic discourse and highly charged discussions among PCN members, a fear exists that spectators of and participants in the PCN will mistake these colorful and performance-amplified versions of folk practices for everyday life in *the real Philippines*. Within Gaerlan’s critique of the canonized, dehistoricized nature of the PCN rests an implied essentialization of the participants. Gaerlan writes that

[i]n my interviews with Filipino American students about the source of their interest in learning such dances for the PCN, invariably they cited a desire to learn about indigenous cultures of the Philippines of which they were previously unaware. They perceived the dances as an anthropological window on Philippine culture. At the same time, without observing a contradiction, they appreciated the modern theatricality of the Bayanihan genre, saying that it gave them a venue for expressing Filipino culture in the United States of which they could be proud (1999, 257).

With the hindsight of a decade since this statement, I believe that the students Gaerlan observed represent one end of a spectrum of PCN participants' attitudes. Some participants might possibly still perceive these dances as an anthropological window to the Philippines. In my research, I engaged the participants in nuanced discussions about their reasons for participation. Although authenticity and culture were discussed on a superficial level, none of my interviewees assumed that they were encountering a completely accurate picture of the Philippines in the PCN. They instead stressed the importance of tradition, often differentiating it from 'modern culture' or 'American culture.' Their concerns were generational in nature, not wholly different from those of many first- or second-generation Asian-American children of immigrants.¹⁶

In order to address the Filipina/o-American myth-making that Gaerlan and Gonzalves criticize, I return to the "reverse exile" motif in the 2002 UCR PCN on a presentational level. Yes, the characters in the four-act drama were in search of a repository of knowledge, but they did not find it in the Philippines; they instead saw it within Filipina/o-America. Two repositories of knowledge shaped this discursive space: the Filipina/o-American history class and the senior citizens. The UCR participants subverted the PCN model in order to show that they are, in fact, aware of their history, and they know where to find it. This history can be found in the classroom. Indeed, many of the students who participated in the 2002 UCR PCN took the Filipina/o-American History Class in the Ethnic Studies Department (i.e. the parodied instructor in the History sketch). The only trips to the Philippines portrayed in the sketches were in the stories of the elderly people. And their young listeners did not, in every case, appreciate these stories. They were disappointed by the old folks' tale of the original Filipinos, *Malakas and Maganda*; the students expected (as any good college student would) more character development and symbolism within the story. But I think this sketch also reveals a deep ambivalence toward learning history in this way: what exactly *are* we supposed to do with these myths, these legends, and stories that told about things wholly unreal in manners that are somewhat elusive? How do we

move from scholarly discourse to the primordial, qualitative realness and moral force of *this* body of cultural knowledge (whether it is considered constructed or authentic)? The students hear a lot of voices: mom and dad, *lolo* (grandfather), and *lola* (grandmother), the reactionary and radical, the informed and the misinformed, the Philippine and the American. Performance and the possibilities of the performative resolve and resituate the diasporic forces of heritage and history with the day-to-day pressures of college, success, and family life, even as the postcollege real world looms large over the horizon of graduation.

Also, unlike the model Gonzalves describes, the UCR PCN creators made no attempt to connect the dance suites to the overall sketch of the drama. Each vignette of learning history was preceded and followed by one of the four dance suites without any attempt to create a contiguous narrative. This design effectively framed each performance as something wholly separate from the sketches; it distanced the stylized representations of diverse Philippine cultures from the everyday reality of these students. It highlighted the constructed nature of each dance suite. The participants thus reclaimed history and self-awareness: by acknowledging the constructed nature of these pieces, the students implicitly responded to critique, as if to say, “We know what this is supposed to be. We are aware of the arguments against it. But we have subverted the form for our own ends.” More recently, college groups have been radically altering the PCN model and highlighting these issues and many more in creative and provocative ways. In the 2009 UCR PCN, the students engaged in critical discussions about the nature of representation throughout the design and production of their show and even included this passage in the program:

DISCLAIMER: Katipunan at UCR feels that it is important to acknowledge that the dances you see tonight are theatrical interpretations inspired by traditional culture in the Philippines. They are not step by step (sic) recreations, but derivatives choreographed for entertainment. Our intension (sic) is not to represent specific ethnic or tribal groups to a wider audience, but to display our own

talents and creative ambitions. We do not intend to essentialize or characterize a group of people, simply participate in a theatrical style of dance propagated (sic) by dance companies in the Philippines. It is for this reason that we stress we are only representing ourselves as student performers that want to be part of a bigger community and culture.¹⁷

Might this be the model for a more politically informed 21st-century PCN genre? I hope so. Acknowledging this underscores the need to examine Asian-American performing culture within a completely different ethnomusicological framework. Rather than treat PCNs as the result of misused and misunderstood nationalist art forms, they are better understood as a transformation of these materials, directed toward community building and ethnic solidarity by students whose most immediate goal is understanding these materials on their terms. The *Tinikling* dance and the *Cordillera* are highly visible survivals of a twentieth-century nationalist project in the Philippines. Yet, their appropriation by informed students at a vital time of ethnic realization and self-awareness is a phenomenon that is entirely Filipina/o-American and celebrated in a performance that will *knock your socks off*.

Thus, the study of home within the context of Asian American studies allowed me to further scrutinize the subject rather than judge it merely as a clever manipulation of homeland practices. By focusing on the participatory social aesthetics of the PCN, I created a window through which I could observe a special form of modern Asian-American ethnic self-realization. I was able to observe young people who performatively carved out their place within a world of mixed messages from parents and teachers, and I tried to learn from their generational sensibilities within a certain time and place. My understanding of their cultural work took place within the discursive space of Asian America as a heuristic device (Lam 1999, 36), within the multigenerational context of young people developing their own voices through performance.

Notes

- ¹ This article is based on research for my 2002 Master's Thesis in Music, "'Ang Bayan Niya': Filipina/o American Music Making and Cultural Performance at Home in Southern California" (University of California Riverside), and a paper presented at the 2009 Society for Ethnomusicology Southern California and Hawai'i Chapter annual meeting (University of California Los Angeles), "Performing Filipina/o America: The PCN Genre and the Politics of Heritage Performance in Asian America." I would like to sincerely thank Ricardo Trimillos, who provided commentary on an earlier draft; Deborah Wong; Jonathan Ritter; and Sally Ness, who read through various versions of this work; and every past and present member of UCR Katipunan.
- ² The opening commentary on "home" in this essay is homage to Timothy Rice's discussion of "the field" (2008, 45).
- ³ The University of California Riverside has a relatively large Asian-Pacific Islander student population compared to other University of California schools and colleges in the United States. In the fall of 2008, API students consisted of 40.8% of the student body, with at least 920 Filipina/o American students (personal communication, Deborah Wong and Joe Virata, Director of Asian Pacific Student Programs, UCR, 5/5/2009). California and Hawai'i have the largest numbers of Filipinas/os in the United States. Although Filipinas/os arrived in the Louisiana territory as early as 1765, the largest number of immigrants entered the continental U.S. after 1965. A change in immigration policy allowed for the reunification of families and the entrance of skilled workers in the U.S (Okamura 1998, 42). This wave of doctors, surgeons, engineers, and nurses is commonly referred to as the "brain drainers" (Okamura 1998, 34; Pido 1997, 33; Lott 1997).
- ⁴ Indeed, many anthropologists turned homeward in the next two decades following the lead of *Reinventing Anthropology* and its 1990 counterpart, *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present* (Fox 1991) (Visweswaran 1994, 100–101). See Rosaldo 1993, Gusterson 1996, and Bourgois 1995 for discussion.
- ⁵ Casey Man Kong Lum's *In Search of a Voice: Karaoke and the Construction of Identity in Chinese America* (1996) focuses on Chinese American music and the practice of self-entertainment. Mari Yoshihara's *Musicians from a Different Shore: Asians and Asian Americans in Classical Music* (2007) is a bold challenge to the racial formation of Western European Art Music performance in the Asian diaspora. Deborah Wong discusses this first generation of scholars of Asian American music research in *Speak It Louder* (2004: 13). This includes Su Zheng's work on Chinese Americans (1993, 1994), Susan Asai's research on Japanese American music (1985, 1995, 1997) and Joseph Lam's landmark article on "Asian American music" as a heuristic device (1999). To this list, I add Parnes (1999), Reyes (1999), and a number of recent scholars chronicling Asian American popular music and performance such as Oliver Wang (2001, 2006, 2007), Christine Balance (2007), and Rachel Devitt (2008).
- ⁶ See the work of Reyes (1999) and Catlin-Jairazbhoy (1991).
- ⁷ Sally Ness discusses aspects of *Bayanihan* and other modern appropriations of Filipino folk dances in "Originality in the Postcolony: Choreographing the Neoethnic Body of Philippine Ballet" (1997).

- ⁸ The history of alterity in music is outlined by Born and Hesmondhalgh in the “Introduction” to *Western Music and Its Others* (2000) and is the through line in Radano and Bohlman’s collection *Music and the Racial Imagination* (2000). Also, Wong recognizes a number of publications in “Ethnomusicology and Difference” from the 1990s that “offered a new engagement with cultural theory and critical studies” (2006, 264). This engagement includes the scrutiny of power in shaping discourse of difference with the re-examination of the colonial/postcolonial nature of music research.
- ⁹ Ricardo Trimillos suggested that the PCN format as well as the time of year it is performed is a survival from the *bodabil* (from vaudeville), a staged variety show in the Philippines in the early twentieth century (conversation at the University of California Los Angeles, February 21st, 2009). Doreen Fernandez has written about the history of *bodabil* in *Palabas: Essays on Philippine Theater* (1996).
- ¹⁰ UCR has many academic resources for PCN performers. In years past, the Department of Dance offered a Philippine Dance Class, in which instructor Patrick Alcedo focused on the dances featured in the PCN. Currently, the Department offers a course directed toward Culture Night performance that attracts students involved in the PCN as well as those producing the Vietnamese, Chinese, and Indian Culture Nights.
- ¹¹ “*Maglalatik*” literally means, “performing the coconut dance” from the root word “*latik*,” (coconut). This is a prominent dance in the Pilipino Cultural Night’s Rural or Country dance suite. The performers wear coconut shells and manipulate them as percussion instruments while dancing.
- ¹² In his dissertation, Gonzalves (2001b) builds on a definition of the PCN Genre provided by Joel Jacinto at the Asian Pacific American Roundtable, 12 April 1996, California State University, Los Angeles.
- ¹³ April 16th, 2002, Riverside Municipal Auditorium.
- ¹⁴ About these research efforts, Elena Mirano writes, “The researchers, by their own admission...simplified dance figures to make the dances useful in the classes...this resulted in a body of material that lost much of its meaning after having been separated from its original context” (Mirano 2004, 51). In this statement, Mirano echoes the concerns of many scholars who reconsider these so-called “folk” dances in their collected, authenticated, stylized “folkloric” performance forms.
- ¹⁵ Stylized representations of Philippine expressive art are complex phenomena that may be interpreted in a number of ways. For instance, in “The Neoethnic Body of Philippine Ballet,” Sally Ness describes the ballet *Igorot* as an attempt to “recuperate” a colonial stereotype (1997, 72). However, Ness describes exchanges with Philippine dance experts who disagree about the appropriateness of this representation (1997, 86-88).
- ¹⁶ This is informed by Joseph Lam’s (1999) idea of generational difference as a unifying factor in creating an Asian-American discourse on music, and by extension, performance (47).
- ¹⁷ Program for “One Fall: 20th Annual Philippine Cultural Night” by the Katipunan Pilipino Student Organization (April 25th, 2009). Justin Pansacola (Cultural Chairperson for Katipunan) wrote the disclaimer because of concerns about misrepresenting the Philippines, Filipinas/os, and Filipina/o Americans in the PCN (personal communication 27 April 2009).

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