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Performing Indigeneity in the Cordillera: Dance, Community, and Power in the Highlands of Luzon

William Peterson

The signature dances of the mountain-dwelling indigenous people of the Cordillera region in the Philippines circulate nationally and internationally as emblematic of Filipino culture, even as the diverse cultures of origin have been increasingly subjected to economic, political, and cultural domination by Tagalog-speaking lowlanders. Through an examination of how dance is situated on its home ground in and around the region's largest city, Baguio, this article demonstrates how indigenous dance based on traditional forms serves a range of masters and a variety of functions, while ultimately providing a space for indigenous people to reclaim, rediscover, and celebrate their culture.

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The indigenous people of the mountainous highlands of the Cordillera region in the Philippines have long served as emblematic of a proud and fiercely independent culture that has resisted colonization. The traditional dance forms of this diverse indigenous population living in north-central Luzon, known collectively as the Igorot,[1] have for nearly a century been presented both domestically and internationally as the headliners that showcase the country's rich cultural heritage. The images of Cordillerans circulating though dance and popular culture are those of strong, athletic men in g-strings executing stylized

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movements that demonstrate their hunting prowess, and tall, graceful women balancing pots on their head and dancing to the beat of hand-held gongs. As the mineral-rich region became increasingly dominated by external forces throughout the twentieth century, their dance traditions have been exported as embodying an important strand of Filipino strength and resilience; while the people of the region resisted political, economic, and military domination by the Tagolog-speaking majority of southern Luzon, their dance forms became incorporated into the wider cultural fabric of what it means to be Filipino. Yet in spite of this double colonization of indigenous Cordilleran land and culture, dance has continued to play a significant role in the lives of those in the region's small towns and remote villages, and it has become increasingly important as a means through which young people in the more ethnically and culturally diverse larger towns and cities in the southern end of region reclaim, share, and modify what were once distinct cultural practices. In a larger national context in which dance-drama competitions constitute one of the most visible forms of mass public performance and spectacle, dance serves to define and maintain community while providing participants with opportunities for regional and domestic travel that are not otherwise not available to them.

Thus two analytical categories emerge that will underpin this inquiry into the social value and use attached to traditional dance in this region. The first set of practices examined will reflect the ways in which political and economic power elites have appropriated Igorot dance as a symbol of a proud people with a strong cultural heritage, often setting forth dance as having the potential to contribute to the positive economic growth of the region, chiefly through tourism and cultural export. Whereas the local village elite were historically the keepers and guardians of ritual and dance traditions, by the end of the Marcos era in 1986, local and national politicians were trading on the status of indigenous dance, often to serve their own ends. The second category is in many ways a recuperative one; if power elites have a particular use for dance that extends it into the wider political and economic realm, then it is clear that at the village and local level groups continue to come together in ways that self-define through shared dance practices. Often developed and disseminated in an educational context, the work situated within this category sometimes sits uneasily alongside the first one inasmuch as dance created by local groups can be presented in a context in which power elites appear to be dominant. Nevertheless, the vitality and public visibility of the dance, as well as the vast number of youth who participate in these types of culture and community-building exercises in this region suggests that it constitutes an important counterweight to the hegemony of the powerful.

Tensions and contradictions exist within each category, and it is through the functions of dance that these internal dynamics are revealed. The social and ceremonial functions of dance in this region were traditionally heavily circumscribed by the tribal elites, whose power and prestige extended largely from capacity to engage in extravagant acts of generosity to the wider community. I will argue that increasingly throughout the twentieth century and into the present these functions have been largely taken over by new elites whose political power base is regional rather than village-based. Similarly, key ritual functions of dance have also been altered, largely because of the Christianization of the region and the diminished spiritual power of those who were the keepers of traditional spiritual practices. It is perhaps the educational function of traditional dance that has remained the most constant over time, though the lessons it teaches have altered. Whereas in the past dance provided the means for expressing and passing down values and culturally appropriate patterns of behavior, today increasingly hybrid dance forms educate by providing opportunities to create an idealized sense of self deriving from a connection with a tribal past, one that is mediated by teachers, community leaders, and cultural workers, and in turn constrained by the parameters for cultural events as set forth by bureaucrats at the provincial and national levels.

Cordillera in Context

The Cordillera region encompasses the country's largest mountain range, one that starts some two hundred kilometers north of Manila and forms an impressive spine running through the northern half of the island of Luzon. The geopolitical entity of the Cordillera Administrative Region contains five provinces and includes Baguio, the region's largest city with a population of more than 370,000 (National Statistics Office 2009). Fieldwork supporting this article was conducted in the province of Benguet, the entryway into the region from the more populated south, and it is in and around the city of Baguio in this province that nearly half of the population of the region is contained. In addition to Baguio, the other principal city in the province is nearby La Trinidad, with a population of less than 100,000. The two dominant tribes in Benguet are the Ibaoloi and the Kankanaey, and while there are significant differences between these two groups culturally and linguistically, their dance and many of their ritual traditions are closely related.

Originally set up as a hill station by the Spanish, who sought respite from the lowland heat, La Trinidad represented the limits of the Spanish conquest of the area. Though the Spanish repeatedly sought to gain access to the goldfields in the region during the nineteenth century, a succession of failed military campaigns demonstrated that their

forces were no match for the legendary fighting prowess of the mountain tribes. Thus at the beginning of the American colonial period La Trinidad was the only colonial settlement of any significance in the region. The implications of this historical fact are profound; unlike other areas of the Philippines that were colonized and converted to Christianity from as early as the sixteenth century, this region remained relatively off-limits to outsiders until well into the American period that began in earnest with the creation of the Mountain Province in 1908.

The Americans, who purchased the country for the slim figure of $20 million at the conclusion of the Spanish-American War in 1898, were intent on winning over the independent and largely non-Christian peoples of the north. The civil, municipal, legal structures imposed by the Americans in the decades prior to World War II rapidly transformed this mountainous and previously inaccessible region and, as Gerald Finin (2005) argues, laid the foundation for the eventual emergence of a pan-Igorot consciousness in an area where a harsh geography had historically meant that individual mountain cultures lived in a state of isolation often characterized by mutual enmity. With the completion of Kennon Road, named after the American army colonel credited with its construction, the region was opened up to mining and timber interests. After World War II, sovereignty was given over to the Filipinos. Since that time, Benguet Province has been increasingly populated by Tagalog-speaking lowlanders, resulting in what has often been an uneasy relationship between those who were indigenous to the region and the relatively more prosperous newcomers, who viewed the tribal cultures of the Cordillera as less civilized than their own.

Today, the diverse cultural groups known collectively as the Igorot continue to be marginalized and colonized within the nation. As Sally Ness notes, "The attribution of cultural inferiority to so-called Igorot communities has been used to justify both the history of colonial domination in the Cordilleran region and the contemporary programs of internal colonization carried out by the Philippine national government" (1997: 71). Lowlander Filipinos have a long history of regarding themselves as a separate race from residents of the Cordillera, and until well into the twentieth century many of the tribes in the region had very little contact with Filipinos from the south. Throughout the early years of the American colonial period, political cartoons circulating in American newspapers and periodicals disseminated racist depictions of the Filipino "native" as a scantily clad dark-skinned savage with wild hair (Halili 2006). Perhaps partly in response to this conflation of all Filipinos with the primitive, as late as 1943, Carlos P. Romulo, one of the most important Filipino diplomats in the postwar period,[2] famously wrote that "the Igorot is not Filipino and we are not related" (1943:

59). More recently Filipino TV personality Candy Pangilinan opened old wounds by publicly declaring, "You think I'm an Igorot, I'm not an Igorot, I'm human"[3] (Catajan 2009), a statement that resulted in her being declared "persona non grata" by the Baguio City Council. Though Pangilinan later claimed she had misdelivered a line in a joke meant to refer to statues of Igorots, she was forgiven only after coming to Baguio to personally and tearfully apologize to the council under the glare of lights from the assembled media. The public outcry over her statement and the gravity of her response reflects the long history of tensions and misunderstandings between indigenous Cordillerans and those whose origins are from outside the region (Figure 1).

The cultural traditions of the region have a long history of being exoticized, the most prominent early instance of which was the wholesale import of Cordillerans to the United States to populate the Philippine Reservation at the massive 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition, also known as the St. Louis World's Fair.[4] Drawing nearly twenty million visitors (Vergara 1995: 111), the event in many respects defined

FIGURE 1. This heroic scale statue of indigenous warriors in the Igorot Garden in Baguio's Burnham Park is typical of the way in which Igorot men are depicted iconographically as tough, proud warriors. (Photo: William Peterson)

the early relationship between Americans and their new and largely unknown colony in the Pacific. Occupying a focal point within the geographic centerpiece of the fair was a Cordilleran "Igorot" village that provided a sharp contrast with the villages created to house other, more "civilized" Filipino ethnic and cultural groups. For David R. Francis, the president of the exposition, "The Negritos and Igorots" were consciously chosen to represent the "least civilised" groups (Vergara 1995: 120). Perhaps not surprisingly, they were a tremendous hit with the public and a source of considerable debate, some of which was centerd around the g-strings worn by the men. While planning the event, Philippine governor-general (and future U.S. president) William Howard Taft passed along President Teddy Roosevelt's suggestion that "where the Igorot has a mere g-string . . . it might be well to add a short trunk to cover the buttock and front" (Vergara 1995: 122), though in the end the g-string prevailed.

Visitors to the exposition witnessed the daily life of what were billed as "The Bontoc Head-Hunters" and, according to the fair's official ouide, were treated to entertainment in which "the Bontocs go through a realistic pantomime in the use of shield and spear, advancing, retreating, posting and thrusting" (cited in Vergara 1995: 125). The Bontoc people from the remote Mountain Province area to the north of Benguet Province—and by extension all indigenous Cordillerans—were viewed as a kind of "noble savage," un-Christianized and fiercely proud, but with a strong sense of loyalty that it was hoped could be transferred to their new colonial masters. According to the official guide, when the "sprightly little fellow" Antaero, one of the Igorots imported for the fair, was presented at the White House, he declared, "Mr. Roosevelt, I will return to the Philippines and whip all of your enemies" (cited in Vergara 1995: 135). Indeed, the very conscious and well-articulated policy of the new American colonial government to treat the Cordillera as a separate and autonomous administrative unit with needs quite different from those of the lowlands (Finin 2005) has meant that its position within the contemporary national cultural framework is still characterized by the ways in which it is different from other Filipino cultures.

After the Philippines became a fully independent republic in 1946 and the country's distinctive local cultures came to be incorporated into the state project of nationalism, generic Igorot dance moves were soon incorporated into significant works in the repertory of the country's flagship Bayanihan Dance Company. Folk dance fusions have been the hallmark of Bayanihan since it started performing in 1958, while dances inspired by the cultures of Cordillera have long assumed a prominent role in programming. The online video promoting the

company's 2009 season (Bayanihan Dance Company 2009) begins with the vigorous dancing of male warriors in the *Kayasig,* described as "a hunting dance" that simulates "warfare movements."[5] Predictably enough, it is followed by the *Banga Salidsid,* based on a courtship dance by the women of Kalinga Province, who undulate gracefully with clay pots stacked on their head, an iconic image that has come to signify all indigenous Cordilleran women. In Sally Ness's analysis of the dance *Igorot,*[6] choreographed in 1987 by Agnes Locsin for the Ballet Philippines, she notes how that pan-Cordilleran dance seeks to assert "a positive, respectful appreciation of the cultural communities represented by the Igorot label via an idealized depiction of the material and ritual culture of these groups" (1997: 71). *Igorot,* observes Ness, "Can most immediately be read as an attempt to recuperate a colonial stereotype" (1997: 71). It is fair to say that those groups identified as Igorot remain today the most exoticized of groups within the Philippines, while images of Cordillerans in traditional attire are ubiquitous in the tourist literature both in print and online. Significant cultural capital both at home and overseas has been gained by setting out the dance from the Cordillera region as the reflection of an independent and vigorous Filipino national identity.

Dance and Political Power

Most dance forms in the Cordillera were originally connected with ritual activities. Rituals, in turn, were divided into those that were based on giving thanks; those associated with the cycles of the planting and harvest season; those tied to betrothals, marriage, birth, and death; and others designed to appease a vast array of sky-dwelling and earthbound spirits, including the spirits of the deceased. Dance has always been featured prominently in the *canao,* a Kankanaey word that has come to mean a thanksgiving feast or gathering. *A People's History of Benguet* defines it as "several and quite different feasts celebrated for the purpose of appeasing spirits of departed ancestors, curing illness, ensuring prosperity, and promoting social status in the community" (Bagamaspad and Hamada-Pawid 1985: 94).

The ritual performance of a *pedit (peshit* in Kankanaey),[7] or prestige ritual of thanksgiving in the *canao* context, was traditionally hosted by the most prominent and wealthy family in a particular village or region as a demonstration of political power (Russell 1989; Sacla 1987). Because a core element of *canao* has involved the butchering of pigs from perhaps as early at the sixteenth century (Bagamaspad and Hamada-Pawid 1985: 128–129), only the leading families (known as *baknang*) were in a position to host these events. In a traditional upland village context, the ability to offer three or more pigs for sacri-

fice and consumption not only was a measure of wealth and power, but it also symbolically communicated the continuing right of the *baknang* to retain power on a local level. As Anavic Bagamaspad observes:

> A *baknang* acquired prestige through a series of feasts which begins [*sic*] with a three pig *pedit* and progressing [*sic*] to higher numbers. For the host, the feast was a clear manifestation of excess wealth. As he progressed in the ceremonial butchering of more and more animals his prestige and power was also enhanced and subsequently he assumed a greater hand in community decision-making. (Bagamaspad and Hamada-Pawid 1985: 114)

Over the twentieth century, as the power of the traditional *baknang* has been eroded due largely to the imposition of a market economy and the privatization of mineral and land resources during the landgrab of the first two decades of the century, it was increasingly left to the state to intervene and provide both the context and funding for these events.

Political involvement in the *canao* dates back to the early days of American colonization, when Dean Worcester, the secretary of the interior for the Philippines, known affectionately as "Bosted" for his "boosting" of the then majority non-Christian population of the region, sponsored what was by all accounts the first modern "grand *canao*" (Bagamaspad and Hamada-Pawid 1985: 193; Finin 2005: 52). With support from what came to be known as the "Anti-Headhunting Fund," Worcester's first *canao,* held in the town of Bontoc probably around 1906, extended over a number of days and required two hundred sacks of rice, ten *carabaos,* and twenty large hogs (Finin 2005: 52–53). Well aware of the symbolic power of the *canao,* in 1974 Imelda Marcos brought Miss Universe Pageant contestants from Manila to Baguio for a *canao,* a field trip that was meant to showcase the traditional culture of the region at a time when its dance forms had already been synthesized into folkloric dances by the Bayanihan company. Subsequent attempts to turn an indigenous ritual practice into a drawing card for tourists during the early 1980s were met with protests from "Igorot professionals and student activists" (Malanes 2000). Susan Russell (1989) describes how during her fieldwork in the region from 1978 to 1980 attempts by local politicians and tourism officials to create a unified *canao* were undermined by the inability of Benguet's Ibaloi and Kankanaey tribes to agree on a common ritual practice. Thirty years later, these internal tribal divisions were circumvented by organizing participation in the event through the province's administrative units rather than relying on tribal elders, much as Worcester had successfully done a century earlier.

After a three-year hiatus, the revival in 2007 of a province-wide *canao* sponsored by the provincial government brought together leaders and representatives from Benguet's thirteen municipalities for a celebration that fused performance with ritual and politics. Throughout the November 2007 *canao* that I witnessed on the grounds of the Provincial Engineer's Office outside La Trinidad, Provincial Governor Nestor B. Fongwan, elected just months earlier, was repeatedly singled out for praise by other provincial leaders for his commitment to indigenous culture through his sponsorship of the event. Fongwan was a significant presence in all aspects of the event, from the ritual slaughtering of pigs to ceremonial dancing and speechifying, and his position as the leading patron reflects the shift in the locus of power and authority in Benguet's Ibaloi and Kankanaey indigenous culture away from a localized *baknang* to the municipal and provincial political elite, many of whom hail from families who came to prominence during or immediately following the period of American colonial occupation.

The event started with an *avang,* the catching of pigs in a specially constructed corral. A representative from each of the thirteen municipalities of the province rushed into the corral, captured and "hog-tied" their pig, and laid it out neatly in a long row while the *mambunong* (traditional priest) blessed the pigs with rice wine (*tapey*). The sweet aroma of the *tapaey* is believed to awaken sky-dwelling spirits who will bring good luck to the participants in the ritual (Ma 2005: 16). The *mambunong* assumed a key role in all ritual practices connected with the *canao* and was the only individual not connected with the political elite who was present throughout all ceremonial functions. While many of the ceremonial actions were undertaken by the political elite, the *mambunong* was consistently present to bestow his blessings upon them. Absent from the *canao* was any kind of repeated evocation of a Christian god, reflecting the fact that Christianity is a relatively recent import to many of the more remote areas in the Cordillera, and that even at the entry to its southernmost point traditional spiritual practices hold sway.

The region's famous circular dance, known generically as the *tayaw,* has long been the signature dance used to express Cordilleran identity. Typically danced by a man and a woman, the dance has traditionally accompanied nearly all public ceremonies (Baguio City 1960: 56), and it assumed a prominent role in the 2007 *canao.* Wearing long, handwoven blankets over both shoulders and extending down the front, the two dancers move in a counterclockwise fashion around a circle, hopping to the beat of musicians who dance with them carrying handheld gongs. The dancers move with their arms open and palms extended, bringing down the blessings from above, stopping the

forward motion periodically to dance in place while opening up their dance positions by moving from side to side. At this event, Provincial Governor Fongwan and his wife, Priscilla, were the first to dance the *tayaw,* circling around the pigs that were now thoroughly subdued, trussed up, and blessed with rice wine by the *mambunong.* Next to dance were Olga Dangwa, the wife of the region's congressional representative, and Vice Governor Crescencio Pacalso. The local provincial governor, as the one who "revived" the event and supported it financially, took on the de facto functions of the local *baknung* in this prestige ritual (Figure 2).

Following the dancing, the vice governor and leaders from each of the thirteen municipalities, as the honored guests and hosts of the event, were called upon to slaughter the pigs by piercing their hearts with a massive wooden stake, using one well-placed stroke behind the animal's front legs. Tradition dictates that only selected individuals are given this responsibility (Sacla 1987: 9). Only the vice governor seemed to have difficulty in swiftly dispatching his pig, something that in a traditional context might have been interpreted as inauspicious. The pigs were then taken away for butchering and cooking in large boiling vats set up at thirteen sites created for each municipality, a process that was

FIGURE 2. Provincial Governor Nestor B. Fongwan dancing the *tayaw* around the trussed up pigs at the 2007 *canao* on the grounds of the Provincial Engineer's Office in La Trinidad. (Photo: William Peterson)

overseen by the elders in each group. The pigs would in turn later feed the hundreds of guests who had come to the event from around the province.

Though the departure of the pigs marked the end of the formal ritual in that those who had traveled for hours or the better part of a day to get to the site of *canao* were now engaged in cooking, the political ceremony by and increasingly for the local elite was just beginning. From a raised dais in a commanding position at the back of the site, each of the political dignitaries took turns speaking to an ever-diminishing audience. The crowd that had witnessed the *avang,* the *tayaw,* and the blessing and killing of the pigs returned to their respective municipal encampments, taking cover under the shelter of tents. Each area was designated by handmade signs indicating their respective municipalities, and it appeared that most groups stuck largely to themselves and did little mingling, though visitors who did not have an affiliation with any one of these groups moved freely from site to site. While provincial governors past and present spoke in English about the importance of retaining a strong cultural identity and of the economic importance of cultural tourism, those who had endured a sleepless night traveling to the site by jeepney seemed more interested in hanging out with others who spoke their dialect than they were in listening to rhetoric that variously championed globalization as nothing other than "global competition" (Molintas 2007) or exhorted them to enjoy "the beautiful tourist spots in the different municipalities" (Fongwan 2007).

By the time Governor Fongwan was urging the few remaining polite listeners to "come back again and witness the improvement of the richness of our culture," the real party was taking place in the encampments. At each, the *tayaw* was being performed in the manner described earlier. Visitors who circulated between sites were invited to dance, first by accepting a ceremonial blanket around their shoulders and then dancing around the circle, joining men playing the handheld gongs. A characteristic feature of the *tayaw* is the chant "Ooooo Wai, Ooooo Wai, Oy! Oy!" that marks the end of the sequence. This chant is believed to be derived from a dance that formerly marked the end of the festival known as the Kadaring, or Spirits Dance, in which the dancers "impersonate the spirits of dead ancestors" (Baguio City 1960: 64). Aided by considerable quantities of rice wine, inhibitions were released and *tayaw* dancing reached a feverish pitch in some of the municipalities' camps (Figure 3).

While the indigenous communities remained contained in their own discrete areas defined by municipal affiliation, the dignitaries, honored guests, and provincial government employees were called upon to participate in the *bendian,* a mass participation dance from the

Kabayan region of Benguet. Meaning "untiring" or "indefatigable" in Ibaloi, its name signifies the belief that those engaged in this victory dance will never tire (Baguio City 1960: 66). Associated with victory in battle (Bagamaspad and Hamada-Pawid 1985: 90), a dance line is formed behind gong players and a leader, with men and then women dancers following his arm movements while stamping with the left foot and moving forward on the right. As the dance line becomes longer, it assumes a spiral pattern that suggests a coming together. One of the less auspicious aspects of this concluding dance at the *canao* was how few people joined into the dance in spite of the MC's efforts to increase participation. This dance, like the speeches that preceded it, were largely by and for the provincial elite and their guests, as by this point in the *canao* most of the largely village-dwelling indigenous people were preoccupied by the goings-on in their own discretely contained communities.

FIGURE 3. As politicians spoke to a dwindling audience at the 2007 *canao,* couples danced the *tayaw* with great energy in the various encampments allotted to the municipalities of the province. (Photo: William Peterson)

The organization, structure, and unfolding of the *canao* suggested that there were in fact two separate social and performance events going on within the structure of a single *canao.* While the provincial government hosted the *canao* and provided each municipality with a pig and a sack of rice (Joseph 2007), those coming from outlying areas far removed geographically and culturally from the largely contiguous area of La Trinidad and Baguio returned to their own tribal groups virtually as soon as the ritual elements of the event were completed. While they remained largely huddled in the spots of shade provided by tents provided by the government, the local power elite displayed their power and prestige by demonstrating their continued capacity to lead by setting forth their achievements and speaking at length about the value of culture and its potential for contributing to future economic development through tourism (Fongwan 2007; Dangwa 2007; Pacalso 2007).

In many respects, the *canao* can be seen as a truncated version of what was previously known as an *uya-uy,* a multiple-day wedding *canao* hosted by "wealthy aristocrats" (Baguio City 1960: 40). The fifth segment of this ritual, known as the *gotad,* bears recounting here in full as it in many ways parallels the structure of the 2007 event:

> All the people both young and old dance during the whole day. While the dancing is going on the *mumbaki* [ritual priest] performs all the religious rites inside the house. The dancers wear their best native attire and beads to show their wealth and family aristocracy. During the dance class distinction is observed. No poor people may dance with wealthy aristocrats. When a group of wealthy aristocrats dance, one of them must stop the dance to give a short talk called *gopa.* He tells of the wealth and achievements of his parents and ancestors challenging the wealthy families to match them. The groups of wealthy dancers take turns in giving a short talk, *gopa.* However, only wealthy people who had the *uya-uy* are allowed to give the *gopa.* More animals are butchered to feed all the people. (Baguio City 1960: 41–42)

While the revival of the grand *canao* by the provincial government after a three-year absence no doubt reflected noble motives, in the end the event replicated the dynamics of the American colonial order in which the power of the state prevailed over the smaller geographic and cultural units that no longer had the economic resources or the cultural capital to host such an event. Whereas in a traditional upland context it would have been the local village leader or *baknang* who hosted the *canao,* today only the provincial government has the financial and physical resources to stage such a gathering. The power elite continued, as they had in the example of the premodern wedding

canao, to speak and perform for themselves, while the poor danced and ate separately. What has changed is that the specificity of the dances and their meanings are no longer so meticulously linked to ritual acts grounded in specific occasions, while in the larger sphere, dance and culture from this region are now being put forth not just as markers of ethnic pride, but as a means through which to fight back against the forces of globalization.

Creating and Reclaiming Community through Dance

While the power elites use dance to demonstrate their continued right to rule by supporting and imbedding themselves in traditional ritual and dance practices, the youth of the region and their numerous and enthusiastic supporters, largely friends and family, use traditional dance as a means to define communities with shared values while recovering and adapting local traditions. In the process, some dance groups self-exoticize in ways that are similar to Bayanihan's reduction of specific, differentiated dances into a generic, regional folk dance tradition. Yet even when groups of dancers gloss over tradition or attempt to stage theatricalized rituals without the attendant belief structure or requisite cultural knowledge to sustain their ritual power, they are still engaged in important community-building exercises.[8] The ways in which community-based dance projects are created, supported, and staged bears noting first, especially as these practices are remarkably similar throughout the Philippines.

Dance competitions are ubiquitous throughout the country and collectively constitute the single performance form that mobilizes the greatest numbers of Filipinos, particularly those who are still in school. Often held in conjunction with local festivals linked to tourism promotion, the church calendar, or fiestas honoring locally revered saints, competitions take place on the local, regional, and national levels. The dance forms represented range from a generic folkloric dance to distinctively local dance traditions, as well as more free-form styles that fall into the broad category of "street dancing." Groups often come together based on the school, university, village, or *barangay*[9] they represent, and considerable time and energy go into the organization, creation, and rehearsal of these performances. At the high school level, dance in its many forms is often the largest organized activity engaged in by the institution, while competitions between schools are often framed and presented as part of a larger public event. The level of professionalism reflected in this work is often extremely high, while the prize money won from prior competitions is generally what enables these groups to pay for travel and the raw materials that go into costumes and props for the next year's event. Labor is donated by partici-

pants, friends, and family, while the prize money is typically paid out by local governments. For most Filipinos, their experience with dance as either a spectator or a participant is in the context of these competitive events that mobilize high school and university students and often rely on the sponsorship of local government.

Over a three-week period in 2007 no fewer than four large competitive events presented in and around Baguio and La Trinidad placed traditional Cordilleran dance at the center. More than a dozen groups of dancers from throughout the Cordilleran Administrative Region in groups as large as fifty participated in the 2007 parade and dance competition associated with the Grand Cordillera Festival, held on the streets of Baguio and culminating in an awards ceremony held in the region's largest outdoor stadium (Figure 4). A more modest number of dancers from local schools participated in the 107th Benguet Foundation Anniversary Celebration through Adivay (gathering in Ibaloi) held in La Trinidad, marking the geopolitical birth of the province at the start of the American colonial period. In two additional events, a dance competition hosted by Baguio's Saint Louis University and an environmental education initiative sponsored by the Cordillera Green Community Network that was also held in Baguio, traditional dance choreography was used as the foundation for constructing a narrative based on local legends or to expand environmental awareness. While all of these events shared most of the key organizational features found in dance competitions throughout the Philippines outlined above, they distinguished themselves in terms of how their use of indigenous dance traditions created tensions and contradictions with respect to the intended educational, religious or ritual, and social functions of dance. The educational and religious or ritual functions will be examined in greater detail below, using examples of specific practices drawn from these four major competitive dance events, while the social functions of dance will provide a foundation for the conclusion.

In all of the contexts observed, dance served as a tool for cultural education, building on traditional dance practice while often using local legends. Students in high schools through the region, as do students elsewhere in the Philippines, come together through extracurricular activities to create original dance pieces based on choreographic traditions that have currency in their region. In the case of two of the competitive events I witnessed, dance moves derived from traditional forms were used to create individual pieces of dance-theatre with a narrative based on a local legend. At the competitive event marking the "founding" of the province, dance teams came from the province's high schools, with each group telling a story that was either informed by or demonstrated distinctive dance or ritual traditions from their

respective regions. Lauren C. Bangaoet, the lead judge for the event, spoke to the criteria before the formal start of the competition, suggesting that one of the challenges for each group was to "use dance to portray a drama" while making it clear that relying on traditional dance as the sole means of expression presented possibly insurmountable challenges that would make it difficult for dance to convey original dramatic content (2007). The content of much of the work reflected the desire to speak to local stories or practices in a way that was didactic in tone and folkloric in its evocation of local color (Plate 1).

Legends dramatized were often chosen for their theatricality and possible crowd-pleasing impact, while their roots in a particular ceremonial or ritual context were minimized. Groups at two competitions, for instance, chose to stage a famous local legend explaining the origins of the anthropomorphic shape of Mount Dakiwagan, also known as Santa Claus Mountain. According to legend, while lost in the mountains, a starving rice trader was offered a gift of food by the gods, served on a golden tray. Abusing their hospitality, he stole the tray while leaving, and when caught, was turned into stone. His face, mouth agape in horror, is etched into the side of the mountain, while a waterfall flows from where his "organ" would be situated. In both dra-

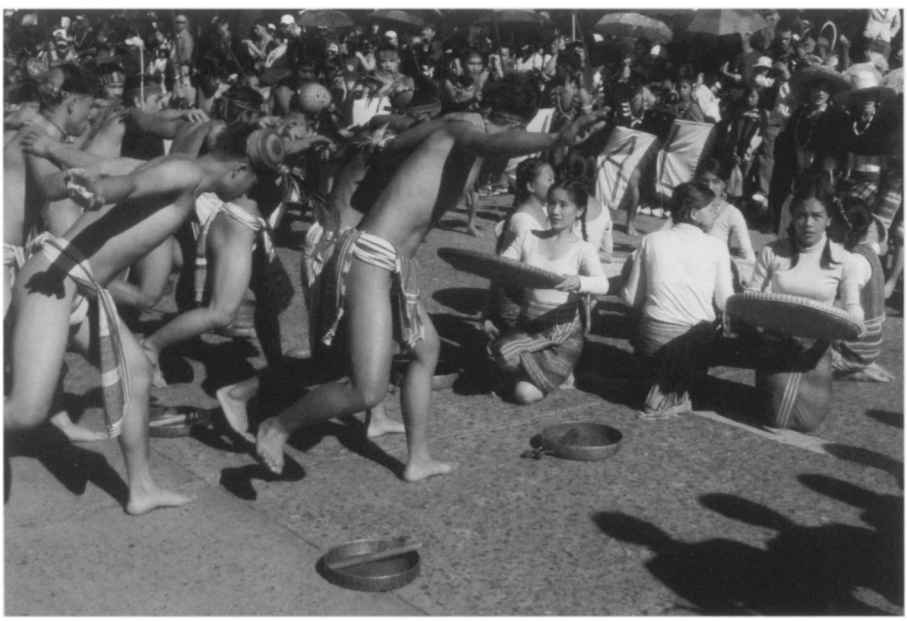

Figure 4. Street dancing at the 2007 Grand Cordillera Festival. Male dancers (left) are wearing characteristic Bontoc woven hats. (Photo: William Peterson)

matizations, the performance style used to convey the narrative fused a generic traditional dance style with pantomimic movement, and also, in both cases, the water flowing from the "organ" of one of the male dancers who represented the mountain proved a hit with audience, provoking gales of laughter.

Dance was placed in the service of environmental education in the work presented by student groups from throughout the Cordillera region at the Ecological Community Theatre Festival, run by the Cordillera Green Community Network and funded with support from a Japanese Foundation. Some of the dance pieces presented reflected the methodology pioneered in the Philippines and the region by the People's Educational Theatre Association (PETA). Established in 1967, PETA's cultural wing uses practices similar to those popularized by Augusto Boal in his Forum Theatre, where nonactors work with an outside facilitator to create an original piece of theatre that critically examines an unsolved conflict in the community or a continuing source of oppression experienced by members of the group. Such socially activist theatre has a long history in the Philippines and has been used to explore a range of thorny issues, including spousal abuse, political injustice, and economic inequality. This PETA-inspired approach was very much in evidence in the dance piece presented by Tanghalan Niyalin Kabayan, a group from the remote province of Kabayan advised by Kenneth Kelcho. Like a PETA cultural worker, Kelcho saw his task as that of creating a "method of inculcating environmental values" through theatre, adding that "we want to make sure that we make an impact on the lives of people" (2007). Though a performance was the most visible outcome of his work in Kabayan, his overarching goal was to "conduct training to become environmental educators" so that the students can "be an influence not only on the stage but in their daily lives" (2007). Their piece used spoken text, song, and traditional and contemporary dance to communicate a history of environmental destruction in the region, showing how clear-cutting of timber has destroyed the area's fragile ecosystem. Corporations were pitted against locals who colluded and resisted as the rainforest died, while the audience was taken forward into a future in which the ecosystem is restored through reforestation and sustainable economic development. The process, product, and projected future outcomes associated with Kelcho's group suggest how traditional dance can be used for purposes beyond showcasing culture or dramatizing local legends.

Many dance groups, including some participating in the parade connected with the Cordillera Festival, created dance pieces that incorporated traditional ritual practices. In some cases there was an uneasy tension between a tradition that had or still has efficacy in its home

context and its re-presentation as a window into culture in the context of a dance competition. Staging segments from weddings and other ceremonial events that incorporated rituals presented difficult challenges for some dance groups, reflecting the fact that Christianity sits alongside traditional spiritual practices that still have meaning to many in the community. Perhaps the most significant practical problem in those dance-dramas that incorporated ritual arose from the requisite use and sacrifice of live chickens in many of the rituals. Whereas in a traditional village context chickens used for ritual sacrifice would be expertly and speedily dispatched by village elders or *mambunong,* in many of the dance-dramas young performers without the technique or presumably the right to perform such a function had difficulty killing—and, in some cases, catching—the chickens. In many instances staged rituals ended unhappily for the chickens as their lingering onstage deaths often made it difficult to focus on the dance.

In terms of what it suggested about the simultaneous practice of traditional and Christian belief systems, perhaps the most striking attempt to stage a ritual was one in which a boy playing a priest undertook the ritual functions of the *mambunong.* This piece, staged as part of the Cordillera Green Network's environmental education project, included the ritual killing of a chicken by a boy priest who came on stage holding a Bible while wearing tribal clothing. Like the *mambunong* in a *canao,* the boy priest sipped the ceremonial rice wine and killed and bled a chicken. The boy's actions demonstrated just how slenderly Christianity sits upon indigenous cultures in the region, mirroring the observation of a prominent regional indigenous leader who spoke at one of the competitions: "We have retained our indigeneity in spite of Western influences and the values of Christianity" (Batay-An 2007). In practice, spiritual and religious authority has shifted from the village-based *mambunong* over the last century to a de facto power-sharing arrangement that accommodates both the teachings of the church and the traditional ritual practices safeguarded and carried out by the *mambunong.* Indeed, the writings of church workers undertaking missionary work in the region speak to the ways in which both Catholicism and evangelical Christianity must necessarily accommodate preexisting belief systems as a key element in the strategy to deliver converts to the fold (Cole 2003; Ma 2005).

Social Functions of Dance

The national tourism infrastructure in the Philippines is perhaps among the most sophisticated and unitary in the world, in that virtually all major performance events connected with regional and local festivals are packaged in a remarkably similar fashion. Not only are all of

these events listed and described through the website administered at the national level, but festivals and dance-drama competitions throughout the country provide public forums for the repetition of key government policies with respect to tourism and economic development. Every major event is preceded by speeches from local municipal leaders and elected officials, typically featuring the local congressional representative, while the rhetoric used from one event to the next is often surprisingly similar. In the public pronouncements of the region's power brokers, tourism is put forth as an answer to local or regional poverty, while culture is seen as not just the foundation for a stronger individual and regional identity, but also as the basis for expanded interest in the region by domestic and international tourists. For some elected officials, like former provincial governor Molintas, "Globalization simply means global competition" (2007), while the means through which a local community can compete is through the development of cultural tourism. The belief that cultural tourism can combat poverty extends back to the Marcos years, when a vast, centrally controlled national tourism bureaucracy was assembled as a kind of counterweight to the imposition of martial law in 1972 (Richter 1980).

Yet on the ground level it is clear that for all of the attempts by political leaders to frame traditional dance as one of the keys to cultural survival and economic prosperity, participants are driven by other factors. For many young people who came to participate in the four competitive events cited, as well as for many of the adults who participated in the *canao,* the political, economic, and tourism infrastructures and the funding of public and private organizations are what make it possible for them to travel from remote mountain communities to Baguio and La Trinidad, the largest urban centers in the region. Baguio, with its population of more than 300,000, is a pleasant college town with a hip, urban ambience that also serves as an important arts center for those who wish to make a living in the performing or visual arts while retaining their cultural links to the region. For many young people, their participation in dance competitions provides the only opportunity they will ever have to come to Baguio, as many will spend their lives in communities so poor and so isolated that they will never be able to return in their adult lives (Plate 2).

Observing audience behavior during the speeches that typically frame all major dance competitions, it is clear that, for the most part, no one outside the immediate circle of the power elite appears to be listening. As we saw at the *canao,* visitors retreated to their own home communities the moment the framing rituals were completed, while at dance events the young dancers and their supporters who have traveled long distances and given up time and income to be present appear

to pay little heed to the pronouncements of the politicians. While the elite performs power largely by and for themselves, the dancers are waiting eagerly to perform, engaged in last-minute preparations with respect to props and costumes or planning the logistics of entrances and exits from the performance space. When the performances are over, all energy is directed toward the judges, as the audience and dancers await the final verdict. Much depends on the prizes, especially because the awards granted for first, second, and third prizes are typically sufficient to provide a financial basis for continued participation in future years. Many competitive events see prizes awarded to all participants, recognizing the considerable time, energy, and sacrifices made to participate. When prizes are announced, the outpouring of energy is powerful and the noise made by the winners and their supporters is deafening.

In spite of the rhetoric of the politicians, the occasional misuse and misunderstanding of traditional rituals, and even the occasionally bad or awkward storytelling, dance provides the cement for a community. The productive energy, expense, and time that goes into these projects speaks to the importance it has in people's lives. While politicians may attempt to hijack indigenous dance for their ends or hold it up as they have done since the Marcos era as a marker of ethnic pride or as a symbol of the country's richly diverse cultural mosaic, dancers do manage to recuperate power, even as fundamental inequities remain in the national and local political and economic infrastructure. While a kind of klepto-oligarchy continues to run the country, without the ability to form communities based on shared cultural values that find expression through dance, clearly everyone—politicians as well as the large urban and rural underclass—would be much the poorer.

NOTES

1. The term "Igorot" encompasses numerous ethnic groups, chief among them the Ifugao, Bontoc, Kalinga, Apayo, Ibaloy, and Kankanaey people.

2. Romulo served as General MacArthur's aide-de-camp and after World War II became president of the United Nations General Assembly. He later served his country as secretary of foreign affairs and as ambassador to the United States.

3. Pangilinan reportedly uttered, *"akala nyo Igorot ako, hindi ako Igorot, tao po ako!"* in the context of a public event in celebration of Mother's Day at the SM Baguio Mall, the largest shopping mall in the region (Catajan 2009).

4. Fermin (2004) provides a fascinating and detailed account of the reception of the Igorot and other groups from around the archipelago at the colonial exposition where many Americans first encountered their "little

brown brothers." W. H. Scott (1992: 7) identifies an even earlier example of this kind of cultural export when in 1887 Bontoc warriors were prominently featured in an Igorot Village at the Exposition of the Philippine Islands in the Madrid Zoological Gardens.

5. This description is repeated in numerous locations online and would appear to be lifted from the Bayanihan program. See Breckenridge (2001) and "Bayanihan Heritage in Davao Performance" (2004).

6. The most detailed piece of scholarship to date that looks at the recontextualization of Cordilleran dance in the context of the professional dance world is Ness (1997). She interrogates the location of culture as dances from the region are grafted onto the choreographic language of ballet in a single work, *Igorot,* which is in the repertory of the Philippine Ballet.

7. Where often related but differing Ibaloi and Kankanaey words are used to signify a concept or dance, I have chosen to use the term in most common usage in Benguet Province.

8. Finin's observations about the dance presentations by Igorot or "highlander" students from the Trinidad Agricultural School in the 1930s suggests that a similar dynamic was at work even then (2005: 85–86).

9. *Barangay*s are in one sense neighborhoods, but they are also political and administrative divisions found within towns and cities. For example, the larger administrative division of Makati within Metro Manila consists of numerous *barangay*s, each of which has a meeting hall, a *barangay* captain, and typically administrators and service workers that provide services to the local population. It is thus the smallest level of government and, for many Filipinos, it is here that the majority of their interactions with government take place.

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