

Places for Happiness: Community, Self, and Performance in the Philippines

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The soul of this wonderful work is revealed through author William Peterson's deep engagement with communities that he has been part of for nearly two decades. In Chapter 1, "Three Tagalog Sinakulos: The Repertoire and the Scenario," Peterson borrows from the work of Diana Taylor¹ to analyze sinakulo, a performance about the life and suffering of Jesus Christ, by examining: 1) physical location; 2) embodiment through the formative, creative and performative processes essential to sinakulo; 3) the sinakulo template and disruptions to the template; 4) the agency of various participants who are part of the process of transferring and carrying sinakulo forward via the use of diverse influences in imaginative and localized ways. Peterson classifies sinakulo as three types within the Tagalog region of the Philippines.

The "Traditional Sinakulo" (author's quotation marks) takes place in a barangay located in Mandaluyong City in the Philippine capital of Manila. The author demonstrates the spiritual and community-sustaining efficacy of strongly held beliefs in continuing what was done in the past, following a text that originated in the 1960s and was maintained through the passing on of performance roles within families from older generations of actors to younger actors as a lineage of traditionalism.

Peterson's "Civic-Based Sinakulo" takes place in Marinduque island as a tradition crafted by local imaginations of a Holy Land 2,000 years ago shaped by 1950s and 1960s Hollywood films. Financed by the local governor's office, government workers play the principal roles such as Pontius Pilate in a three-night production coalescing around the desires of the community's citizens to fulfill panata (vow).

In "The Activist Sinakulo," the author examines another traditional sinakulo titled *Martir sa Golgota*, produced in various sites within Manila and led by a notable director who casts television and film actors in principal roles supported by an ensemble of community actors. A propensity to inject social justice issues into religious festivals by Manila artists using theatrical methods is cited by the author via Nicanor Tiongson's critiques of politicized performances of the religious and spiritual. However, the author argues against a dichotomy of the political and religious by noting and showing in this sinakulo that "the activist Christ is deeply emplaced in the Filipino consciousness and merits continuous restaging and rediscovery" (p. 43), regardless of class distinctions and severe economic inequalities in the Philippines.

Chapter 2, "The Body of Christ," brings attention to one of the author's main themes of "what it means to be a complete person, one who is capable of harmonizing the inner (*sa loob*) with the outer (*sa labas*)" (p. 19) for Roman Catholic Tagalog Filipinos. Through what the author terms the "Best Friend Christ" or the "Suffering Christ," each participant bestows devotion upon actors playing either version of Jesus within barangay reenactments of the fourteen stations of the cross as a *comunitas* of catharsis and "joy in this participation, even when commemorating something as terrifying and disturbing as the suffering of Christ" (p. 71). Local agency is exercised by appropriating elements from Hollywood movies such as the brutally visceral 2004 film "The Passion of Christ," elevating suffering

¹Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

and pain through spectacle for and by the masses. *Sa loob* and *sa labas* are activated through performances by actors embodying “Christ-like” qualities, igniting participants en masse to constitute themselves as one Body of Christ.

In Chapter 3, “Panata, Politics, and the Morions of Marinduque,” Peterson extends his discussion of *sa loob* and *sa labas* into the realm of local politics. Individuals who govern the locality authorize infrastructure improvements and pork barrel funding as loyalty-enhancing acts and also fund *sinakulo*. Thus, politicians highlight themselves as benefactors of the people, as sustainers of a tradition to fulfill *panata* and also accord themselves the agency to make artistic choices such as extending the dynamic arc of the Holy Week story beyond the crucifixion and resurrection toward the mock decapitation of Longinus, a Roman soldier who converted to Christianity. As in Chapters 1, 2, 5, and 6, the author weaves together an ethnographic account layered with performative nuance, revealing links between the personal, political, religious devotion, and communal performance-making in the yearly creation of what it means to be Filipino and Catholic in Marinduque island.

Chapter 4, “Dancing Natives, Dancing Nation: From Bayan to Bayanihan,” considers the choreographies of the Bayanihan National Folkdance Company and the company’s representation of minoritized ethnic and Islamized groups in the Philippines to domestic and international audiences. This chapter perhaps draws too heavily from the flowery writings of former and acclaimed Bayanihan costume designer Isabela Santos, which are mildly balanced by the views of a few scholars who have commented critically on Bayanihan. The troupe’s choreographic inventions, what the author terms “folk-inflected” dances that are ascribed by the Manila-based Bayanihan to people in some of the poorest areas of the Philippines – the Cordillera Administrative Region, Mindanao, and the Sulu Archipelago – typify socio-economic differences and disparities in representation between metropolitan dance artists and provincial practitioners. As such, the chapter draws attention to paradoxes that characterize nation-building through art dance making. In another example of appropriative arts making, Peterson highlights *pangalay*, a dance of the Tausug people in the Sulu Archipelago popularized by Manila artist Ligaya Fernando-Amilbanga. Peterson duly notes that Fernando-Amilbanga’s *pangalay* along with her publications founded on the artist’s research several decades ago serve as important contributions to the nation-making project. Alternatively, readers can also refer to newer research inclusive of the perspectives and movement nuances of individuals who self-identify as Tausug, an Islamized group that has historically migrated and circulated *pangalay* and music within the Sulu Zone² including nearby Sabah, Malaysia. Recent works include Desiree Quintero’s dissertation³ and journal article,⁴ and another journal article co-authored by Desiree Quintero and Mohd Anis Md Nor.⁵

Chapter 5, “Time and Transcendence at Ati-atihan,” returns to the strength of Peterson’s fieldwork, within the framework of phenomenological anthropology. Having participated four times in the Ati-atihan in Kalibo, Aklan province as an adopted member of a local family, Peterson offers readers a captivating account of the Ati-atihan, an event founded on mythopoetic stories. In Peterson’s narrative, the Ati-atihan is propelled by *sad-sad* drumming music, “the beating heart of the Ati-atihan” (p. 136) that drives the dancing as *panata*, casting participants into deeply embodied experiences of self with others in adoration not to a Suffering Christ or Best Friend Christ as in Chapter 2 but to an object, a statue of the Holy Child Jesus endowed by devotees over the centuries with healing and other miraculous powers. Peterson brings readers into an ethnographically grounded account of what it means to be performatively embodied in situ as Kalibonhon and as Filipino Catholic.

²James F. Warren. *The Sulu Zone, 1768–1898: The Dynamics of External Trade, Slavery, and Ethnicity in the Transformation of a Southeast Asian Maritime State* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1981).

³Desiree A. Quintero. “Inhabiting Pangalay ha Kulintang as Suluk in Sabah, Malaysia.” Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Malaya, 2016.

⁴Desiree A. Quintero, “Tiyula Itum and Pangalay: Suluk Anthemic Expressions in Sabah, Malaysia,” *Borneo Research Journal* 11 (2017), pp. 118–32.

⁵Desiree A. Quintero and Mohd Anis Md Nor, “The Curvilinear Ethnoaesthetic in *Pangalay* Dancing among the Suluk in Sabah, Malaysia,” *Wacana Seni Journal of Arts Discourse* 15 (2016), pp. 1–25, <http://dx.doi.org/10.21315/ws2016.15.1>.

For further reading on Ati-atihan from a scholar who is Kalibonhon, see Patrick Alcedo's dissertation, journal article, and book chapter.⁶

In Chapter 6, "Street Dance and the Bayan-Centered Framework," Peterson further extends the idea of Filipino as a linking of self, group, locality, traditionalized dance and music, suffering, hope, play, politics, tourism, religion, and nation. The sourcing of provincial festival winners for the Aliwan Festival, a competition spectacle for the gaze of audience members in the Philippine capital of Manila, serves as "massive theatricalized expressions of the local, contained within an increasingly homogenized and national form" (p. 21). Peterson then goes on to make a strong argument, "that dance is the most significant and wide-spread mode in which Filipinos perform their relationship to place and *bayan*" (p. 21), illustrated by diagrams of action models with intersecting circles of performativity.

In Chapter 7, "Juana Change: Performing the Personal and Political," Peterson further demonstrates the performative construction of Filipino and guides the reader toward the doing of identity as repetitive, personal, and political through various actions such as mass performances exemplified by the 1986 EDSA revolution, voter-motivation performances called "Rock the Vote," and political rallies and public debates enlivened by celebrity artists in collaboration with candidates' campaigns and community activists. Underscoring these public performances, Peterson directs the reader's attention to the national level of gamesmanship wielded by political families, describes the dynastic swamp that engulfs the people of the Philippines, and suggests a ray of hope for political change through the performative surveillance of the political and socio-economic elite by comedian-activist Mae Paner in the character of Juana Change ("who wanna change").

Chapter 7 caps a dynamic trajectory highlighted along the way by Peterson's compelling narratives of on-the-ground co-performances with thousands of other participants. For Peterson, performances of devotion induce a shared happiness made meaningful by bringing oneself into *communitas* with others as respite from the daily realities of surviving in a country governed by an oligarchy stubbornly rooted in historical precedent. Since 2001, Peterson has emplaced himself among different Filipinos who submit themselves to forces greater than the individual self. In a sense, Peterson has offered this book as fulfilling *panata* to the local communities who he has engaged with on their terms, immersing himself in their performative traditions, and brings forth the paradoxes and beauty inherent to Philippine places for happiness.

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The Cosmopolitan Dream: Transnational Chinese Masculinities in a Global Age

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Drawing on media images, internet websites, books, everyday life interactions and interviews, this edited volume seeks to probe the meanings of transnational Chinese masculinities across four continents

⁶Russ Patrick Perez Alcedo, "Traveling Performance: An Ethnography of a Philippine Religious Festival." Ph.D. dissertation, University of California Riverside, 2003; Alcedo, "Sacred Camp: Transgendering Faith in a Philippine Festival," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 38:1 (2007), pp. 107–32; Alcedo, "How Black Is Black?: The Indigenous *Atis* Compete at the Ati-atihan Festival." In *Dance Ethnography and Global Perspectives*, eds. Linda E. Dankworth and Ann R. David (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 37–57.