

The Appropriation of the Dances of the Igorots From Traditional to Transnational

The Igorot dances and culture of the Philippines have been used to create ballets in service of a number of purposes, and in heralding an introduced art form in Philippine culture. **Joelle Jacinto** asks whether the agenda of establishing a national identity through the appropriation of Igorot culture in balletic form addresses the needs of a Philippine audience as well.

The Igorot People and Appropriating Igorot Culture

Early in the development of dance as an art form in the Philippines, appropriations such as those of the Igorot culture were used to represent a national identity to an international audience, in tandem with the nationalist agenda of cultural funding agencies, in this case, the Cultural Center of the Philippines and the ballet companies in residence. The author looks at the dance, Igorot, and its legacy, and the works that were created with this legacy in place, to further understand the need to establish this nationalist identity, for what purposes and for which audiences, and if this need is still relevant today.

The Igorot people is a collective reference to five ethnic communities that reside in the Northern highlands of the Philippines, the Bontoc, Isneg, Kalinga, Ibaloi and the Kankanaey. Prior to the arrival of foreign colonial forces, they did not refer to themselves as Igorot, much less think of themselves as belonging to one tribe or ethnolinguistic classification.¹ However, as they live within the Cordillera

¹ For more detailed information on each community, there are entries on each in the volumes of the CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art.

mountain range, they are referred to as Igorot, which roughly translates as “from the mountain.” The Igorots first entered global consciousness when the people and recreations of their native villages were featured at the St. Louis World’s Fair in 1904 as controversial “Living Exhibits,” performing rituals and ceremonies for audiences to get intimately acquainted with the Philippine indigenous culture.² (Vergara 1995:111, 121)

The Igorots remain identifiable with Filipino culture, largely because this pre-colonial civilization is still alive today. Although modernized, they still wear the traditional cloths on occasion, and continue to practise their rituals and traditions. Many of these rituals involving dance were popularized in the Philippines by the Bayanihan Philippine National Folk Dance Company, whose repertoire includes a suite made up entirely of the “dances of the Cordillera people.” Most recognizable of these dances is “*Sayaw sa Banga*,” wherein an Igorot maiden balances several clay pots on her head while whirling like a dervish. According to Reynaldo Alejandro (2002), the folk dance is inspired by Cordilleran lasses fetching water from the river.

The proficiency in a prestigious art form has been a source of pride for the Philippines, and now boasts of two major ballet companies supported by the government, namely Ballet Philippines, which was established in 1970, coinciding with the inauguration of the Cultural Center of the Philippines, and Philippine Ballet Theatre, which was formed in 1987. A third major ballet company is Ballet Manila, established in 1995, at first as an independent touring company, then operating under a private sponsor. Each company

²The uprooted 1,100 Filipino natives were not all from the Cordilleras; there were also Moros, Visayans, Tingguians, and Bagobos, among others. All were treated inhumanely, starting from the boat journey where some froze to death, and throughout their stay at the exposition. The Igorots were forced to wear their native loincloths in freezing temperatures and to perform their sacred rituals and ceremonies every hour. Particularly memorable was how the Bontoc people were made to slaughter dogs and consume them for show, as if this was the people’s only source of nourishment, completing the illusion of the savagery that the Americans had discovered in their newly acquired territory, the savagery that they promised to civilize, modernize, and educate.

has developed a repertoire that presents standards from Classical ballet alongside choreographed works that have Philippine themes.



Figure 1: Je An Salas as the medicine woman in Agnes Locsin's *Igorot*. Photo courtesy of Agnes Locsin.

The works of these companies discussed in this article include Agnes Locsin's *Igorot*, debuted in Amsterdam in 1987 and mounted on Ballet Philippines a year later; Jojo Lucila's *Banbantay* and *Sari't Bahag*, which were choreographed for Philippine Ballet Theatre in 1995 and Ballet Manila in 1996, respectively; and Novy Bereber's *Angel of the Morning*, which was choreographed for Philippine Ballet Theatre in 2010. In analyzing these works, the development of a Filipinized/Filipino ballet tradition can also be seen, and the transformative theories behind this development may help address the questions raised regarding cultural responsibility.

Locsin's *Igorot* has actually been extensively discussed in Sally Ann Ness' "Originality in the Postcolony: Choreographing the Neo-ethnic Body of Philippine Ballet" (1997) wherein she analyzes the choreographic structure of *Igorot* to address issues of cultural responsibility that will arise from "marrying" movements created

by an existing ethno-linguistic community with ballet, and using the resulting form to “produc(e) a developing country’s national identity for international consumption, at least in part.”

Validating the Philippine investment of developing a Philippine ballet tradition, Ness states that ballet “commands transnational prestige,” and is an “ideal vehicle for objectifications of nationalist identity that seek to achieve approval and affirmation at international and cosmopolitan venues.” Ness questions what local audiences take away from a performance directed to an international one, and particularly the very community whose traditions these works derive from and allude to.

Igorot Dances as Folk Dance

Since Francisca Reyes-Aquino codified dances from the mountain provinces in 1935, and before Agnes Locsin created her *Igorot*, there has been a wealth of choreographed Igorot “dances” in the repertoires of Philippine folk dance troupes performing in and outside the country. The most popular of these is the repertoire of the Bayanihan, who also produced the music recordings that accompany their dances, and were subsequently used by Locsin and Lucila for their choreographies. Even before ballet companies used Igorot culture to perpetuate national identity, folk dance companies have already been doing so for several years. The Bayanihan National Folk Dance Company have toured internationally with a repertoire that reflects many aspects of Philippine life and lore, and have been celebrated for their exhilarating performances that showcase a colourful, energetic and diverse nation, whose people exhibit a strong sense of spirituality and passion.

These choreographed dances are often mistaken as the actual dances performed by each Cordilleran community, as the folk dance groups market their repertoire as “authentic.” The dances of the Cordilleran peoples are, however, not structured as they are codified in Francisca Reyes-Aquino’s notation system; they neither

follow a sequence of steps nor specify a number of repetitions. A lot of these dances are spontaneous improvisations, using predefined dance movements that were taught at rituals and celebrations over generations.

Aquino's research collected and documented the folk dances of the different regions, and allowed them to be taught throughout the country. It represented an attempt to make tangible an intangible cultural heritage, and to add the needed structure to the Cordilleran dances for inclusion in the instructional volumes of her *Philippine Folk Dances*. This structuring was aided by the recording of her fellow scholar, Antonino Buenaventura, of the live music played during performance of these dances.

The codification of these dances inadvertently led to a sort of heritagization of culture that is rampant in Philippine folk dance, and has sparked countless debates on authentic portrayals of culture. Nevertheless, this invention of tradition helped establish the concept of a national identity for the Philippines, and therefore a sense of nationalism among its constituents. Eric Hobsbawm has recommended the invention of tradition as necessary to "legitimize institutions and (regulate) beliefs, value systems and conventions of behavior", for members of an emerging nation to feel a "sense of identification" for that would-be nation, and for a nation to be formed (Hobsbawm 1983:7-14).

Folk researcher and anthropologist, Ramon Obusan, who had been both a dancer and researcher of the Bayanihan, has opined that once folk dance is removed from its natural environment and put onstage, it has lost all its authenticity and is transformed into a new form. For his own Ramon Obusan Folkloric Group, which he formed in 1972, he staged dances that he had researched on his own, that do not appear in Aquino's instructional volumes.

Obusan choreographed *Kayaw*, translated as "Headhunt," in 1974 for the Larawan Dancing Group; it was premiered at the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) as a full theatrical performance. The work narrates proceedings of a traditional

headhunt, wedding, and peace pact in the Kalinga community, using the dances of the Kalinga, and in the peace pact, some dances of the Ibaloi and Isneg, to move the story along (Villaruz 1994:154-155). In later years, he choreographed *Kailihan*, which presented ten different groups to emphasize their differences from one another, in dress, weaponry, body ornamentation, musical instruments, and dance styles and movements. Each community would step up to centre stage, where a representative will proclaim which group they belong to (“*Ako ay Ifugao....*” or “I am of the Ifugao...””) and briefly describe their group to identify themselves apart from the other groups. Then, the other members of their group start dancing with their spokesperson, and each group’s dancing, while identifiable as Igorot movement, displays the differences of their dances and, ultimately, culture. *Kailihan* is usually used as an introduction to a longer suite of dances from the Cordillera groups, as seen in the folk dance festival *Sari-saring Sayaw, Sama-samang Galaw* (Varied Dances, Moving Together) in February 2006.

The Ramon Obusan Folkloric Group became a resident folk dance company in 1987, after President Ferdinand Marcos was deposed and new policies in all aspects of government were instigated. Before this time, there were only two resident dance companies subsidized by the CCP, the Bayanihan as resident folk dance company, and CCP Dance Company as resident ballet company. The latter would later become Ballet Philippines (BP).³

³ Initially called the Alice Reyes + Modern Dance Company, it was renamed the CCP Dance Company to establish its status as the resident dance company in the national institution. As such, theatrical dance at the CCP became exclusive to the resident ballet company, and the other groups felt ignored and unsupported. The CCP Dance Company was later renamed again to Ballet Philippines. This second renaming was meant to widen the scope of the company – from Reyes’ original choreographies to full-evening classical ballets – and its reach, aiming for an international audience. As explained by Reyes’ sister Denisa, who was also an artistic director of BP (1991-1994 and 1996-1998), when the CCP Dance Company went on tour, the name had to be explained: what the acronym CCP stood for, and what the institution was, as well as what kind of dance they performed. The name ‘Ballet Philippines’ spoke for itself, including genre, and hinted at the repertoire.

The Bayanihan's musical director and artistic director of the CCP, Lucrecia Kasilag, was an important adviser to BP founder and artistic director, Alice Reyes, and would naturally recommend including Filipino-themed works in the new company's repertoire. Most of these works were done in the modern style, rather than ballet. It would take the company several years before becoming fully proficient in classical ballet, and more before Agnes Locsin would choreograph for the company and establish her neo-ethnic style.

Ballet and Other Post-colonial Effects

There is a tendency for post-colonial countries to assert an identifiable culture that existed before colonization. Folk dance troupes are expected to assert this national identity, and the Bayanihan, and several smaller groups all over the country, are able to accomplish this. Although ballet companies are not expected to make this assertion, Ballet Philippines, Philippine Ballet Theatre, and Ballet Manila were seen to contribute to establishing this identifiable national culture as well.

Introduced at the turn of the 20th century, ballet quickly became an art form that Filipinos aspired to. Before modernization, early in the 16th century, Filipinos did not practise art in the Western sense; creative impulses and artistic inclinations were instead woven into regular activities and everyday implements. Dance in particular had a purpose to fulfill; some groups used dance to mark milestones, some danced to pray for a good harvest, others danced to prepare themselves for war or to grieve their dead, their bodies so full of anxiety and upheaval that they needed a very physical outlet for this tension. When ballet arrived in the country by way of the circus and vaudeville entertainments brought in by American colonial rule, with the earlier establishment of other theatre forms, dance added spectacle and entertainment to its list of functionalities. Beyond activity or ritual, dance became a form of art.

Although many Filipinos loved ballet, and the genre had been practised well enough through the years to merit legitimate professionalism and international consideration, ballet is not universally accepted as a Philippine art form, being European and incongruous to the short, stocky Filipino body, and may only serve to entertain the bourgeoisie. Until recently, ballet was commonly associated with the CCP, where it is usually seen, and the CCP was commonly associated with Imelda Marcos, who had the entire CCP complex built to fulfill part of her husband's presidential agenda for the Philippines to appear as a prosperous emerging nation (Jacinto 2007: 2-5, 49-51).

This would explain why ballet companies were compelled to produce a repertoire that is Filipino. Imelda Marcos' programme for the CCP was for folk art and so-called "high" art to co-exist. "High" art forms, including ballet, opera, symphonic/orchestral music, furthered the reputation of the Philippines as a progressive nation, while folk art forms established that this progressive nation had its own identity even before its discovery by colonial forces. In this way, high art and folk art were made to be complementary, and it is particularly seen in the repertoires of the dance companies. Post-Martial Law, the sense of nationalism heightened. Following the new democracy, people power made people more nationalistic, and the repertoire continued to include "Filipinized" ballets.

The desire to stage a "Filipinized" ballet was not a new concept pushed by the political agenda of the Marcoses and the CCP. Filipinizing ballet began as early as 1927, the year Polish emigre Luva Adameit returned to the Philippines and set up a ballet school; her recitals included her own choreographies such as *Planting Rice*, *Cariñosa* and *Maria Clara*, all with Filipino themes (Villaruz 1994). In the same manner that Marius Petipa's orientalizing of ballet produced the Indian-themed *La Bayadere*, Adameit adapted balletic movement to make a foreign dance form familiar to her local, would-be dance students (Jacinto 2007: 26-27).

Adameit's contemporaries developed the same mixed repertoire – European classics and original choreographies with Filipino themes

– although it is unclear if they all had the same impulse as dictated by Filipino culture, or if they were just copying Adameit’s style. In any case, the strategy worked and ballet became a very popular activity in the country, so much so that a Ballet Ban was eventually imposed in 1950, by conservative Catholic schools who were outraged to see their prim and proper students expose themselves in tights and leotards onstage. Despite the threat of expulsion from these esteemed *colegios*, ballet fanatics still found ways to continue their ballet classes, and with its popularity, ballet successfully became part of Philippine upper-middle class culture.

Filipinizing Ballet

When Agnes Locsin choreographed *Igorot* in 1987, the CCP was already in operation for 18 years, as was BP, which had by then amassed several ballets with Philippine themes in its repertoire (the most popular being Alice Reyes’ *Amada*, Gener Caringal’s *Ang Sultan*, and Denisa Reyes’ *For the Gods*).

The Filipino repertoire of BP suited the agenda of the CCP to preserve, develop, and promote Philippine arts and culture, and although ballet was an introduced form and not indigenous to the Philippines, it was welcomed by the CCP for its potential for international prestige. BP credits Imelda Marcos herself for envisioning a ballet school at the cultural center (Fernandez 1981:10). The former first lady had intended to establish the CCP as an icon of progressive development in an emerging nation state, its purpose more for an external, international view, as much as, if not more than for local beneficiaries.

While performing a classical European repertoire, Filipino choreographers were also developing their own choreographies, with Filipino themes, to Filipino stories, using Filipino music, and even borrowing from Filipino dances. Most early Philippine-themed work were mostly neo-classic ballets or modern dance works that used a rural or pre-colonial royal backdrop to appear Filipino, and based on stories written by Filipino authors, or myths handed down through generations.

However, “Filipinizing” ballet steps was still a choreographic device that had yet to be thoroughly explored. Most of the Filipino ballets of this time were still set against a rural or imagined-royal-in-a-pre-colonial backdrop, and the main indication in the movement for it to be Filipino was to incorporate flexed hands in the choreography to orientalize the work.

Over time, folk dance research expanded the material that local choreographers could use in their work. While there are many examples of translations of folk dance into balletic movement, there was none quite as stark and revolutionary as Agnes Locsin’s *Igorot*.

Igorot

Igorot begins with the lone figure of an Igorot priestess kneeling downstage. The recorded chant of a shaman is heard over the speakers, and she starts to move her head, as if the chanting is coming from her. As a gong punctuates the chanting, the priestess raises herself up on her knees, and in one swift motion kicks



Figure 2: Igorot maidens in 5th position, and in their g-strings. Photo courtesy of Agnes Locsin.

her leg out and punctures her pointe shoe-clad foot onto the floor in front of her, as if puncturing the earth. She is then joined by five maidens, and the suite of dances commence: a maidens dance, a war dance for two male dancers, and a courtship pas de deux.

When *Igorot* premiered in the Philippines in 1988, the ballet community was electrified with this revolutionary approach to the Filipino ballet. Agnes Locsin found favour with not just BP, which appointed her as director of the junior company BP2, and commissioned more work, but also with the CCP upper management. Although there were criticisms, especially from the folk dance community, *Igorot* branded Locsin as one of the most important choreographers in Philippine history.

Sally Ann Ness' main criticism of Agnes Locsin's *Igorot* is that there is the danger of the work being culturally irresponsible. Ness tries to validate the work by seeking the accounts of others with "varying stakes in the ballet and the peoples it claims to represent," interviewing senior Philippine dance scholars, Basilio Esteban Villaruz and Ramon Obusan, as well as the dancers of *Igorot* to source out their own opinions on the work's cultural negotiations. The dancers themselves felt that they were doing important work with regard to identifying themselves as Filipino, but some were wary about how the work would be received by the Igorot community. One of the dancers informed that there used to be a native of the Cordillera who danced for a time with BP, but they did not know if that dancer was with the company when *Igorot* was created and staged (Ness 1997: 64-108).

Villaruz opines that *Igorot* was an abstraction, thereby absolving the work from misrepresentation as it was not representing the cultural communities in any specific detail. Obusan describes the work as a collage of the cultural communities, not specifying one community in particular, and supports Villaruz in the view of *Igorot* as an abstraction.

Touting the work as an abstraction then shows where the work will fail in how Ness believes it would "empower" the "peoples it

claims to represent.” On the one hand, Ness concedes that the ballet, *Igorot*, is able to “restor(e) dignity” to the people of the Cordillera mountain range, given that these communities maintain a negative colonial stigma, not only internationally but also locally, as evidenced by documented domestic conflict in this region. She writes that Igorot “asserts a positive, respectful appreciation” of the cultural communities whose culture it appropriates, but mostly because it is an “idealized depiction” of their culture. However, she points out that this idealization of the Igorot communities only exists at this “level of aesthetic discourse,” and did not change the reality of the status of these communities, mentioning how development programmes in the region are still met with opposition. This outsider viewpoint of Ms. Ness is curiously idealistic as well, given the complicated history of the Cordilleran pursuit of autonomy, and the shifting priorities of the different governments that were inducted throughout time.

Despite the concern for the responsibility of cultural appropriation, Ness declares that Locsin’s *Igorot* successfully Filipinizes classical ballet. She describes the choreography as divided at the waist, pointing out that the top half of the dancers’ bodies emulate Igorot dancing movement and gestures, as “identified and codified by the Bayanihan,” while the lower half perform ballet steps, slightly reoriented to go against classical ballet impulses and accents. She asserts that this combination of styles only works because although they appear on the same body, they are assigned to different body parts, with each divided half able to fulfill its purpose. Unlike other previous “Filipino” ballets, which are neo-classical choreography set to a Filipino libretto and/or music, in Filipino costumes and against Filipino sets, the steps themselves in *Igorot* successfully reclassifies the genre to generate a new Philippine dance style.

Revising choreographic structure to integrate gestures and intricacies that would make ballet “Filipino” is now known as “neo-ethnic” dance, a term coined by Locsin’s collaborator, musician

Joey Ayala, that was adopted by the CCP to classify Locsin's succeeding body of work (Locsin 2012:62-63). Aside from Locsin, not many choreographers adopted neo-ethnic dance as their genre, perhaps in part because of the cultural responsibility tied to it, and perhaps also to avoid comparisons to Locsin as initiator of the genre.

Banbantay and Sari't Bahag

Jojo Lucila danced for BP before he started to choreograph in 1983, eventually founding his own independent dance group, Chameleon Dance Theater, in 1989. His choreographic style is modern dance with some experimentations on what he calls "traditional transformations" in an email shared on November 2012. His dance background has foundations in folk dance, being part of the University of the East dance troupe early in his career. For Chameleon, he choreographed *Tagabanbantay*, which impressed Ramon Obusan, who started to share his research with Lucila to authenticate his upcoming "transformations."

In 1994, Philippine Ballet Theatre invited Lucila to choreograph a new work for them. For this commission, Lucila created *Banbantay*, a different work from *Tagabanbantay*, as a longer, fuller work that played out as a story ballet, with the fire tree as its central theme, after a Cordilleran tribe that used the tree's seasonal activity to determine their life cycles, including when to hunt, when to go to war, and so on.

The word "*Banbantay*" is Ilocano for "mountain," while "*Tagabanbantay*" translates to "From the mountain," which is also the loose translation of the word "Igorot." *Banbantay* has a broader scope as it tells the story of life on this mountain, rather than an individual character or group of people. An example of life being depicted is a section for the female corps de ballet, where they walk across the stage en pointe with clay pots on their heads. This is also seen in the aforementioned *Sayaw sa Banga (Dance of the Pots)*. A technical showcase piece, it is difficult enough to balance

several clay pots on their heads; the level of difficulty is doubled when they walk and whirl swiftly around the stage *en pointe*.

In 1995, dancers from Philippine Ballet Theatre broke away from the company and formed an independent group christened Ballet Manila. It started out as a touring company, and therefore the repertoire that was built accommodated the number of dancers in its roster, as well as the audience they wished to attract. For a performance in the U.S., they asked Lucila to choreograph a work built on Igorot culture, since *Banbantay* proved to be so successful. For Ballet Manila, Lucila choreographed *Sari't Bahag*.

There are inevitable similarities between the works, although *Sari't Bahag* is based on a different Igorot mythology from another tribe, with the Kalinga tradition of looking at the idaw bird replacing the fire tree to symbolize the outcome of a headhunt, and therefore dictate what rituals to perform next. It was also very much simplified given the parameters for intended performances. The similarities partly come from the fact that the dancers of Ballet Manila were also the dancers on whom *Banbantay* was mounted on, when they were still with the Philippine Ballet Theatre, and were dancing both works the same way.

Philippine Ballet Theatre and Ballet Manila were both classical ballet companies. It was rare for their dancers to have any training in modern dance or any other style of dance besides ballet, unlike BP, which has always enabled their dancers to perform a more diverse repertoire, and provided training in other genres. When Lucila choreographed *Banbantay* in 1994, he was met with resistance from the company's younger dancers, who could not grasp the concept of "grounded" dancing, nor of performative "attack," and had difficulty moving in a non-balletic style *en pointe*. They also had to overcome their natural tendency to look "pretty".

Lucila did not intend for his work to look like classical ballet nor ethnic dance, nor an amalgam of the two as Ness describes Locsin's *Igorot*, though perhaps *Banbantay* may indeed appear

as a hybrid of the two styles, but different from Locsin's in that Lucila sequenced his work to tell his story. The way the dancers finally executed the choreography was what finally determined the choreographic style of *Banbantay*, and subsequently, Ballet Manila's *Sari't Bahag*.

Although both works were commissioned to fulfill the agenda of national identity, and were consequently brought on national and international tours of both companies, Lucila himself did not intend for these works to fulfill this purpose. While it is an honor to have his work performed at international venues to represent the country, it is his personal interest in Igorot culture that led to these "traditional transformations," from his mother's affinity with the people, from having been raised in that region, and from his own impressions of the people and culture during his own youth.

This illustrates how Filipinos are their own audience. As a country of very diverse multiple cultures, there is a curiosity about "other" cultures within the same nation that is seemingly omnipresent through time. In a way, although Lucila is not born of the mountains he is fascinated with, his appropriation of their culture for his choreography allows him to participate in this culture. In a similar way, Filipinos feel a strong emotional sense of belonging when they see such work, which is the same affinity and pride felt by an entire nation when Manny Pacquiao wins or loses a boxing match.

Angel of the Morning

A former member of BP with a strong folk dance background, Novy Bereber was commissioned to choreograph for Philippine Ballet Theater's 2010 choreographer's showcase with the theme *Romance*. He presented *Angel of the Morning*, coming down from heaven to "love the daughters of men." The angel is harnessed and hovers over the stage, watching a stageful of Igorot maidens planting rice on the mountain.

When the angel walks the earth, his “wings,” made of four other male dancers, spread out behind him. This enables a series of pas de deux where the angel dances with each of the maidens (the actual angel with the first and last maiden, and his “wing feathers” with the maidens in between). At the end of the work, he sheds his wings and commits himself to his chosen maiden. The style of the work is more contemporary than ballet, which only acts as a technical springboard for the more complicated choreography. The angel and his wings, for example, dance in the contemporary style throughout, punctuated with an explosive ballet trick every now and then.



Figure 3: *The angel finds a mate: Lucas Jacinto and the maidens in Novy Bereber's Angel of the Morning. Photo courtesy of Ador Pamintuan.*

The women were *en pointe*. Twenty-three years after *Igorot*, dancing en pointe while physically grounded was no longer a Herculean task to Filipino ballerinas. Given that these works were mounted on bodies that were purely classically trained, *Banbantay* and *Sari't Bahag* definitely contributed to the renewed sensibilities for dance technique that grew within the local dance scene. By the time Bereber choreographed *Angel of the Morning*, the dancers of the Philippine Ballet

Theatre were not so resistant to the challenging choreography, and the dance developed more in the way the choreographer wanted it to, rather than having to follow the limitations of its dancers.

Bereber's decision to use Igorot culture in his work was connected with his concept of the fallen angels. In an email received on 23rd November, 2012, Bereber explained that his exposure to Igorot culture and dance in folkloric ballet has "always inspired me, especially the way Igorot culture combines the joy of dance and music with their everyday life and work. They seemed to be the perfect models for the 'Daughters of Men' – people of such joy and beauty they tempted the angels out of the sky."

On the subject of cultural responsibility, *Angel of the Morning* ran the risk of misrepresentation as the Igorot maidens are dressed in flesh colored unitards with bands of Igorot cloth draped strategically on their bodies, appearing as the traditional g-string worn by the males. While the costuming could also be seen as an abstraction of the traditional Cordilleran attire, being basically a unitard with traditional trimmings, the placement of the *bahag* was still recognizable as male. *Igorot* was first to stir this controversy, as the maidens and warriors wore the traditional jackets and the male g-string. According to Locsin in interview, her costuming arose of necessity. She had few dancers who had to take on both male and female roles, and could not quickly change costumes between dances. This clearly misrepresents the Igorot maiden, who is quite conservative in nature, as does the courtship pas de deux, because it is taboo for men and women to touch each other in public.

Bereber assures in his email that he meant no disrespect with the costuming. "On the contrary, I think locking the Igorot into a staid folkloric costume that borders on the touristic is to disrespect the vibrant, living nature of Igorot culture. And that's also why I dressed the Angel of the Morning in jeans: if Lucifer were to come to earth today he would be contemporary, and very sexy. I was actually very happy that the costuming choices raised these questions, even

controversy. After all, what is the point of contemporary dance if it doesn't address contemporary issues?" Still, it felt that the costuming could have been given better consideration, and not simply serve to shock the audience.

An Igorot's view of Igorot and Appropriating Igorot Dances

Sally Ness wondered how the native Igorot would find Agnes Locsin's appropriation of their culture, but was unable to speak to any before she completed her paper. When the journal was published in 1997, a young Kankanaey named Biag Gaongen was enrolled at the Philippine High School for the Arts. There, he saw a ballet based on Igorot culture, most likely inspired by *Igorot*, and was appalled by how high the girls kicked their legs in their short skirts. While at the high school, he was "discovered" by Agnes Locsin, who convinced him to train in ballet, and later, join BP.

While at BP, Gaongen was never able to dance *Igorot*, but he did see it in rehearsal, and was able to discuss it lengthily with Locsin. "Ladies in *bahag* bothered me at first but then I forgot about it as the dance progressed because the dance was very intense and spiritual." In contrast, his reaction to *Angel of the Morning* was not as accepting, even if he was good friends with choreographer Bereber, having danced together in BP. Gaongen felt that Bereber was unable to justify the women's use of the *bahag*, and that the pyrotechnical duets, though beautiful, had nothing to do with the culture.

Gaongen understands that *Igorot* is not trying to appear as an "Igorot dance," but rather a "representation of this culture." What Gaongen appreciated was how the dancers treated the work with respect, how they had their own perception of the purpose of the work and what it represented. In his opinion, this is how Locsin's *Igorot* achieves cultural responsibility. "One has not only have the technique in both the classical and modern styles to be able to do it genuinely but one should always take into consideration that this

was not just a dance for performance's sake. One has to understand and respect the culture that inspired it.”

According to him, if his community might see *Igorot*, there would be “mixed reactions,” referring to the dual nature of the contemporary Cordilleran, modernized yet still practising ancient traditions. “The world is constantly changing and so does a culture. It evolves. As long as the core values remain, then one must not be afraid to alter some of these pre-existing practices and traditions.”

Conclusions

Agnes Locsin's *Igorot* was first composed in Europe, on European dancers, to a European audience. The transformation of the movements of an indigenous tribal culture into a balletic theatrical choreography sought to identify the choreographer as Filipino in an international setting. Similarly, when the work is brought by BP to international performances, the decision to include *Igorot* in the touring repertoire is tied to the work's ability to identify the dance and the dancers as Filipino. The exoticism of the movements informed international audiences that the Philippines has a strong and definitive culture prior to modernization/colonization, while the use of ballet as the language to present this culture impresses with the capacity of Filipinos to be proficient in a complex international art form.

To Philippine audiences, *Igorot* is considered an important representative of their culture for the same reasons, but is also appreciated on its own. The dances appropriated from the Igorot peoples are lively, energetic, high-spirited, and very compelling to watch, and remain so whether they appear in their choreographed folk dance form or stylized balletic form. Perhaps the reason why these choreographed appropriations exist is that Filipino choreographers wish to recreate this spirit and energy, identifying with a cultural minority through a shared activity: dance. In her Philippine Neo-Ethnic Choreography, Locsin writes that she had always been impressed by the Igorots' “admirable dancing in

unison,” and had gone to the mountain ranges to research Bontoc culture, hoping to eventually create a modern dance narrative (Locsin 2012:65-66).

As already mentioned, Jojo Lucila’s appropriation of Igorot dancing in his work allows him to participate in a culture that is not his own, while Novy Bereber has always admired the Igorot people for their celebration of everyday life. Locsin, Lucila, and Bereber are not from the Cordillera mountain range, but all of them are choreographers who are able to use contemporary ballet as a medium to express their creativity and their interest in the dances of the Igorot peoples.

It is also worthwhile to point out that they are only three of many choreographers in the Philippines who use ballet and contemporary dance as the medium to express their creativity. Many of these choreographers were conditioned by the agenda of the cultural center to create works that represented the Philippines in hopes of promoting a national identity, or at least the ongoing pursuit of one. Work created today, however, is not driven by political agenda as it was used to. The impulse to present Filipino works is no longer tied to the need to prove that our country has a strong and progressive culture. It has only been conditioned to aim towards this, with national funding institutions demanding such for the last few decades.

The desire for acceptance of the introduced genre by the Filipino audience led to a transformative tradition that goes beyond the establishment of national identity, seeing as the audience being addressed is local, and not international. As the archipelagic Philippines manages its plural cultures, establishing a national identity seems to serve Filipinos living within the Philippines as much as it hopes to present the nation to a foreign point of view.

Bereber had no encouragement to use Igorot movement in his work; it was not dictated by the artistic director or the company that hired him. His decision to use Igorot dancing in his work arose from his own admiration for the people, similar to Lucila’s own

impetus to create his “traditional transformations.” In similar fashion, additional examples of appropriation of Igorot culture for choreography found in Flordeliza Fernandez’s *Ang Kasal* and Elena Laniog’s *Woman Warrior* show that using Igorot dance movements transformatively has itself become a choreographic device, rather than a tentative experimentation. When asked why she used Igorot movement in *Woman Warrior*, in an email correspondence in March 2013, Laniog shared that Igorot movement seemed to be the easiest to appropriate into contemporary dance, because it was already well defined, from the appropriations that came before. In this way, the appropriation of Igorot dance had become part of Philippine dance tradition.

Novy Bereber is of the position of a transnational artist; he is based in Sydney, Australia, and manages to get commissions to choreograph work there and in other countries. Where his work is performed is of little consequence to him, but he draws on the desire to be identified as a Filipino choreographer, even to Filipino audiences. *Angel of the Morning* was for the Philippine Ballet Theatre; the performance was in the Little Theater of the CCP, implying that it will be performed for a smaller audience, and no promise that it will become part of the repertoire, much less part of the repertoire that would tour internationally.

Although the Philippine Ballet Theatre found that *Banbantay*, on international tours, was an audience pleaser, it was retired when Gener Caringal’s *Andres*, based on the life of revolutionary hero, Andres Bonifacio, entered the repertoire. Current Philippine Ballet Theatre artistic director Ron Jaynario, in a conversation on November 9, 2012, informed that *Banbantay* has not been resurrected since. It is also interesting to note that most of these tours are for the Filipino communities in these foreign cities, and the task of the touring company is to bring a bit of home for overseas Filipinos, rather than presenting a local culture to an international audience.

How do we negotiate these dances with the cultures they are representing? In 1904, exposure of Igorot culture at the St. Louis

exposition was inhumane and damaging to the people of the Cordilleras, as they were not only represented in the wrong contexts, but physically and psychologically abused as well. In the 21st century, the people of the Cordilleras themselves have adapted to modernity while protectively maintaining the indigenous culture that has defined them over generations. As Biag Gaongen explains it, there are many rules that they still follow when performing traditional rituals and community activities, but it depends on the individual person how strictly they wish to follow these traditions.

Gaongen's perspective of a constantly evolving culture echoes Bereber's own view of the Igorots. Bereber opines that "the Igorot are as much a part of the modern world as they are proud representatives of thousands of years of a native Filipino culture." Given that this is still a living tradition, and the appropriation of their culture has become part of creating dance in the Philippines, there should be more time invested in fully understanding the culture for presentation and representation.

Gaongen views the appropriation of Igorot culture in dance to be the general acceptance of his culture as Filipino. Non-Igorots performing Igorot dance is not Igorot dance, but "it is possible for one to dance someone's culture as long as it is revered and given enough time to understand it." He compares this with classical ballet, in that it has become universal, that any nationality may perfect the art form so long as the form is treated respectfully and learned and understood. This is what the Filipinos have successfully achieved with classical ballet, so there should be more potential to learn and understand a culture that is indigenously their own.

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