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## <Book Review>

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**William Peterson. *Places for Happiness: Community, Self, and Performance in the Philippines*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016.**

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an enduring one for social movements? How do international funding arrangements rework the approaches and aims of different social and political organizations? Finally, there will always be the trouble of organizational divisions along ideological and political lines. Setting aside differences for agreements on wider calls should be done because it is difficult to contest long-term elite interests as opposed to the ever-transforming goals of social movements.

The book stirs up many questions. How will progressive politics address democracy's unleashing of the conservative forces of society? Is liberalism the only way for democracy considering its radicalizing effect on the other sides? Can democracy be developed, thought of, felt, and experienced apart from the conditions of the "free market"? Are there other forms of democracy? How can Indonesia's rich history of social struggles (its particularities)—especially its indigenous conceptions and practices of pedagogy, land and labor value, sexualities, and multidimensional human abilities—continue to inform social movements worldwide (the universal) progressively? How should Indonesians (and the world) confront the specter of communism haunting movements across the political spectrum in light of the persistent calls for justice for those abused, imprisoned, tortured, and extrajudicially murdered in the wake of "October 1965"? Progressive politics can only be progressive if it first realizes that democracy is a moving target. In a nutshell, democratization is a never-ending struggle.

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

WILLIAM PETERSON

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016.

An early transnational experience of witnessing cultural dances from the Philippines, through his late Filipino American boyfriend whose life was cut short by a pandemic in the early 1980s in San Francisco, was what spurred William Peterson to write *Places for Happiness: Community, Self, and Performance in the Philippines*. To understand those dances from and in their autochthonous places, Peterson, an American performance studies scholar based in Australia, conducted years of research in the Philippines—the provenance of the dances that piqued his early scholarly interest in studying Filipino bodies in performance. Since 2001, along with the diasporic dances he first saw, which Philippine dance practitioners refer to as "folk" dances, he studied the *sinakulo* (a play about the life and Passion of Jesus Christ), the Aliwan festival, and political acts of theater activist Mae Paner whose stage name is "Juana Change" in Manila; the Moriones festival on the island of Marinduque; and the Ati-atihan festival in Kalibo, Aklan on Panay island. Peterson astutely argues that these

public performances, together with folk or traditional dances, constitute and are constituted by the fluidly complex nature of a Filipino nation or *bayan*.

As much as Peterson's work gestures towards a "nation," he articulates from the get-go the delimitation of his study. That it is confined in specific areas in Luzon and the Visayas, within the Tagalog and Visayan cultures, and does not include the large island of Mindanao and the string of islands comprising the Sulu Archipelago in the southern Philippines. These latter two are rich sites for studying expressive cultures of Muslim Filipinos, *lumad* (indigenous) population, and groups of Ilocanos, Cebuanos, and Visayans, who migrated to Mindanao starting in the 1930s, to seek greener pastures. *Bayan* is therefore not determined by language and geography's material contours, but is indexed by the many significations embodied performances Peterson studied in Luzon and the Visayas deploy every time they are re-enacted, staged, memorialized, created, and activated to form a community.

The book is topically divided between religious processions and Passion plays observed during the Lenten season and "street dancing" festivities that bring hundreds, even thousands, of participants to coalesce as one dancing and music-making organism. Peterson organizes these two seemingly disparate groups of public phenomena to bifurcate in such a manner where they are not exclusive from each other, but whose theoretical boundaries and research methodologies flow from and with each other. What ties them together is Peterson's lifelong passion for politics, performance, and religion—a trifecta in his scholarly work and ethnographic research.

The first three chapters center on *sinakulos* and the Moriones festival in Boac, Marinduque. Chapter 1 focuses on three kinds of *sinakulos*: the "traditional" *sinakulo* of San Roque, Barangka Ibaba in Mandaluyong City in Manila; the "civic-based" *sinakulo*, which unlike the first kind, is for a wider public and is almost always sponsored by powerful politicians and economic elite, with the Moriones festival as one such example; and the "activist" *sinakulo* Al Santos' *Kalbaryo ng Maralitang Tagalungsod* (Calvary of the Urban Poor) performed around Manila and Manila's Mobile Theater's *Martir sa Golgota* (The Martyr of Golgotha) under the artistic directorship of movie and theater personality, Lou Veloso. The next chapter is an exposition of the "Body of Christ," of the willingness and desire of believers and penitents in the Tagalog-speaking region to experience pain and suffering to be intimately connected to Christ in fulfillment of their *panata* (religious promise). Chapter 3 is Peterson's careful ethnography of the Moriones festival in Boac, a nationally renowned event where *morions*, dressed and wearing masks as Roman soldiers, roam the streets during Holy Week. The festival's highlight is a re-enactment of the story of Longinus, the half-blind, unknown soldier who stabbed with his lance the side of Christ on the cross—a narrative that Carmencita Reyes (the then congresswoman and later governor of Marinduque until her death) revised to draw tourism and as an expression of her power.

The last three chapters are on "folk" and "folk-inflected" dances. Chapter 4 is a critical explanation as to why folk dancing gained much traction in the Philippines' nationalism efforts in

the middle of the twentieth century; it examines the pioneering contributions of Francisca Reyes-Aquino in the research, teaching, and dissemination of this dance form. It also delves into the Bayanihan, the national dance company of the Philippines that has become the exemplar of how to choreograph folk dances for theater, with a recall of their being catapulted to the international stage in the wake of their successful participation at the 1958 Brussel's World Exposition. Following this chapter is Peterson's phenomenological experience attending in 2009, 2010, 2012, and 2014 the Ati-atihan. This is a festival in Kalibo, the capital town of the province of Aklan, annually celebrated in January to honor the Santo Niño (Holy Child Jesus) and the indigenous *atis*, a dark-skinned indigenous population who are considered as the putative ancestors of the Filipinos. Here he encountered a transcendence of time and an emplacement of local culture—in his body that participated for hours and hours in the street dancing called *sadsad* with the Motuses, the family that “adopts” him and welcomes him to their house every time he is in Kalibo. Chapter 6 is about the Aliwan Festival, a national “street-dancing” extravaganza that brings to Pasay City, in the Star City Park adjacent to the Cultural Center of the Philippines, which is the brainchild of the infamous Imelda Marcos, award-winning contingents in provincial festivals throughout the country. With a beauty contest as a highlight and a parade of spectacular floats standing in for different provinces, participating contingents vie for the grand prize of one million pesos—their competitive, trained bodies become embodiments of what Peterson calls “bayan-in-action” in the context of Aliwan, a newly invented, corporate-sponsored event. To conclude, Peterson zeroes in on the crucial role “Juana Change” (Mae Paner's alter ego) played in the 2010 election in support of Benigno S. Aquino III's presidential candidacy and his eventual winning as the country's 15th President. With writing partner Rody Vera, Paner originally came from PETA, a theater group known for its activist, social consciousness, and anti-Marcos works. Peterson in this final chapter brings out the notion of the “personal is political” and of Paner's and Vera's performance advocacy as an extension of the concept of *bayan*. In this enlarged concept, Peterson includes within its ambit alternative change and, following Catherine Diamond, “communities of imagination.”

Striated across the book is Peterson's application of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's “flow” and the Filipino understanding of *kapwa* (self) as developed by Virgilio G. Enriquez, F. Landa Jocano, and Father Dionisio M. Miranda. Attendant to *kapwa* is the concept of *loob* (interiority) and *labas* (exteriority) that are in constant interaction with each other, that the self is about being with others, a unique confluence Peterson witnessed and experienced as an “outsider” while doing fieldwork in the Philippines. His third concept is *bayan*, a capacious Tagalog word that could mean a town, community, district, or even a nation. Following Edward Casey, following Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *bayan* for Peterson does not simply refer to a location, but is also about embodying a place—a kind of embodiment corporeal experiences and memories instantiate. Thus, while the dancers, musicians, penitents, and actors present in his book are performers imbued with the ability to bear communal identities and their own specificities, they are also “placelings” capable of bringing into

their bodies the places where they have elected to perform outside the quotidian.

These three concepts are the major theoretical frames that help form the crux of his study that is “happiness”—a state of being emerging out of and generated by performances that practitioners nourish by annually repeating them either as close to the original as possible or with intended alterations. As a responsible ethnographer, Peterson in his choice of theories to employ is sensitive to the politics of citationality. He provides importance to scholars in the country where he conducts research. For him, the Philippines is not simply a source of ethnographic materials to investigate, query, and write about, but also a wellspring of theories undergirding his scholarly project.

Reviewing this book during the Covid-19 pandemic is a reminder of the importance of liveness in performative acts and of being consistently present physically in an ethnographic endeavor that spans many years. This global upheaval has turned upside down the very lives of practitioners, who populate his book, and has dramatically altered and even halted the ways in which the community-based and traditional or folk-inspired performances he ethnographically investigated, are now being held.

On May 28, the Bayanihan had culminated its first-ever, two-week *sayaw* (dance) workshop online to children and dance enthusiasts. In a June 8 interview via Zoom call, Suzie Benitez, Bayanihan’s executive director, stated that the online technology has made it possible for workshop participants from Manila and Cebu and from Sydney, Australia and Toronto, Canada—diasporic places with high concentrations of Filipino immigrants, in complete opposite on the globe hemisphere, with markedly different time zones—to come together to learn folk dances from the Bayanihan. That workshop made it possible for the attendees and their teachers, core members of Bayanihan, who before the pandemic would trot the world representing the Philippines in dance festivals, to form a temporary virtual dance community.

After all, the Tagalog word, *bayanihan* means a “community working together towards a common goal”; and in the case of this world-renowned dance company, of a community dancing together to bring pride to the Filipino nation and to keep alive the rich Filipino culture by staging for the contemporary theater Philippine traditional dances. However, Benitez added that synchronous learning, which she terms as “flexible,” cannot be on a par with performing dances face-to-face, embodying them side-by-side with each other, and gaining tacit knowledge through the very act of dancing and making present one’s non-digital body to perform with others.

As much as Peterson’s book is a testament to the irreplaceability of body-to-body interaction in transmitting expressive culture and about anchoring cross-cultural discourses in “being there,” borrowing from Sarah H. Davis and Melvin Konner (2011), it is as well a powerful reminder of the need to intersect socio-cultural and politico-historical dynamics that are at play in any performance practice one has elected to investigate. Peterson conducts his study vis-à-vis the Philippines’ political context, colonial past, the practice of corruption, and cacique democracy (quoting Benedict

Anderson), and modern principalia (as informed by Dante C. Simbulan) that have governed lives of Filipinos since the Spanish colonial period, have produced the privileged *mestizo* class, and have led to extreme economic disparity.

His discussion of politics is erudite. An example is his making sense of the fall of the Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos' dictatorship, the staggering corruption during their heyday that gave them global notoriety, and the rise to power of Benigno S. Aquino III as the country's president. President Noynoy or Pnoy, as popularly referred by Filipinos and the Philippine media, is the son of the late President Corazon Aquino, the housewife of the slain Ninoy Aquino, the archenemy of the Marcoses, whose death became the spark that ignited the 1986 People's Power revolution. This unprecedented outpouring of anger by the Filipino people, who gathered by hundreds of thousands on EDSA, a major artery connecting Quezon City to Makati, installed overnight Cory, as she was fondly called, as the country's 11th President. The People's Power forced the Marcoses to go into exile in Hawai'i—ending two decades of ironclad governance and dizzying, unconscionable excesses.

Such are the many pithy contextualizing in Peterson's book, demonstrating splendidly that through an array of performance practices one can come to terms with how the personal becomes political, the ways in which folklorized religion, nationalism, and regional identities are embodied, and how a deep sense of enjoyment leads to "time out of time" as Alessandro Falassi (1987) formulated it, and to becoming members of a Filipino nation or *bayán*. Indeed, to experience "happiness," as Peterson describes, could be via performance's "flow"; and being *in situ* physically and diachronically remains a fodder for the ethnographic mill.

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