Dansuer Bantugen:
Gendering of the Filipino Hero

DESIREE QUINTERO
University of Hawaii at Manoa

Introduction

With the stage black, a melody of a chant filters hauntingly through the air. One cannot decipher if it is a woman chanting, or perhaps a flute rendering a similar sound. A lively, bouncing kobing enters the melodic soundscape. Rattling engenders anticipation in a suspense-filled theater. The thumping of a primal drum and the clashing/crashing of gongs generate sounding in a chaotic frenzy, which makes its way into for the procession from stage left; it is led by two bare-chested men carrying 10 foot poles with flag-like tassels hanging from what looks like large pointy “rice hats.” Three malong-clad ballerinas follow closely behind, executing coupé en dehor pirouettes alternately left, right, left, right twirling their woven palm leaf fans. They are partnered with three men with arms in a stylized fourth position, wearing spandexed purple knee length tights with a silver sash/apron hanging from hips. The sash is perhaps a fusion of an Ancient Roman warrior costume and a “native” g-string? A line of maidens in long orange dresses and gold okir-esque tiaras walk in smilingly, arms in a Bayanihan Pangalay style fourth position, with flexed wrists. Kolintang gongs tinkle in the background as the “King” strides in, donned in a black waist-length jacket, knee length tights, gold apron and a bright gold-sequined crown, followed by several sabulayan bearers. The King walks upstage center and stands confidently, defantly, legs parted in second position, in an assuringly masculine way.

The three fan dancers and their partners enter into a short combination mid-stage in circular formation. The women and men dance in ballet flats in contrast to the pointe-shoe maidens observing on the side as part of the King’s court. The couples go into a two-line formation executing various arabesques, jumps and pirouettes. The men, choreographed in a musical queue, with legs splayed in second position, imitate the pounding drums in the air, as if manifesting what has become a very “native” or “primal” atmosphere. The men’s movements are open and staccato in comparison to the women who gracefully manipulate their fans, confined within their own personal space.

Suddenly, rattling erupts. The dancers leave mid stage. Bantugen enters from stage left, defying gravity by executing a grand switch leap in what seems to be six feet in the air. He is wearing a simple green jacket, a white leotard, and green tights with a green sash tied around his head. Bantugen ends in relevé, thrusting his kampilan in the air. He hands the kampilan to an...
attendant, greets the King with a bow and an appropriate handshake then touching the heart, in true Southeast Asian (Muslim) male protocol. Bantugen then prepares for his solo, as the maidens gaze in admiration and desire. In a whirlwind combination, Bantugen performs tour jetés, tour en seconde, tour en l'air, pirouettes in grande allegro style- a feat for the principle danseur.

The Philippine Ballet Theatre performed Darangen ni Bantugen at the Tanghalang Nicanor Abelardo Theater, located in the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) on May 14, 2008. It was premiered as part of a month long celebration of Filipino culture and arts, organized by the Filipino Heritage Festival Committee. On November 25, 2005, UNESCO declared the Darangen, a Maranao epic chant, a masterpiece of oral and intangible heritage. The Maranos of Mindanao (from namely the Lake Lanao region) are considered to be the largest of the thirteen Moro ethnic linguistic groups in the Southern Philippines. According to UNESCO, the Darangen, composed in classical Maranao verse, is the longest Philippine epic with 72,000 lines. The epic, which is chanted by a professional singer called an onor, can take days or even weeks to recite in its entirety. Gener Caringal, Philippine Ballet Theatre’s artistic director during the 2008-2009 season, choreographed a ballet based on the Darangen fittingly titled Darangen ni Bantugen, the story of Bantugen. As part of the lineage of Philippine dance housed in the government-subsidized CCP, the Philippine Ballet Theatre is one of three major ballet companies in the Philippines, including Ballet Philippines and Ballet Manila. Also within the auspices of the CCP is the celebrated Bayanihan National Dance Company, the Philippine cultural “attache” that has defined and brought “national” dance and music to an international audience through its tours. Central to the many myths and stories contained within the Darangen is the mythical hero Bantugen, or Paramata Bantugen, who is considered by the Maranao to be the “perfect model of all the qualities that should be found in a man.”

In this paper, I will discuss how the ballet Darangen ni Bantugen, as performed by the Philippine Ballet Theatre, is a reflection of the shifting ideas of “Filipinoness” and “Maranaoness” in modern Philippine society. I argue that the shift echoed in Darangen ni Bantugen is a direct attempt (by the State) to subsume Maranao identity under the Philippine body politic through the appropriation of the cultural arts: that is, what is Maranao becomes Filipino through a process of refashioning. Darangen ni Bantugen recontextualizes images of “Moro” masculinity from what was historically considered in the Philippine arts as the Muslim Other to the refined Filipino Hero. In this context essentialized ideas of masculinity have morphed from the belligerent, morally deprived Moro found in komedya plays to the warrior/prince of Bayanihan’s dance piece Singkil, thus culminating in the Filipino Hero observed in Darangen ni Bantugen. Borrowing from Shay, I contend that “balletizing” an indigenous folk form is an attempt to create a high art that is understood within the Manileño gaze as belonging not only to the Maranao, but rendering it as part of the Philippine nation’s cultural history. Darangen ni Bantugen reassigns an ownership of culture, from being Moro or Muslim to Filipino, thus legitimizing and adhering to the UNESCO recognition of the Darangen epic as intangible heritage. This recognition invokes a set of issues and concerns over ownership: Who “owns” this art? Who can create from this art? Who is this art for? Against this backdrop, the ballet Darangen ni Bantugen becomes the manifested answer to these questions: the Darangen, a Maranao art form, is simultaneously both Filipino AND Maranao/Muslim/Moro. The ballet is syncretic, mixing balletic forms with Bayanihan derived movements, infusing Filipino ideas of masculinity and femininity within a seemingly “originally” Maranao and ultimately “Filipino” story.

The construction and dynamics of performance as practiced within Maranao society through the holistic chanting performance of one woman or man and her/his kolintang ensemble is different from a ballet where theatrical devices such as sophisticated lighting design, a musical score and dramatized choreography interact to produce a spectacle onstage. The “western” theater experience creates certain protocols of performance, using the different sensory experiences of the audience member’s eyes and ears, which that are focused and separated from a proscenium stage. This is in contrast to a Maranao gathering or celebration that may be held at someone’s house, where people may have their attention elsewhere besides the musical performance.

For Filipinos, the desire to retrieve and attach a perceived pre-Islamic art form such as the Darangen is a
deliberate attempt aimed at connecting to what is seen as an uncolonized past. The Darangen represents a rich cultural history that is Filipino, contradicting and reacting to the notion that Filipinos are a “people without culture.” As a result of this appropriation, the Christian versus Moro dichotomy in Filipino performing arts, from komedya plays to dances such as Maglatik, is redefined: Darangen ni Bantugen becomes a manifestation of this dialogue as Bantugen transforms into the “syncretized” male who dons/embodies both the Filipino and Maranao/Moro identity. Bantugen is refashioned as the cultured Moro, the ballerino, the warrior and the hero. Watching Darangen ni Bantugen “being” Filipino resituates the Moro as Other; it visually and performatively integrates the Moro as Self, even if such a theatrical movements derives from an image or sense that exoticsizes and idealizes the cultural heritage of the Moro as Other. Darangen ni Bantugen constructs the mythical Maranao world of Bemburan as the Other in relation to the urban and national center of Manila, creating a valued binary between Manileño hegemony and the Moro Other. By identifying with the Moro Other through an assertion that the Darangen is “Filipino” and thus reconstructing the Moro image that had pervaded and informed certain Philippine cultural art forms such as the komedya and Bayanihan’s Muslim Suite, the Philippine Ballet Theatre is attempting to re-present Bantugen as a quintessential “Filipino Hero.” Darangen ni Bantugen’s choreographic dance argument situates Bantugen as a legitimate Filipino cultural hero whose story has been preserved by the Maranao, in spite of Spanish colonization. Though wrought out of the mold of the image of the “Muslim” in the Philippines, Bantugen is a manifestation of an assembly of masculinities: the Moro, the Warrior, and the Hero.

In order to understand how and why the character of Bantugen was “choreographed” the way he was in the Darangen ni Bantugen, we must look at the dominant constructions of Moro masculinity. In particular, I will examine the portrayal of the Moro in the following two Philippine performances: the komedya and Bayanihan’s Muslim Suite, the Philippine Ballet Theatre is attempting to re-present Bantugen as a quintessential “Filipino Hero.” Darangen ni Bantugen’s choreographic dance argument situates Bantugen as a legitimate Filipino cultural hero whose story has been preserved by the Maranao, in spite of Spanish colonization. Though wrought out of the mold of the image of the “Muslim” in the Philippines, Bantugen is a manifestation of an assembly of masculinities: the Moro, the Warrior, and the Hero.

The image the gendered Moro male as a “Cultural” Hero. The depiction of Bantugen through its “make it macho” balletic choreography supplants the conventionalized gender constructions that are present in the original narrative chants and songs with different categorizations of gender. Women who have more prominent roles in the Darangen chants have minor roles in the ballet, thus reiterating and reifying a patriarchal order where Bantugen is King. First, however, I will discuss briefly the chanting form from which the Darangen has traditionally been sung.

The Darangen and the Onor

The Darangen is one of the longest epics in the Philippines and was declared by UNESCO as “another Philippine masterpiece of oral and intangible heritage of humanity” in 2005. The Darangen is an epic chanted by an onor who narrates the history of the Maranao through legend, and tells of the mythical Kingdom of Bembaran. As such, “before the introduction of Islam, the Darangen was the source of wisdom that validated acts in the society.” The Darangen is...
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memorized by the onor and is performed in what is considered a holistic presentation, where the onor is expected to chant, recite poetry, dance and play the kolintang. The role of the onor carries with it the responsibility of perfecting and displaying the vocal and musical arts of the Maranao, and serves as the transmitter and carrier of tradition. The process of training an onor involves a retired Goro (teacher) teaching the young Moriz (apprentice) by the rote system where the student emulates the stylings of the Goro. According to the documentary Darangen: A Maranao Epic Chant, the increasing Islamic influence in Lanao del Sur has crafted a perception that sees all, which is pre-Islamic and culturally folk as un-Islamic, contributing to the alleged demise of the practice of the chant.

Interwoven in the chant are social values, wisdom and a code of personhood for the Maranao people. The Darangen can thus be viewed as the epitome of Maranao culture and contains the “essence” of what it means to be Maranao, and ultimately what it means to be a man. For example, a popular chant in the Darangen called Mamayog tells of the edicts of how to become and what it means to be a good Maranao leader. Accordingly, it is “common in the epic to find... advice to the young generation to be like the heroes” as the heroes are “not extraordinary persons or people gifted with special powers, but as ordinary men whose virtues are the source of their power because the gods always help good men.” Thus, masculinity is not defined by the physical power and ability of a man, but is rooted in his virtues and actions.

Bantugen as depicted within the Darangen is the perfect man. “Bantogen [sic] was humble. Much loved by his people, he was the most popular person in the whole of Bembaran because he was so helpful that no one who came to him for help was ever disappointed, whether the help needed was financial or physical... He was noble, wise, and handsome, so attractive to the ladies that he was much sought after, but he was never one to court.” Many of the descriptions from the Maranao perspective portray Bantugen as great not necessarily for his physical strength but because of his refinement, integrity, bravery, and especially his desirability among many women.

Komedya in the Philippines

During the Spanish colonization of the Philippines, various types of propaganda were used as tools to support the colonial order. As the Spanish were unsuccessful in colonizing parts of Mindanao and Sulu, in part due to the fierce resistance of the Moros, the Spanish introduced the komedya, or the moro-moro, plays that depicted conflicts between Christians and Muslims, in an attempt to create a divide between the two groups. The Christians, the protagonists of the plays were modeled after the Spanish. According to Nicanor Tiongson, in a komedya “both the characters and the actors playing those characters are called personahe and are usually divided into: Cristianos (Christians) from the kingdoms, principalities or countries of Medieval Europe... and Moros (Moors or Muslims) from the Muslim Sultanates or Caliphates.” Demonizing the Moro, “the plays, accordingly, recite the struggles between these and the Christian tribes, the former attempting to seduce the latter to Islam, with the alternative of death in various horrible forms.” Eventually the Moro-Moro was appropriated and became a popular genre of Tagalog theater and rose to prominence in the eighteenth century. According to Tofighian, “When indigenous writers started to write plays, the Moro-Moro became secularized, focusing on love stories set against the background of Christian-Moor hostilities.” This form of Spanish propaganda, along with the history of slavery whereby Moros would raid Christian coastal towns in Luzon and the Visayas, reinforced difference, along with animosity, between the Christians and Moros. These sentiments served as a backdrop from which a negative constructed image of the Moro emerged.

The Moor personahe in a komedya play is defined by a certain hierarchy: the sultan or emperador (emperor), the princesa (princess), the konselero (counselor), general (general) and soldado (soldier). According to Tiongson “all the male characters in a komedya, except the villagers, shepherds, and hermits, are bursting with belligerence and quick to draw the sword. However, Christians are described as more civilized, more loyal to their king and faith, more noble in court or battlefield, while Moors are uncouth, self-serving, disloyal to their sultan and cowardly in the face of death.”
When viewed as a system of gendering, the Spanish-Indio relations take on new meanings: Indios as feminized, powerless, and cared for subjects, while the Spanish are represented as paternal and hyper-masculine. Within this system, the Moros came to symbolize a threat to the established patriarchy and colonial order of things. In so doing, the Moro was highly characterized, based on the European Spanish colonial gaze that associated Islam with Arabic cultures. This is evidenced in the costuming where “Moorish males wear... Arabian-inspired headdresses- all in bright red or re-orange... The Sultan is identified by his chest band, big cape and large turbante.”

The Christian courtiers modeled after Spanish military officials of the nineteenth century dressing in black and blue attire (See Figures 2 & 3). This is an Orientalist construct wherein the komedya play in Mindanao becomes the dark continent of the Other occupied by uncivilized, strange and morally inferior Moros.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Spanish colonization came to an end and the Philippines was ceded to the U.S. in the 1898 Treaty of Paris. Although the Moro Province was created in 1903 under American military rule as a distinct economic territory, the shift from a Republican U.S. Congress to a Democratic one in 1913 marked major changes in Mindanao relations and called for the integration of the southern regions into the Philippine nation-state. With the creation and building of the Philippine nation came the need for the creation of a Filipino national identity and “Filipino leaders regarded ‘Muslim identity’ as an intrinsic part of being Filipino.”

The process however of defining “what is Filipino” and incorporating the Moros into a “Filipino” body politic created a socio-political relationship between dominant Filipino culture and the subjugated Moro culture. As power switched “hands” from the Americans to the central Philippine government, so did the colonial patriarchal order. The Moros became “feminized” as the assertion of patriarchal domination under the Americans morphed into the dominance of the Philippine central government, with Manila as its center. Within this conceptual gendering framework, the “internal colonization” of the Moro in the Philippine nation-building project was seen through their subjugation under the patriarchal rule of the Philippine central government.

**Nationalism and the Bayanihan Philippine Dance Company**

In 1937, the Commission on National Integration (CNI) was created to “achieve real, complete and permanent integration of all cultural minorities into the national polity.” Coincidently the same year, Dr. Helena Z. Benitez founded the Bayanihan Philippine Dance Company based in Manila. During this nation-building period “the Philippines was coming near the close of its first quarter-century of American colonial rule, and Western influence was changing Filipino social customs. The old dances were dying out and American dances were extremely popular, especially in the urban centers and areas reached by American cultural and educational influence.” In response to the “Americanization” of the Filipino, one of Bayanihan’s objectives was to “collect indigenous art forms as expressed in music, dance, literature, arts and crafts; to distill and transform these cultural traditions into theatrical representation.” Moreover, as part of the process to find the “roots” of Filipino culture, Bayanihan dance researchers had gone into the field to document and record the dance and music of the “Filipino” people. In a speech during a visit to Marawi City in Lanao del Sur, Lucrecia R. Kasilag, the musical director of Bayanihan, proclaimed to a majority Maranao audience, “not only do all of us become inseparable partners in nation-building but more importantly, together we forge an enduring bond of mutual respect and love for each other as brothers and fellow citizens of a great nation.”

Bayanihan, as a “civic response to a government appeal for a cultural program”, participated in the 1958 Brussels World’s Fair, and has since become the “depository of almost all Filipino dances, dress and songs.” By implication, Bayanihan serves as the authority on and source of authentic knowledge regarding Filipino dance and music, including that of the Moro people. In this capacity and as a result of the international acclaim it has received, Bayanihan alleges to have “awakened a new pride among Filipinos in their culture heritage; added a new dimension to the country’s dance tradition; and has built a rich reserve of international goodwill.” The recognition by the international community further reinforces Bayanihan’s credibility as the authority on national cultural forms.
Interestingly, according to Bayanihan, the dances and musical cultures of Christian Filipinos trace their source-origins to the Moro-Moro plays performed during the Spanish colonial period. In contrast, the cultural arts traditions of the Moro people were allegedly gathered in the “field” by Bayanihan’s dance researchers Francisca Reyes Aquino, Leonor Orosa Goquingco and Henrietta Hofer-Ele. One can still see traces of the Moro from komedya plays in Bayanihan’s Muslim Suite. Upon observation, the dancers in the Muslim Suite exude an aristocratic and somewhat defiant image of the Moro: the serious facial expression and the “regal” posture of the female dancers and the warrior, fierce and formidable attitude of the male dancers. In a sense, the image of the Moro as depicted in the Muslim Suite is a reflection of the dominant culture’s perspective of the Moro people. As Shay states, “dance performances often create and perpetuate devastatingly accurate portraits of national prejudices, class strife and ethnic religious tensions and they express a reality often avoided in the verbal discourse of strident nationalism and chauvinism.” Similarly, as Gaerlan discusses, the Moro depiction is that “Muslims are exotic; they have slaves; they are warlike; their leaders and they live in a ‘sensuous’ atmosphere.”

The politics of representation demonstrate the power dynamics between the Christian majority and Muslim minority, where non-Moros perform the “Muslim dancer” on stage. The support and propagation of Bayanihan by the Philippines government, and private funders, can be seen as an attempt to construct and define the image of the Filipino as well as represent it to the international community. Thus, the “Moro” in Bayanihan’s Muslim Suite purports an image of the “Moro” as fully integrated within the Philippine nation.

In 2000, Bayanihan was named “The Philippines National Folk Dance Company.” The creation and inclusion of the Muslim Suite in the Bayanihan repertoire is symbolic of the political agenda of the Philippine government to assimilate the Moros into the Philippine national body politic. In this regard, Bayanihan has effectively become the symbol of the successful cohesive Philippine nation whereby the Christian and Moro peoples, in the spirit of bayanihan, meaning to work together, share the same stage under the Philippine flag. For the Philippine government “the value of utilizing folk dance for the representation of an entire nation emerges from the common public view that these dances originate in some primordial source of the nation’s purest value.” “Moro” has been transformed from being the label used by the Spaniards to create difference between Christianized “Indios” and Islamic “Moros,” to a constructed, politicized representation of “Moro” in Bayanihan’s Muslim Suite, the Philippine “cultural attaché” to the international community. Moreover, Bayanihan has become the standard from which many cultural performance groups base...
their own repertoire. One can see evidence of such an influence, especially in dance companies housed in the CCP, including the Philippine Ballet Theatre.

**The Muslim Suite: Singkil, the “Maranao” Component of Bayanihan’s Repertoire**

Entering from stage right, a woman wearing a white, form-fitted bejeweled frock clasping two fans is seated atop two bamboo pools carried by two men. Her apparent “royalty” is made obvious by the “crown” of a golden bird called the sarimanok on her head. A slow melody emerges from the kolintang gong set, which seems to heighten this somewhat brooding, exotic atmosphere. Upstage left, seated on his royal “throne” is a Prince, with his sword in his right hand and shield in his left. He sits in desire observing the Princess. He is bare-chested, donning a kopiot. The carriage halts mid-stage, the Princess’ female attendant/umbrella holder kneels before her, opening the royal umbrella and offering her hand to assist the Princess off her perch. Elegantly the Princess places her right hand in her attendant’s hand and steps down, waving the fans in figure eight motions through the air. Her attendant follows suit, carrying the umbrella to cover her majesty’s precious head. The Princess saunters across the stage, walking suggestively swaying her hips, waving her fans alternating her right fan and left fan up and down. Her chin is stylistically cocked up, while her eyes are cast down. She makes no qualms with having the occasional eye contact with the audience members. The bamboo poles are laid in on the floor, two pairs in a criss-cross formation, held by four holders. They bow on their knees, with their heads down awaiting a command from their Princess.

After the Princess circles the bamboo poles once, she comes downstage, with belts on her ankles, wearing a pair of golden Aladdin shoes. As she pauses, the kolintang tinkling stops, and everyone waits in anticipation of the Princess’ next move. She stamps her foot... once... twice... three times; the bamboo holders come up from their bow. She stamps once... twice... three times again and in an instance the bamboo clackers start their rhythm slowly. The Princess and her attendant begin to weave in and out of the bamboo, walking through on half toe. The tempo speeds up. The Prince, perhaps excited by this irresistible display of the Princess below him, stands up, he thrusts his sword in the air, as if on the attack. The clashing on the rim of the gong and the thundering roll of the drum signals his desire to enter the bamboo with the Princess. Also donning a pair of “royal” Aladdin shoes, the Prince, with his sword and shield, weaves in and out of the bamboo also on half toe, swinging his sword like a baton in his hand. The dance ends in the climax of both the Prince and the Princess with incredible speed weaving through the bamboo in a flurry of fans and swords and shields.

According to National Dance Artist Leonor Goquingco “dancing among the Muslim peoples is more Oriental, mystical (especially for the women)... having flowered in a culture touched by the influences of the Hindu, Javanese, Chinese and Arab-Persian civilizations, yet retaining its individuality...inner intensity and absorption, mysticism, languid grace, much use of the upper torso, flowing, extended movements of the arms as they change from pose to pose.... all these bespeak the Oriental style.” It seems obvious from the description of Singkil that there is an eroticism in the exoticization of the “Muslim” in the performance of Singkil. It “harkens back to the lurid Orientalist vision of Muslim slaves and harems in the Middle East.” When the Prince enters the bamboo "he gives an impression analogous to the macho (and Orientalist) King of Siam played by Yul Brynner in Rogers and Hammerstein’s 1951 film The King and I." Through use of choreography and costuming, Singkil is the manifestation of the essentialized Moro. The liberties of costuming recalls the Arabian-esque turbans of the komedya, with the Aladdin shoes and the white form-fitting outfit of the Princess, replacing what would traditionally be a very shapeless, loose-fitting malong. The absence of a very traditional Maranao piece of clothing such as the malong (see Figure 4, the tubular cloth worn around the waist of the dancers) and, instead, the use of the body hugging costume in the modern Bayanihan Singkil (see Figure 5) draws the audience’s gaze more explicitly to the female body, exposing a sense of her physicality and the “shapeliness” of her hips. The body of the Princess is treated “as a kind of canvas on which culture paints images of gender.” The Prince, with his open vest to expose his bare chest emphasizes his fit body, indeed an act of physical “masco-ness.” In a sense, the Princess and the
The Prince’s fierce and bombastic sexuality as he “thrusts” his sword in the air prior to entering the bamboo poles to dance with the Princess is perhaps symbolic of the latent eroticism and sensuality between the two characters. Similarly, this sword’s “thrusting” motion conjures certain phallic connotations, his sword symbolic of an erection as he pursues the Princess, the object of his desire, the “chase” being a danced form of foreplay. At one point after the Prince enters the bamboos, the “haughty Princess reclines submissively... at his feet.”

This submissive gesture by the Princess reemphasizes the hyper-masculinity of the Prince, the dance being a very macho display of his sexuality. The “orgasmic” climax unfolds at an incredible speed in which the two performers weave in and out of the bamboo—as spectacle that amazes and wows audiences.

What is not made obvious by the staging of this scene by Bayanihan is that it has its origins in the Darangen. In this regard, the Prince actually depicts Bantugen, while the Princess serves as one of the many women he pursues (in Singkil it is Princess Gandigan). The part of the epic in which Bayanihan draws this scene from tells of “a prince noted for his amorous exploits, who was finally captivated by a lovely princess, and loses no time in pursuing her. But the spirits of the forest will not leave him unpunished for his philandering, so they set his path with difficulties... to make his pursuit of the princess extremely challenging.” As she enters on stage, the Princess is with her carriage on display, a visual feast for the Prince. Here, the gaze of the audience is that of the Prince, the Princess the object of his desire as she attempts to “seduce” the Prince as she walks suggestively, swaying her hips, across the stage. The dance culminates with the Prince achieving sexual satisfaction by “capturing” the Princess after a speedy chase through the bamboo.

However, as Cadar argues, “Maranao society sanctions against male and female dancing together.” The “original” Singkil consisted of a single female dancer weaving in and out of the bamboo; there was no Bantugen saving or pursuing the Princess. While strict social norms about the sexes ‘dancing’ together might have informed traditional Maranao society, particularly when Cadar was disputing the ‘authenticity’ of Bayanihan’s depiction of Maranos in Muslim Suite, many contemporary Mindanaoan cultural arts troupes in fact have men and women dancing, interacting, and performing onstage together. I would argue that this performance reality is in part attributable to the revisionist work of the Bayanihan Dance Company. Indeed, one could look at the many different Mindanaoan performance groups that have modeled themselves after the Bayanihan Singkil and its presentation of a lovely Princess being “chased” or courted by a Prince, both stepping through clacking bamboo.

The inclusion of the Prince in Bayanihan’s Singkil is an intriguing addition that raises several important issues. According to Ricardo Trimillos, as told to him by Bayanihan’s “mother” Lucrecia R. Kasilag, “Fred-die Durano of Bayanihan was the one who created the prince character for himself.” Based on his surname, one could infer that Durano is not Maranao and thus explains, in part, his willingness to break Maranao social protocols, possibly unbeknownst to him, by having the Prince dance with a woman. Durano’s interpretation of the Prince character has become part of the Bayanihan’s “tradition” when performing the Singkil dance. The orientalized, bombastic sexuality of the Prince speaks to the performance of masculinity onstage, whereby Durano created a fantasized depiction of a hyper-sexualized man within a heteronormative context. The addition of the Prince, moreover, has some pertinent implications: it adds a dramatic element to a dance, i.e. a man chasing a woman through fast clacking bamboo; it reinforces an idea that a woman needs to be “saved”; a woman submits, while simultaneously being attracted to a strong, domineer-
ing male; and, that men are always victim to their sexual passions. In this sense, the inclusion of the Bantugen character reflects Jacques Lacan’s phallocentric notion, where from the phallus “the place of authority, the privileged subjectivity, is always normative” and, in doing so, the audience shares the gaze of the Prince as he watches the Princess. The Prince eventually is able to “capture” and “subjugate” the Princess. Similarly, the Prince is rendered as a symbol of Moro masculinity by the non-Maranao, Durano, and “falls under the category of artistic creation.”

Accordingly, the appropriation of the art forms of marginalized peoples (i.e. the Maranaos) by a dominant group (i.e. the Philippine government-supported Bayanihan National Dance Company) results in the powerlessness of a minoritized group, the Moros, in any rendering of their cultural arts within the national scheme. This is relevant in that Bayanihan has become the authority and source of ‘authentic’ depiction of many dances and music performances of the Philippines from which cultural arts companies have based their “folk” dances on. In this context, Santos notes:

Authenticity requires going out into the field to observe the dance at its place of origin, as Bayanihan has done… the approach is, first of all, humanistic: to know and understand the people— their lives, occupations, aesthetic concepts, and history… In the adaptation of the ethnic and period dances to the stage, authenticity is still the decisive consideration. It is, above all, essential not to lose the original flavor and feeling of the dance.

In contrast, I argue that the addition of the Prince character in Singkil can be seen more as an artistic rendering of the Darangen narrative by Bayanihan rather than an “authentic” depiction attempting to capture the “original flavor” of the dance. Bayanihan’s depiction fosters the image of a hyper-sexualized Moro masculinity as opposed to the “original” feeling in the dance that is performed traditionally only by women. However, Bayanihan’s alleged National Dance Company status situates the choreographers of Singkil, including Durano in his creation of the Bantugen character, as legitimate purveyors of Maranao music, dance and tradition.

Why Danseur Bantugen could not be Maranao

The Prince’s costume disallows certain ways of being Maranao, while purporting an ‘inauthentic’ image of Maranao masculinity through Bayanihan’s portrayal of Bantugen. According to Cadar, the “displaying of the chest and abdomen… is offensive to the Maranao sense of decency.” Also rubbing against this misrepresentation is how the Prince’s costume accentuates Bantugen’s genitalia, his sex, through the spandexed snugness of his tights. Granted the costuming may be seen as appropriate for a ballerino because the balletic form of dancing requires a man to be able to move freely, jump, jeté, pirouette without having any material restriction or impediment to his movement. Similarly, one notices that all other dansuers (See Figure 7), including the King, have a sash strategically covering their genitalia. The sash is reminiscent of a g-string commonly found among Philippine cultural communities such as the Ibaloi and Kankaney in the Cordillera region. An exception to the g-string costume is the “genderless” bottled souls in the scene the Abode of Death; these dancers perform in nude-colored unitards guided by gender-neutral movements (See Synopsis Darangen ni Bantugen). The direct display of Bantugen’s genitalia onstage reinforces his hyper-masculinity in contradistinction to not only the female dancers, and their “lack” of a phallus, but also in relation to other men who are covered and fail to “measure-up” to Bantugen.

The other men’s crotches are “veiled,” thereby directing a genital gaze to Bantugen’s “package” and emphasizing his genitalia that is in constant display. Besides the non-gendered bottled soul exception
where men and women seemingly wear the same unitard costume, Bantugen does not have the g-string costume accessory. Why? Perhaps it is because of the technical difficulty of the choreography of Bantugen that the sash might get in the way perhaps as Bantugen executes a grande turning jeté across the stage. This may be true. But perhaps it is to display the very masculinity of the character, as shown through his body, his fit athletic, muscled male physique. By accentuating Bantugen’s genitalia via his tights, his masculinity, his sex, is drawn into focus. Consequently, and, in combination with the outstanding athletic ability of the dancer, he represents the essentialization of an ideal epitome of a man. As costuming engenders the “body as canvas” concept, “the ideal” writes Tolentino, “is to infuse the dance with the masculine personality, initially presented by the dancer’s costume.” As the use of tights in ballet have always been associated with the ballerina, thus having been a feminizing aspect of ballet when a man dons them, by contrast, in Darangen ni Bantugen, in combination with masculine choreographies, accentuates the masculinity of Bantugen.

Similar to Bayanihan’s inclusion of the bare-chested Prince character, Bantugen in tights displays the “phallos as master-symbol” in that Bantugen’s flaunted genitalia re-emphasizes male authority and power. In the ballet, Bantugen is aroused and tempted by women. The first temptation is by Magimar, whose engagement to Bantugen’s brother Madale and subsequent flirtations and seduction of Bantugen led to his exile from Bembaran. The second instance is a vision that Bantugen has of Datimbang, and his search for her, which leads him on a tumultuous journey, resulting in his death. Despite Bantugen’s apparent weakness for women, he is never emasculated. Rather, he is depicted as hypersexual. Though the actual ballet form has a certain technical refinement in comparison to Bayanihan’s Singkil where the focus is on the dancer’s agility while stepping through clacking bamboo at an incredible speed, Bantugen’s performance in Singkil is similarly depicted as the hypersexual man. The two artistic
renditions focus on Bantugen’s relation to women. In this sense, Darangen ni Bantugen emerges as a masculi-
line ballet, while Singkil becomes a masculinized inter-
pretation of the all female “original.”

**Balleticizing Bantugen**

“The dance itself serves as a sign of the cultural process of ‘othering’ through representation—on ongoing process of construction that is always self-reflexive with regard to the culture that produces it.”

Ballet came to Philippines at the turn of the twentieth century. What seems to be a relatively new phe-
nomenon is a dance genre termed “neo-ethnic” which emphasizes contemporary works using “ethnic” or traditional forms. According to Sally Ann Ness, the neo-ethnic ballet is the Filipinoized embodiment of ballet and Darangen ni Bantugen has been classified by the CCP as a part of the neoethnic genre. While the Other is the “ethnic,” it has simultaneously become a part of the Filipino cultural identity. In reviews and in its marketing, Darangen ni Bantugen has been de-
scribed as a Filipino piece, and proud part of Filipino heritage. Understanding this appropriation of the bal-
et dance form within a post-colonial Philippine con-
text creates “high art” of the Other. Caringal states that “the most important thing here is that Filipinos, no(t) necessarily the ones from Mindanao or Luzon or Visayas, have a very, very, good material, an epic that we can be proud of.” Bantugen thus becomes a “Fili-
no” and a Maranao symbol. The Christian symbology is that can be read in the ballet is interesting (see the Synopsis of Darangen ni Bantugen). The parallel of the story of the Darangen ni Bantugen to the sacrificial death of the National Hero during Spanish coloniza-
tion, José Rizal, and to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, is perhaps a reflection of the agenda of the creators of the ballet to have chosen a story that would be most familiar to a majority Christian nation.

In Joelle Jacinto’s article on the opening of Darangen ni Bantugen in 2008, “Maranaos in the audi-
cence at the May 14 and 15 premiere at the CCP sought Caringal out to share that he had managed to show a representation of their culture that they were able to relate to.” The Philippine Ballet Theatre, with their vast repertoire, has “expanded its vision and pursues the goal of bringing upscale art of dance to general appreciation among Filipino audiences.” Perhaps what the Maranaos recognize in the ballet is the recogni-
tion of an art form that originates with their own people, that the balleticizing of the Darangen has in some way “legitimized” their contribution to the greater Filipino society. And they can claim, with pride, that one of their own, Prince Bantugen, is a mythical Filipino Hero.

Darangen ni Bantugen’s choreography is a combina-
tion of classical ballet, modern and contemporary dance genres. However, if choreography “focuses attention on the interrelationality of various sets of codes and conventions through which identity is repre-
sented,” then the performance could be read in many ways. For example, Berger has suggested that the ballet form has been “embedded with feminine and homosexual stereotypes” and dance, in general, stage men as the emasculated “Other.” In the context of this reading, Bantugen can be viewed as an attempt by the hegemonic Manila arts community, an extension of the patriarchal Philippine Government, to appropriate a Maranao art form, subjugating it through a process of feminization or more accurately, balleticization. In contrast, by examining the choreography, the character of Bantugen also reinforces a typical patriarchal struc-
ture. As Hanna adds, “Movement metaphors distin-
guish male from female. Danced gender patterns serve to remind audience members of their respective identi-
ties and roles.”

Gendering can be observed through the syntactic ballet vocabularies in Darangen ni Ban-
tugen where men control women and become the base from which women move. The man constantly displays the female body while reiterating his masculinity as shown in his strength and agility. During the pas de deux sections, the danseur is able to control, manipu-
late and lift the female body, exerting a certain amount of power within the dynamic of a duet (See Figure 8).

Daly reminds us, “Pointe work often frames the ballerina as needy of her partner’s help” where the bal-
lerina cannot execute specific movements, such as quad-
ruple pirouettes or arabesques without the assistance and control of her male partner. Where the danseur’s movement is outward, occupying much of the physical space on stage with jumps and turning combinations, the ballerina is confined to a smaller space where her pointe shoes bring her more upward than outward, limiting her mobility and utilization of the stage space. Hanna also explains, “these patterns of gender in
space—female immobility and male coming and going—are expressed in dance.”

The choreography for the male ensemble in *Darangen ni Bantugen* is quite masculine in its athleticism; it uses a combination of jumps and pirouettes, for example. Through syntactic ballet choreography, *Darangen ni Bantugen* attempts to create ballet “as macho, in the sense of making it seem athletically masculine and resolutely heterosexual” countering the “effeminate stereotyping in the ballet world.” As one blogger stated with regard to *Darangen ni Bantugen*:

I must commend the dancers in the play, especially the main characters...Most especially, the dancer who portrayed Prince Bantugen. Aside from being a great dancer, he acted so well and was so much into the character. There was a scene I really commend. There was this scene where his soul wandered in the heavens and saw the other souls. His dance was really fantastic and there was this step (I don't know how to describe it, and I don't know the name either) which he executed many times without pause! And it was like he's pausing in the air when he leaps!

The blogger’s use of “step” is a reference to “barrel turns.” In this movement, the dancer turns consecutively in a fantastic display of technique and athleticism, jumping in the air with one leg extended outward in front of the body as the back leg is bent in a derrière attitude. This is one indication of how movement is gendered in the ballet, as one would not see a ballerina attempt to perform such a movement. Such athleticism characterizes *Darangen ni Bantugen*, not only in the choreography of Bantugen, but also in the male ensemble work. For example, during the final battle scene between Prince Miskoyaw and Madale, to which Bantugen eventually joins, the danceurs are hoisted atop of the shoulders of another ballerino as they “ride” them like horses and joust with *kampilans*. The battle itself, a very masculine display, ends with Miskoyaw’s defeat and Bantugen’s triumph. Whether the audience reads the ballerinos who carry the premier danseur as horses, servants, or just stage effect, one sees visually the dominating power of the premier danseur in contrast to the ballerinos representing a “subordinate masculinity.”

Bantugen is not the bombastic, hypersexual male in *Singkil* or the *komedia*; rather, he “seduces” his partners in life, he assists them in their pirouette combinations. Bantugen, though masculine and sexual in the sense that he is in pursuit of women in the ballet, there is an attempt to project him as a refined male in the balletic choreography.

The Role of Women in the Darangen and the ballet *Darangen ni Bantugen*

There are marked differences when comparing the “original” *Darangen* narrative with the staged ballet. Initially while reading the text of the *Darangen* one is struck by the hyper-sexualization of Bantugen whose sex drive is so powerful that he seems to be constantly risking his life to find “sweethearts” in every kingdom. On Bantugen’s quest to see the beautiful Maginar, Queen of Babalayan Anonen, he is faced with some life risking feats and requests the help of the *tonongs*. They respond:

Now you have seen, Bantugen, what
A foolish, boastful prince you are!
You have many sweethearts, but now
Must you still look for another
While undergoing such hardships?
For you could, indeed, have been killed
And would now be long forgotten
Passing through that thick cogon field!

Similarly, while reading deeper into the text we encounter images of women who actively participate in affairs that are considered within male “space.” For example, in negotiating with the other Datus as to what to do with Bantugen’s body after his death, and as the news of Bantugen’s death could possibly cause a misunderstanding and worse spark a war between Bembaran and Natangkopan a Ragat, Datimbang convinces her brother Makadalongdong Lena (Ayonan sa Nasopan), to send her own *nori* (pet bird) with Bantugen’s *nori* with the news of Bantugen’s death. The Ayonen sa Nasopan listens to his sister Datimbang, who is considered wise and beautiful: “For who will not agree with the/ Wise advice of Datimbang who/ Had always been praised for her great/ Wisdom, in fact, famous for it?” During a gathering of all of the datus of Bembaran during Bantugen’s death, many of Bantugen’s “sweethearts” willingly offer themselves to marry any man who can travel to the *Abode of Death* and retrieve Bantugen’s soul. Though this might be understood as treating women as chattel, the women in the *Darangen* narrative leverage their power of beauty, desirability, and wanting of men. This is most evident in the charac-
ter of Maginar whose appearance lures Bantugen to her and whose power as a “witch” ultimately leads to Bantugen’s death and subsequent resurrection.

Similarly, it is quite often mentioned that women consensually enter into relationships with Bantugen. They do so either out of free-will or they are unable to resist his “masculinity” and gracefulness. The women therefore choose to be with Bantugen. Depictions of women occur in the songs of the Darangen, many of which describe Bantugen and his adventures in courting women. Bantugen describes himself as the “favorite pet of princesses/ Cherished sweetly like a nori/ Sheltered by the royal ladies.” This is significant since much of the Darangen narrative exists due to Bantugen’s romantic exploits, his heroic feats of “rescuing” women (for example, the way Princess Gandiggan is portrayed in Bayanihan’s Singkil and “saving” Bemberan itself (as in the story Kapnataangkopan a Ragat, Batungen is resurrected from the dead by Maginar and defends Bemberan from attack). Within this understanding, it becomes clear that Bantugen as a Maranao hero cannot exist without women; his gender depends on the gender of others. He courts women, saves women, and is saved by women. Bantugen’s masculinity, and his heroic status, is tied to the role of women in his life.

Women in the ballet Darangen ni Bantugen

In the ballet Darangen ni Bantugen, it is obvious that the insatiable desire for women is one of Bantugen’s flaws, his weakness. For the choreographer Caringal, it was a big challenge “to show the greatness of Bantugen and his weaknesses when it comes to women.” Perhaps this is why the female characters in the ballet take somewhat of a minor role and are mostly posited as Bantugen’s objects of desire. The premier ballerina Datimbang cares for Bantugen as he dies by calling a “shaman” in an attempt to heal him of his ailments. Though she is unsuccessful in reviving him, she weds Bantugen after he is resurrected. Datimbang’s primary role in the ballet is that of Bantugen’s love interest.

Diwata and the nori are both played by women and take on roles in service to Bantugen. After Bantugen’s banishment and his subsequent journey that leaves him weak and close to dying, Diwata saves him and brings him to the Kingdom Between Two Seas. Bantugen’s nori has a similar role as she accompanies Mabaning and Magali to the Skyworld to retrieve Bantugen’s soul. The roles of Datimbang, Diwata and the nori are as caretakers of Bantugen. Though there is evidence of this type of patriarchal relationship in the Darangen narrative between Bantugen and the women in his life, what is absent in the play is the role women take outside of the care-giver mold. Thus the prescriptive behavior for women throughout the ballet is that of subservience to Bantugen, emphasizing his “greatness,” his masculinity. This is reinforced by the Bantugen’s patriarchal balletic choreography. The ballerina becomes an essentialized figure “because ballerinas are smaller and lighter than danseurs, they are biologically determined to be the supported rather than the supporter.”

Divergent Stories: Differences in the narrative and in the ballet: Maginar

In the narrative Darangen, Maginar is not betrothed to Bantugen’s brother Madale, but is sought by Bantugen after he meets her beautiful nori. After his tumultuous journey, Bantugen encounters an old ugly woman who offers him a prepared betelnut quid as she believes him to be her husband. Bantugen is so offended by her ugliness that he attempts to kill her, unbeknownst to him that it is Maginar in disguise. In the ballet, Maginar takes a brief and nominal role, whose seduction of/by Bantugen results in his banishment from Bemberan. In the narrative, Maginar not only
enchants Bantugen by casting a spell on him to stay in Babalayan Anonen, but she also causes his death as the Angel of Death who keeps his soul in a bottle in her tonong. Similarly, she resurrects Bantugen by pouring his soul back into his bellybutton. Magimar’s role in the ballet is marginal and is a reflection of how women are treated throughout the ballet. Within the narrative, Magimar is empowered by her sorcery, and subsequently her femininity, as she is able to enchant Bantugen not only with spells but also with her beauty.

In the Abode of Death- playing a woman or latent homosexuality?

In the narrative, Mabaning Ndaw Rogong and Madali travel to the Skyworld to retrieve Bantugen’s soul. As part of the strategy to distract the tonong Inirandang sa Baya, or the Angel of Death, Mabaning transforms himself into a beautiful Queen. Mabaning is successful in luring the tonong away from the bottled souls by promising to marry him if the tonong can accomplish two things: pick a particular type of flower that is grown on a particular tree in the Skyworld; and, find out when Mabaning will die. In the ballet, the ballerino who plays Mabaning “transforms” himself into a woman by veiling himself and using very “effeminate” movement. In Darangen ni Bantugen, the use of the veil coupled with the movement indicates to the audience that Mabaning is playing a woman—costuming and embodied movement become critical in deciphering the gendering of the scene. Rather than having an actual ballerina perform as Queen Mabaning, the choreographer decided to have a ballerino “veiled” as a woman, executing feminine-esque movements. Why? As part of a macho ballet, the homosexual connotations between the tonong, who is played by a man, and the ballerino who plays Mabaning, is obvious. Mabaning’s character is disgusted by the affections of the tonong, reemphasizing the heteronormative theme in the masculine ballet. Additionally, the audience notices the intentional latent homosexuality of the scene. The “make it macho” strategy of the ballet takes into consideration the different types of masculinities in the Philippines: the hypersexual hero, the lesser, subjugated masculinity, and the marginal masculinity of homosexuality. It is significant that Mabaning and Magali save Bantugen in the ballet, as opposed to Maginar in the narrative. This emphasizes the masculinity-centricity of the ballet.

**Conclusion: Ballet is “culture’s most powerful models of patriarchal ceremony”**

In this paper, I have argued that essentialized ideas of masculinity have transformed in the Philippine performing arts over time. The range of masculinities in Philippine performing arts, from the belligerent, morally deprived Moro found in komedyá plays to the “integrated-Filipino” warrior/prince of Bayanihan’s dance piece Singkil, culminates ultimately in the Filipino Hero depicted in Darangen ni Bantugen. The seemingly “threatening” Moro men depicted in komedyá plays sets moro masculinity as inferior to the morally upright Cristianos. Moros in komedyá plays were belligerent and morally deprived. Traces of this depiction are seen in Bayanihan’s Singkil with the inclusion of the warrior/prince character in the dance that produces a latent eroticism between he and the princess. The thrust and use of the sword in his pursuit of the princess interlaces the erotic with the phallocentric. The belligerence that is reminiscent of komedyá plays becomes eroticized creating an orientalized atmosphere in Singkil. The balleticized Bantugen in Darangen ni Bantugen constructs Moro masculinity yet again as being “weakened” by his unending desire for women and while simultaneously being heroic. The “make it macho” choreographies of Bantugen in the ballet subjugate women and other men in an effort to depict Bantugen as a hero, creating a masculine ballet suited for a Filipino Hero. Darangen ni Bantugen is indeed a masculine ballet that attempts to recontextualize the Moro Other into the Filipino hero. In the pre-colonial “original” narrative the role of women in relation to Bantugen is that of a reflexive relationship. In the ballet, Bantugen takes on a more patriarchal role, the women being defined by Bantugen, their actions all in relation to him, reinforcing “traditional” patriarchal structures that are remnants of a colonial gender structure. Ultimately, the journey of the image of the Moro, from the komedyá plays, to Bayanihan’s Singkil, to the premier danseur in Darangen ni Bantugen is that of a masculinizing project, attempting to define, in its many degrees, Filipino masculinity.
Appendix One: Synopsis of Darangen:
Two Songs

1. Kapmaginar

Bantugen is sitting on a rock as the nori, pet bird, of Maginar circles above his head. The nori’s name is Sampiri Kagadongan. He asks the nori where it is from and who her mistress is. The nori lies and says she is a stray bird. She asks for Bantugen’s name, which he tells, she then finally tells him who her master is. She speaks of Maginar’s beauty in Babalayan Anonen, where no man has ever reached. Everyone has died attempting to reach Babalayan Anonen, a place with lovely maidens with a queen with incomparable beauty. Sampiri describes all of the obstacles that Bantugen will have to encounter and then leaves him.

Bantugen begins his journey encountering various obstacles: an igand tree with giant roots where giant crabs live, tall palm trees that capture and hold people for eternity, a ring of fire that he conquered by walking through it using “his great power and wit,” a place of perpetual daylight, then darkness that brought a hail of stones and a typhoon. On his journey Bantugen starts to grieve as he feels he might not survey and may never see any of his sweethearts again. As the sky clears, Bantugen sits and rests at a beach filled with skulls of men who had failed on the journey. He has a dream that a beautiful Princess tells him to go to Babalayan Anonen lest he be killed. He awakens and begins to cry. Five large crocodiles emerge from the river and grant him access to visit the lamin, a tower constructed on top of a torogan (royal house) to hide the princess and her ladies.

Bantugen enters the lamin and is received by Mangoda Linimbowan, the sister of Maginar [sister]. She seats him on a “richly embellished bed” and offers him betelnut quid that she prepared especially for him. She suggestively asks if he is there to visit her, and Bantugen responds, asking for friendship instead. Linimbowan then insists that he is her elder brother “Ndawan” and takes out a knife, threatening to kill herself if he doesn’t agree. Bantugen dumbfounded as he has never encountered such a thing, concedes and says she is his sister. Linimbowan then takes Bantugen to the upper lamin.

Bantugen sees the stunning Maginar, but she refuses to look at him as “she remembered the sufferings/ that he had caused her earlier”. Maginar reveals that she was that ugly old woman that he had tried to kill after she offered him betelnut quid. Bantugen apologizes but Maginar refuses. Linimbowan interrupts and threatens to leave Maginar if she doesn’t serve betelnut to Bantugen and accept him. Maginar thinks and hand over betelnut to Bantugen. He accepts it and falls under a spell.

2. Kapnatangkopan A Ragat

Inaynon o Kampong, king of Bembaran, orders all datus and subjects to reject Bantugen as he has been living with Maginar, a much feared witch. Maginar, having a vision that Bantugen will die, sends him back to Bembaran. When Bantugen arrives he is not greeted and is ignored by all. He asks his sister Arkat a Lawanen what is happening, she informs him but asks him to stay with her in her lamin. Bantugen leaves Bembaran broken hearted.

Bantugen grows weaker and weaker, perhaps because he is rejected by everyone in his kingdom. He makes his way to another torogan in Natangkopan a Ragat. He reaches the lamin where Datimbang comes to his aid. Too weak to speak his name, Bantugen attempts to eat the betelnut quid she gives him. Bantugen dies and his soul is taken by Inirandang sa Baya, who is Maginar’s tonong in the Skyworld. Datimbang tells her brother and advises him to sound all the agongs to announce that someone has died. This is in hopes that someone will be alarmed and could give the identity of this Prince.

Bantugen’s nori flies into the Natangkopan a Ragat in hopes that she will find her master. Datimbang reveals Bantugen’s body and the nori reveals his identity. Datimbang suggests that Bantugen’s nori be accompanied by her own to Bembaran to tell of the news of Bantugan. In Bembaran, there is much grief and anger after the news of Bantugen’s death reaches them. All the datus set sail for Natangkopan a Ragat to claim Bantugen’s body and possibly start a war.

Datimbang greets the datus and convinces them that they did not know the identity of the Prince and that he was close to death when she found him. The datus believe her and they, together with Datimbang and the King of Natangkopan a Ragat, sail back to Bembaran.

Meanwhile Bantugen’s friends Madali and Mabaning travel to the Skyworld to retrieve Bantugen’s soul. They are able to travel through all the layers of the Skyworld. Mabaning transforms into a beautiful Queen in order to trick the tonong Inirandang sa Baya. Mabaning asks the tonong to find out when he will die and to pick a particular flower for her/him. The tonong leaves and Mabaning and Madali leave with Bantugen’s bottled soul. Exhausted from the trip, Mabaning and Madali take rest on a rock in the middle of a lake. As they sleep, a tonong of Maginar comes and takes the bottle.

Back in Bembaran, the datus assemble and all of Bantugen’s sweethearts are present. Each one of his sweethearts offers to marry any man who can bring Bantugen’s
soul back from the Skyworld. Maginar is present. Her sister Linimbino now notices that Maginar has a bottle and convinces her sister to save Bantugen. Linimbino threatens to leave Maginar forever if she doesn’t save Bantugen. Maginar pours Bantugen’s soul back into his body.

Meanwhile Misoyow, Bantugen’s rival, plans to sack Bembaran since the news of Bantugen’s death reaches his kingdom. He does not know Bantugen has been revived. A battle commences. Bantugen fights fearlessly and is only stopped when his cousin Minabay sa Alongan asks him to stop the war.

Appendix Two: Synopsis of Darangen ni Bantugen as performed by Philippine Ballet Theatre

Act One: Madale’s Kingdom

Prince Bantugen, a beloved Maranao prince and warrior, gathers with the people of the land to celebrate the engagement of his brother, Datu Madale, the king and a princess of another land, Maginar. However, unable to resist Bantugen, Maginar flirts and attempts to seduce him. Though Bantugen is warned by his friends Magali and Mabaning, he gives into Maginar’s seduction. This betrayal angers Datu Madale and consequently Bantugen is banished from the kingdom.

Vision and the Journey

As Bantugen laments his fate he receives a vision of another Princess in a distant kingdom, the Kingdom Between Two Seas. In his quest to find this Princess, Bantugen encounters and is able to overcome the elements: fire, earth, air and water.

Diwata and Princess Datimbang

Though Bantugen survives these ordeals, he is severely weakened and calls for the help of his spirit protector, Diwata. Diwata and her fairies carry Bantugen to the Kingdom Between Two Seas. Datimbang, the princess in his vision, attempts to save Bantugen. He falls unconscious and Datimbang calls for a healer who is unsuccessful in reviving Bantugen.

Angel of Death

The Angel of Death descends from the Sky World takes Bantugen’s soul. Datimbang and Diwata grieve over Bantugen’s death as his pet bird, looking for her master, flies into the palace. Upon discovering Bantugen’s body, she asks Datimbang and Diwata to bring his body back to his home.

Act Two: Madale’s Kingdom

Datimbang and Diwata bring Bantugen’s body back to Datu Madale’s palace. The kingdom goes into mourning. Magali and Mabaning, Bantugen’s friends, set out to find and retrieve Bantugen’s soul from the Angel of Death. Bantugen’s bird leads them to the Sky World.

The Sky World

After adding Bantugen to his collection of souls that are bottled in jars, the Angel of Death falls asleep. The bird, Magali and Mabaning search for Bantugen’s soul but cannot locate him. As the Angel starts to wake up, Mabaning dresses as a woman in order to seduce him. Magali and the bird hide. Mabaning is able to convince the Angel of Death to pick some flowers for him in the land of the living. In the Angel’s absence, they are able to retrieve jar with Bantugen’s soul.

At Madale’s kingdom

Bantugen’s rival, Prince Misoyow attempts to invade Madale’s kingdom after hearing of Bantugen’s death. Mabaning and Magali arrive in time to revive Bantugen. He awakens and wins the battle. Madale, thankful, accepts Bantugen back into the kingdom. Datimbang and Bantugen then wed.

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End Notes

1 A kobing is a bamboo mouth harp.

2 A malong is a tubular skirt that is found in many parts of Southeast Asia. The malong is worn by both men and women.

3 Fourth position is where one arm is placed above the head, and the other is held in front of the body.

4 Geometric and/or flower designs found in the Southern Philippines. Okir is the term used by the Maranao.

5 Bayanihan National Dance Company.

6 Term used to describe a musical instrument made up of graduated knobbed gongs that are laid in a row.

7 Maranao term for flag.

8 Second position is a balletic stance where the feet are placed slightly wider than hip-width apart with the feet turned out.

9 A pointe shoe refers to a type of ballet slipper. The square box at the toe of the shoe is meant to provide balance for the dancer.

10 Relevé is a ballet position where the dancer stands on points or demi-pointe

11 A type of sword that is made of steel “forged with any one of three blade designs: curved, straight or with two points” (Darangen 1993:474). In the ballet, Bantugen brandishes a kampilan with two points.


13 According to the U.S. Library of Congress, Moro was the name given to Muslim Filipinos by the Spanish (http://memory.loc.gov/frd/cs/philippines/ph_glos.html).
Desiree Quintero


15 Onoi, “From the English “honor,” referring to the singers of the genre Kambuyok/Kambuyoka who have become famous through public acclamation; fame (frequently used by the singers as part of their praise language)” (Cadar Vocal Music 1980: 150).


18 Manileño- people who reside in Manila, the urban center and capital of the Philippines.


20 Magklalatik is a percussive coconut dance depicting Christians vs. Moros performed by men. It is interesting to note that the color scheme reflects similarities in komedya plays: dances who “play” Christians wear blue pants and Moros wear red pants.

21 Bombaran is a mythical kingdom from which the Maranao claim to originate.


34 Tiongson, “Komedya,” 12.


43 The Muslim Suite is a segment of Bayanihan’s performance that is dedicated to the dances of the “Muslims” in the Philippines.


45 Gaerlan, “In the Court of the Sultan,” 259.

46 The Bayanihan was named the Philippine National Dance Company through the passing of R.A. 8626 through the passing of R.A. 8626 through the passing of R.A. 8626 through the 10th Congress 10th Congress through the passing of R.A. 8626 through the 10th Congress.

47 Shay, “Parallel Traditions,” 35.

48 The Kopia is found throughout Southeast Asia. The kopia is usually worn by men during formal occasions. Though it was indicated to the author that it known to be worn by older, more distinguished men on a daily basis. In Singkil, the kopia as a costume seems to reference more to the “Muslim-ness” of the Prince character.

49 Leonor Orosa Goquingco, The Dances of the Emerald Isles (Quezon City, Metro Manila: Ben Lor Publishers, 1980), 159-161.

50 Gaerlan, “In the Court of the Sultan,” 262.


52 Gaerlan, “In the Court of the Sultan,” 262.


55 The term “original” is used or referenced by various Maranao writers to describe the dance of Singkil as done traditionally by the Maranao. These writers include Minerva S. Sani, Edna C. de los Santos and Usopay H. Cadar. Sani writes “Strangely, the ancient ‘choreographer,’ if there were such a person, never depicted Prince Bantugen with the princess because a Maranao male and a female are not customarily paired in a dancing performance (Sani 1979: 108).


57 Connell, Gender, 84.
59 Santos, Bayanihan, 35.
60 Cadar, “The Bayanihan,” 50.
62 Connell, Gender, 84.
64 Basilio Esteban S Villaruz, Treading Through 45 Years of Philippines Dance. (Quezon City: The University of the Philippines Press, 2006), 92.
74 Hanna, Dance, Sex and Gender, 77.
75 Fisher, “Make it Maverick,” 46.
77 Connell, Gender, 183.
78 Hadji Lawa Cali et al., Darangen: in Original Maranao verse. with English translation, Vol. 7. (Mindanao State University, University Research Center, Philippines 1993), 3.
79 Tonong refers to spirits. There are three kinds “those who live in the air or the clouds, those who live in tall trees, and those who live in the water. They serve men, in particular those to whom they have been given as guardian spirits and whom they must guard and defend” (Darangen 1993: 482).
80 Cali et al., Darangen: in Original Maranao, 222.
81 Cali et al., Darangen: in Original Maranao, 309.
82 Cali et al., Darangen: in Original Maranao, 212.
83 Manipon, “Dancing Darangen” (accessed March 25, 2010).
84 Daly, “Balanchine Woman,” 17.
85 Daly, “Balanchine Woman,” 17.
86 Cali et al., Darangen in Original Maranao, 219.