

Performing the Postcolonial: Philippine Prison Spectacles after Web 2.0¹

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On June 27, 2009 within ten hours of the breaking news of Michael Jackson's death, prison security official Byron F. Garcia arranged for a music and dance tribute to the King of Pop; this tribute was to be performed by over 1500 prisoners in front of a live audience of tourists and media corporations in the exercise yard of Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Centre in the Philippines. Neatly dressed in identical bright orange prison jumpsuits with feet moving in matching black and white Chuck Taylor sneakers, the inmates danced to a ten-minute medley of Jackson's hits – "Ben," "I'll Be There," and "We are the World" – piped through the prison loudspeakers, with such precision and passion that one would be forgiven for thinking one was watching a professional, if slightly unorthodox, Broadway musical.

Such a feat might have gone unnoticed by international media in the turbulent wake of Jackson's death, if not for the fact that these prisoners were already internet stars who became bona fide internet celebrities following their 2007 YouTube interpretation of Michael Jackson's 1982 epic music-video *Thriller*. With over fifty million views to date, the inmate performers – known as the "Dancing Inmates" of the Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Centre (CPDRC) – have since received attention from an array of mainstream news conglomerates (including Al Jazeera; BBC; CNN), independent DIY bloggers, and more recently, from academia. Scholars such as Mangaoang (2013) and Perillo (2011) critique the prisoners' rise to international, digital fame through the dance-as-rehabilitation programme, relating it to Foucauldian understandings of embodied discipline and docile bodies, countered against media claims of inhumane treatment and racial essentialism. Meanwhile others, including Peterson (2012) and Williams (2013), deem the dance programme rehabilitative despite its commodification, overall viewing dance as a pleasurable and positive form of penal discipline. Although my wider research project details concerns for the inmates' overall well-being, it is not the focus of this essay. Rather, my purpose here is to deconstruct the CPDRC performances to demonstrate how the legacy of colonialism lives on in contemporary Filipino experience. I explore this distinctive case study's postcolonial themes drawing from the transnational, transdisciplinary dialogues across new media and critical

theory, with contextualisation from the work of contemporary Philippine scholars.

The interdisciplinary field of Philippine studies, understood here after Priscelina Patajo-Legasto, incorporates inquiry with respect to the Philippines and Filipinos through the critical lens of Western hegemony, which includes discourses surrounding Filipino cultural practices. It includes the work of those in the Filipino diaspora, and as Patajo-Legasto affirms, Philippine studies aim

to liberate ourselves from the legacies of Spanish and American colonist discourses and the continuing power of Western hegemony, that have metamorphosed into discourses of globalization. (xxiii)

Of course such studies have not been limited to Filipino scholars. From the late 1980s to today, scholarship in Philippine studies has witnessed a wave of foreign academic attention, with particular focus on Philippine politics and society and anthropological ethnographic studies (including the works of Fanella Cannell [1999], Sally A. Ness [1992], and Michael Pinches [2005]). By deconstructing the dancing inmates' performance in line with recent Filipino studies scholarship, I argue that globalised YouTube audiences display their hegemonic power and disciplinary policing over the Filipino inmates through the medium of banal entertainment.

This essay takes as its point of departure an understanding, shared by countless other scholars, of the Philippines' distinctiveness that emphasises the noticeably American nature of the state after four decades of colonial rule. I focus on how this case study operates as a vehicle for different kinds of nostalgia, tracing how and what "pleasures" are being activated through its YouTube dissemination. The roots of CPDRC performances' perceived success, I argue, lie in its intimate relationship with various forms of nostalgia, intertwined with the early 20th-century US colonisation of the Philippines, and subsequent post- and neocolonial states.

Building from what Anne McClintock calls the obfuscating "bogus universals" of the postcolonial "other" (92-3) that serve to enhance – by providing (inadvertent?) entertainment in this case – the everyday lives of the globalised West, such texts gradually remind us of the critical role the Other performs in the digital era. Hinged on labour – dirty, dangerous, often for little or no pay – such work is increasingly prevalent in new media platforms such as social networking sites, which fill much of Filipino cyberspace. I aim to draw attention to the neocolonial nostalgia peddled in the seemingly innocuous Dancing Inmates performances. Such neocolonial nostalgia – a cultural hybridisation of American popular songs with Eighties archival choreography within a Philippine prison – can be theorised here as warden Garcia's intense investment in upholding the mandatory ritualistic, fetishistic performances that I argue echo, however

faintly, the forced ritualistic performances of the Filipino tribes at the St Louis World's Fair.

Just after the turn of the 20th century, the St. Louis World's Fair – also called the Louisiana Purchase Exhibition – constructed the Philippine Exhibit, the largest, most expensive and most popular of all the displays. It incorporated 47 acres and 100 structures in addition to the 1200 indigenous representatives of the Philippines, who were forcibly plucked from the recently acquired archipelago and shipped to the US to be viewed and to perform hourly “exotic” rituals for the pleasure of the American masses. Infrequent sacred tribal rituals were repeated in a monotonous daily routine, with the main attraction being the display of dog-eating undertaken by members of the Igorot tribe. The 1904 Exhibition displayed the displaced Filipinos in loincloths, attending to various tasks under the watchful eyes of thousands of visitors. As Patago-Legasto (2003), Delmendo (2005) and others have remarked, the Philippine Exhibition was justified by an imperial, and orientalist discourse, and promised an experience that would surpass a trip through the Philippine Islands by showcasing America's “new-caught, sullen... half-devil and half-child” acquisitions (Patago-Legasto xvi). The jarring experience of having over one thousand Filipinos living in captivity and being put on display is, however, observed a century later in the internationally popular, contemporary Philippine prison *Thriller* phenomenon. I contend that the contemporary case study operates by and through nostalgia, and activates an array of pleasures among YouTube audiences that can be clearly read within the trail of digital footprints left by viewers within YouTube's embedded comment system. Indeed, the performances serve to tap into both a neocolonial nostalgia and YouTube's digital archive of nostalgia, where a mere mention of such culturally valuable texts as Michael Jackson's *Thriller* can unleash a tsunami of global nostalgia.

After briefly describing the Dancing Inmates programme, I will explore notions of the complex American-Philippine relationship through the foundation of an American colonial education system and ensuing “miseducation.” I read the digital circulation of the CPDRC popular music and dance performances as complex extensions of the US colonial education experience through the imposition of American popular music and dance performance onto captive subjects. In many ways, the CPDRC performances mirror US acts of imperialism in the Philippines. However, at CPRDC warden Garcia replaces the US, with Garcia enacting the contemporary role as “bearer of benevolence” (Racelis and Ick). Garcia commands the mandatory performances of 1500 Cebuano inmates to dance in unison and sing along to songs in the language enforced by the US imperial project – English. The following section locates Philippine cultural identity amidst colonial legacy and lastly, I highlight the paradox faced by new mediated subjects. Digital media platforms have given a voice to postcolonial and subaltern subjects, while they simultaneously problematise the Filipino performers, presenting them as uniform, “highly trainable,” Orientalist stereotypes, powerless to personally participate in

the digital swirl within which they operate. I suggest that this quasi-MTV style video, with hundreds upon hundreds of clearly marked Filipino prisoners at its core, becomes a metaphor for 21st-century postcolonial Philippine attempts to assert their independence from the United States.

Setting the Stage: The Spectacular Dancing Inmate *Hataw Sayaw*

We're the dancing inmates of CPDRC, we dance and entertain the world and make you all happy, a new approach to rehabilitation, representing Cebu province and the rest of our nation.

We're the dancing inmates of CPDRC, fun and laughter, smiles in every corner. Got the world's attention, coz we've got moves, and now all millions of you say you've watched us on YouTube.

CPDRC, CPDRC, CPDRC Inmates, CPDRC Inmates...
(Chorus from the "CPDRC Song" by Byron F. Garcia)

Located in the central Visaya region of the Philippines, Cebu is famed for being the birthplace of Christianity in the Philippines (and by extension, Asia) due to Ferdinand Magellan's arrival in 1521. A long line of colonisers followed the Spanish, with American and Japanese imperial forces in power until independence in 1946, only for Martial Law to be declared under the Marcos regime (1972-1981). The CPDRC, a purpose-built facility nestled in the hills of Barangay Lahug a few miles outside the city of Cebu, is home to around 1500 inmates who await trial for up to six years. In 2006, the Cebu Governor Gwendolyn Garcia assigned her younger brother, Byron F. Garcia, in the role of Chief Security Consultant for the unruly CPDRC, which had reached new levels of disorder and violence due to drug abuse, corruption and severe boredom. The new warden was inspired to introduce music to the inmates' exercise regime after watching the Hollywood film *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994). One of the central scenes of the film occurs when the sound of the "Canzonetta sull'aria" duet from Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* fills the prison yard, providing a momentary respite from the prisoners' otherwise music-less existence. Garcia believed in the transformative and communicative power of music, especially in communicating with prisoners, but rather than using a classical soundtrack as featured in the film, popular music was deemed a more suitable and communicative medium to accompany the choreographed routines (Mangaoang 47).

To encourage the prisoners to expel physical energy so that there might be fewer violent incidents inside the prison cells, Garcia initiated a mandatory exercise programme that developed into inmates marching in brisk, synchronised movements around the prison yard to the beat of a drum, often carrying the Philippine or Cebu province flag. Marching in time and flag waving are historically rooted and deeply associated with military ideas of dance (McNeill 1995). The development from marching

and flag waving to flag dancing and into other forms of dancing, in spite of biases against male participation in dance, historically bears witness to predominantly all-male companies moving in unison displaying a union between governing bodies and participants. A prevailing social stigma against male dancers continues to exist in the Philippines, along with many other countries, though with notable differences to the degrees of stigma associated with different dance genres. Yet with most genres, dance remains widely viewed as a feminine activity, and all males who dance face the possibility of being classified as effeminate and/or gay. While the lead male dancer portraying Michael Jackson's girlfriend in CPDRC's *Thriller* is openly gay, a noticeable percentage of CPDRC's YouTube audience verifiably categorise *all* the dancing inmates as effeminate and camp (see the sample of YouTube comments in Table 1).

Table 1. A representative selection of YouTube comments for byronfgarcia's "'Thriller' (original upload)," reproduced here as posted on the CPDRC Thriller video, followed by the username in brackets.

Can I serve here to get free dancing lessons ? (ChristianRG2000)
Homosexuality is a sin. Like you didn't know.... (TruckTurner Jesus Has Risen)
I'm not impressed by a bunch of murderers, rapists and child molesters. (Max Trantham)
lol i would like to know if that tranny get * after video :)))) (Rodier Ratafakus)
Please imprison me in that jail!!! Whahaha :) (Fritz Givero)
That is the ugliest Michael Jackson I've ever seen.. (katalee lopez)
The zombies...scary. The "chick"...terrifying. (Diplamatik Juan)
This is gay heaven. (TJDreed)
This is so much better than watching "Dancing With The Stars." (Ron S)
WE NEED A GANGNAM STYLE NOOOWWW. (cmc42561)
What a pussy prison. (Khong Biet)

YouTube audiences bring forth a range of responses, from entertainment, to empathy – a “there but for the grace of God, go I” attitude – to revulsion at their appearance or criminal status, posting public comments to such effects underneath the YouTube videos. The platform offers users the option to communicate with other members of the online community through its text-based comment board, which lends to the video-sharing platform's “conversational character” (Burgess and Green 54). It invites and indeed rewards – through lofty promises of social and cultural capital – those who engage with the video through the real-time comment board embedded underneath. As the comments in Table 1 demonstrate, the majority of the text-based comments that continue to be written alongside CPDRC's *Thriller* respond directly to the viewer's initial impression using a mix of colloquial, text message-based terminology, phrasing, and occasional emoticons. These comments form a select tonal representation

of the majority of the 70,000+ comments that are digitally fused to the video, archived and accessible to the public for an indefinite length of time. Numerous users have written messages addressed to the YouTube community expressing their amusement – an uneasy mix of pleasure and irreverence – over the inmates’ captivating performance.

After the inmates had mastered the marches, Garcia hired external choreographers for the prison in 2007 to work alongside his creative designs. What started as a gentle one-hour work-out soon developed into a rigorous programme that ordered all able-bodied inmates to dance outdoors for around four hours daily. Auditions were held for inmates who wanted to be part of the core ensemble of lead dancers, while all other inmates danced a simplified version of the focal dance routine. In October 2006 Garcia posted his first YouTube video of the inmates performing “The Algorithm March,” a Japanese song and dance-craze that penetrated popular culture across Asia that year, initially citing a desire to show other prison managers his innovative disciplinary technique in action. Virtually ignored by the YouTube community, it was Garcia’s subsequent postings of the inmates rehearsing to Michael Jackson’s *Thriller* some months later that caused a media frenzy and turned the CPDRC into one of Cebu’s leading tourist attractions. Warden Garcia revived the facility to the extent that Governor Garcia’s 2007 profile of achievements included a statement that under her term, CPDRC prisoners now “gained respect and worldwide fame” (Governor’s Profile). Indeed the popularity of CPDRC as tourist attraction continues today, with the latest edition of the popular *Lonely Planet Philippines* guidebook listing CPDRC in its recommended “Sights” of Cebu alongside butterfly sanctuaries and museums, enticing international backpackers and business travellers alike with the following description:

This is where you can catch the inmate dance performances that became an internet sensation on YouTube several years back... The performance was the brainchild of chief warden Byron Garcia, whose love of Eighties pop inspired him to groove up the regular prison exercise drill. There are free performances on the last Saturday of each month; first register your name with the Capitol building... (207)

CPDRC continues to function as a maximum-security prison while concurrently transforming into a tourist site once a month, a hybridised site of leisure and incarceration. New repertoire is added regularly, with requests coming from the YouTube community and Cebu Government officials alike. The “CPDRC Song”, highlighted above, is just one example of Garcia’s interdisciplinary role within CPDRC, from official security consultant to video producer and pop music composer.

The special “live” monthly performances at CPDRC have become an integral part of the inmates’ prison routine, doubling up as a chance for family and friends to visit, though in reality most of the audience comprises foreign tourists. Aside from Filipino visitors, South Korean and German are, curiously enough, among the most numerous visitors to the facility, and, regardless of nationality, photography and recording

equipment is welcome. Each performance ends with an invitation for audience members to enter the prison yard and have photographs taken with the inmates, exiting through the gift shop. It is vital to note that photographs taken of the dancing inmates go on to enjoy a life beyond the ephemeral three-hour live *palabas* (spectacle) or *hataw sayaw* (dance show) as they are archived, disseminated and magnified indefinitely. As the live audiences take their seats behind the steel fencing in the panoptic towers high above the prison yard, a moralising framework is further construed. For live and mediated YouTube audiences alike, such ritualistic, public spectacles of inmates dancing in identical orange uniforms, serve as a constant reminder of their status as incarcerated people.

“The Miseducation of the Filipino”: Colonial Subjugation Through Education

US history pitches the acquisition of the Philippines as part of an “informal empire” that was markedly different from the European imperial territory. As historian Paul Kramer asserts, “US colonial rule in the Philippines has frustrated accounts of American uniqueness: ushered in with a war that looked much like Europe’s colonial wars” (15). Since military victory alone does not equate victory, the most effective means of subjugation used by the US colonial rulers over the Filipino population was the establishment of a public education system that truly “captured the minds” of the Filipinos and sought to train them to be citizens of a new American colony (Constantino 21-25). Thus, in 1901 a group of 509 American public-school teachers landed in the Philippines aboard the *Thomas*, tasked to “carry on the education that shall fit the Filipinos for their new citizenship” and close “a chasm” between Americans and Filipinos. As Kramer states, the Thomasites, as they were known, were instructed to bring into accord with “us,” “a people who neither know nor understand the underlying principles of our civilisation” (168-9). The Thomasites were meant to restore the foundation of US nationalism among Filipinos still in recovery from Emilio Aguinaldo’s First Philippine Republic defeat in the violent war of 1898-1901 that displaced tens of thousands of Filipinos and destroyed the economy (Kramer 169-170). The physical violence of war was replaced by imperial ideology. The key to this new colonising process was the decision to introduce a new foreign language, English, and enforce it as the medium of instruction. For Constantino, the English language became “the wedge that separated the Filipinos from their past and later was to separate educated Filipinos from the masses of their countrymen... This was the beginning of their education. At the same time, it was the beginning of their miseducation, for they learned no longer as Filipinos but as colonials” (25). He continues:

The new generation learned of the lives of American heroes, sang American songs, and dreamt of snow and Santa Claus... Thus, the Filipino past, which had already been quite obliterated by three centuries of Spanish tyranny, did not enjoy a revival under American colonialism. On the contrary, the history of our ancestors was taken up as if they were strange and foreign peoples who settled in these shores... We read about them as if we were tourists in a foreign land. (25)

Education in the Philippines today remains focused on catering to an overseas market, relying heavily on sending 10 per cent of its nearing 100 million population to work abroad. Philippine public education practice remains not dissimilar to American colonial practice: from Grade 3 through college, English is the medium of instruction in most education courses (Fullmer 5). Since the US supported the Marcos regime (1969-1986), the comparative advantage of the current Philippine economy is founded on the exportation of Filipino bodies throughout the world as cheap labour. Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW), of which some three million reside in the US, are widely praised as being “the best workers in the world” (that is, according to multiple Philippine labour administration reports, national and international media articles and popular blogs). Such is the reliance on OFWs that former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo coined the term Overseas Filipino Investor (OFI) to designate Filipino expatriates whose annual remittances create business, purchase property and repay interest from the World Bank debt. Thus proficiency in English remains highly valued as many of the colonised are still being processed for “integration into First World developmentalism through transnationalism and the global division of labour” (Tolentino 673). The price of transnationalism is paid for dearly by Third World people, most especially women, Tolentino argues, and thus feeds into the logic of colonialism that is, in fact, neocolonialism (673-4). Indeed, the culture of Filipino workers sent around the world as domestic workers, seafarers, and mail-order brides is as prevalent as ever.

Researching social media interaction in the Philippines is especially interesting. With 44 per cent of the population in the 18-24 age bracket, the Philippines today has transformed from being the text-messaging capital of the world to the social networking capital of the world. By the end of 2012, over 103 million SIM cards were actively in use on mobile phones in the Philippines, and over 33 million Filipinos online (Montecillo; BBC). Philippine educators are recognising the high levels of online activity students undertake, noting that Filipino youth are increasingly being educated through such online interactions (Bernabe; Fullmer). The neocolonial education of Filipinos demonstrates the historical impact of “miseducation.” Meanwhile the active Filipino online presence, particularly on social networking sites (including Facebook, YouTube, Instagram) demonstrates an increasingly globalised popular culture with inextricable links to the West, that at times serves as a platform to critically engage with US imperialism.

Against Essentialisms: Music and Postcolonial Identity in the Philippines

I hope that in due time the enchantment of Western civilisation shall gradually wear off and in its place a truly integrated Filipino consciousness will develop ever more richly as the spirit of a proud and sovereign people that it must be. (Felipe Padilla de Leon 274)

Establishing a postcolonial identity after “three hundred years in a monastery and a half-century in Hollywood” is not without challenges (Rosaldo 77). Stereotypes regarding the extensive history of imperial rule are stated and reinstated half-jokingly by Filipinos (as in Rosaldo’s statement), leading to a view of Filipinos as a people with no culture. Nationalist critics such as Doreen Fernandez have attacked the continuous US cultural imperialism over the Philippines, noting the domination of all forms of popular culture including American films, music, comics and literature over Filipino popular culture for decades stating that such “an active, ongoing, multimedia, multi-sensory bombardment” renders Filipinos “powerless and complacent” (Fernandez 38). Fernandez continues: “Before most Filipinos become aware of Filipino literature, song, dance, history ..., education, language ... the media have already made them alert to American life and culture and its desirability” (Fernandez qtd. in Lockard 164-5). Certainly, Filipino scholars have been divided on the values and meanings of popular culture in today’s society, and view popular culture products as “purely escapist slop concocted by the hegemonic order and which the undereducated and the underprivileged lap up to the max” (Flores 48).

While the Philippines operated as an American colony, schools were used as a site for Filipino dance preservation, including Spanish and American colonial dances. Dance remains an important facet of public school education today; however, with more of a focus on calisthenics over creativity. “Colonial identities can be interpreted through choreography,” argues dance scholar J. Lorenzo Perillo, and indeed such ideology is echoed in the CPDRC ethos as the inmates “demonstrate physical ability rather than develop an artistic concept” (Perillo 614). Watching the neat and orderly rows of hundreds of inmates dancing within the confines of an invisible square foot box and hardly ever coming into physical contact with their fellow dancers bears more resemblance to an imperial drill than to a dance/movement therapy initiative. It is the addition of popular music soundtracks that prevents the exercise from being deemed a purely militaristic endeavour.

Though CPDRC’s *Thriller* aims at “reducing gang violence and promoting discipline... [it] effectively extends racial and colonial inequalities,” thus it is crucial to “understand the deep-seated colonial contexts of dance in the Philippines” in order to situate *Thriller* accordingly (Perillo 608-613). Such restrained engagement underpins the stereotype that Philippine performers are “chameleons,” a mutable talent

that unconsciously imitates the original; more than any other Asian nation, the Philippines “seems to have been plagued with doubts about its cultural identity from both Asian and Western perspectives” (Diamond 141). Popular culture has the power and ability to manipulate minds but it can just as easily be turned against authorities as a weapon, as Lockard observed in his study of Philippine popular music practice. The choice of primarily Western pop music soundtracks – in particular American pop songs – for the Philippine dance programme is not surprising, given the vast, continued impact of the US imperialist project on the Philippines and Filipino people. What is significant in the production, uploading and digital sharing thereafter, of CPDRC’s *Thriller*, is how the Philippines is imagined – constructed, even – as a site for international intercultural encounters and exchange.

Permeable Boundaries: YouTube, Popular Music, and Prison

In a place where visitors are searched with military precision for any kind of contraband, it is notable that music, especially popular music, has the unique ability to permeate the maximum-security walls of the prison. The CPDRC performances serve to highlight the porous nature of music, in particular to song and dance’s ability to transcend physical borders and offer a sense of expression, a carefully framed celebration of liminal liberation otherwise unknown to those incarcerated. Popular music and dance have strong associations with feelings of liberty and hope, especially when utilised in a penal institution where prisoners’ autonomy is limited to the bare minimum. There are several cases of music and dance being utilised in prisons, most commonly as an explicit form of optional therapy offered to inmates, often alongside further education opportunities and art programmes (e.g. Pat Graney’s “Keeping the Faith” prison dance and performance project in the US, Pimlico Opera’s musical collaborations with the inmates of Wandsworth Prison, and “Jail Guitar Doors” – Billy Bragg’s campaign to give UK prisoners access to guitars). Of course such concepts of hope are questionable: is this hope real or illusory? Or is it a hope that popular music and dance can bring about a composite of reality and illusion? At CPDRC, the combination of popular music and dance performance bring about a hope that simultaneously exists as real, illusory, and perhaps somewhere in between.

Through this new dance-as-rehabilitation ideology delivered in choreographed moves and nostalgic pop songs, inmates have encompassed, with implicit or explicit coercion, a distinctive way of passing time, a way that some, if not many, inmates enjoy on some level. Garcia has found a way of getting inmates involved in a daily exercise plan, a feat that medical officials around the world have attempted to implement in prisoner health plans. And most prominently, Garcia adds

popular music to the equation, as he explains in an interview with *ABC News*:

While the goal is to keep the body fit in order to keep the mind fit, such may not actually happen if it is not done in a manner deemed pleasurable. Music, being the language of the soul, is added to that regimen. (Campbell, non-paginated)

The addition of music to the exercise routines gives a task that might ordinarily be seen as objectionable, a comparatively pleasurable appearance. Here, Garcia notes that it is music, not dance or exercise which is seen as activating pleasure for the inmate population. Music is presented as a collectively accepted, universally understood “language of the soul,” a concept frequently debated in history, from Greek classical dialogues to German philosophical discourses. Writing in the nineteenth-century, Arthur Schopenhauer declared, music “creates such a powerful reaction in man’s inmost depths, it is so thoroughly and profoundly understood by him as a uniquely universal language, even exceeding in clarity that of the phenomenal world itself” (324). As Garcia says, the goal of this programme is to “keep the body fit in order to keep the *mind* fit”: it seems, after all, that the physical exercise part of this programme is really subservient to the true goal, that is, to keep inmates mentally robust. In making such a statement then, Garcia is replicating a traditional argument, a historicised belief in music’s magnificence and ability to be truly universal. Furthermore this statement indicates at least two possible interpretations. Firstly it suggests a holistic approach, a cost-effective method of keeping the inmates in good health throughout their incarceration. Secondly, however, it may refer to keeping the inmates mentally fit in order to absorb the prison’s – and by extension the state’s – disciplinary ideology. Yet the meaning inferred and interpretations yielded from Garcia’s statements are not wholly self-evident, as the variety of YouTube comments alone suggests. The performances are justified, and feed into, the discourse that surrounds them, and conversely, such discourse is constantly justified by everyday performances, creating a digital feedback loop with real-life, human consequences.

In his essay “Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences,” Homi Bhabha argues that in order to examine cultural problems of difference and diversity, we must look at the boundaries between cultures. It is precisely at this boundary, at the point at which two (or more) cultures meet, where cultural differences can be seen (Bhabha 1994). At CPDRC the boundaries between a Philippine prison, popular music, mass entertainment and Internet cultures are undoubtedly blurred. Since its foundation in 2005, YouTube has demonstrated how video sharing impacts greatly on Internet culture operations and communications. In the Web 2.0 era, sites like YouTube operate as important locations for citizen journalists, who take advantage of a world where most people have cameras embedded in their ubiquitous cellphones (Jenkins). CPDRC’s performances represent the very form of participatory culture that

YouTube has become so famed for, but unlike the majority of the early YouTube “most watched” videos that centred on personal, DIY expression, CPDRC’s videos demonstrate that participatory culture should not be blindly celebrated as it does not automatically equate progress. Speaking from a US socio-political perspective in 2007, media scholar Henry Jenkins informed us that we

need to be concerned with the participation gap as much as we are concerned with the digital divide. The digital divide has to do with access to technology; the participation gap has to do with access to cultural experiences and the skills that people acquire through their participation within ongoing online communities and social networks (Jenkins, para. 11).

CPDRC’s *Thriller* and other musical repertoire are symptomatic of YouTube’s power to express a form of cultural community collaboration. Yet the inmates’ active participation in one of the most popular online communities highlights the parasitic relationship that can exist between those captured on video and those profiting from their labour, particularly in light of YouTube’s partnership with Google which monetized the site at an unprecedented rate (e.g. particularly through the use of roll-out advertisements and increasing pressure on YouTubers to sign in using their full name). For the inmates, there is no reciprocal relationship in terms of Internet revenue. They remain the subject of the viewer’s gaze, their individual bodies vanishing into a collective vision of orange and black. They have limited power to return the gaze to the audience present in Cebu, and they, the seen, are powerless to participate in the YouTube comments or social networking undertaken *about* them by millions of viewers who tune in on smartphones and tablets across the world. To many viewers, the inmates remain an entertaining image, a powerless commodity that appears to present the inmates as themselves but ultimately functions as a fantasy-production that glosses over years spent awaiting justice.

Conclusion

When examining history from present vantage points, it becomes relatively easy to reflect upon CPDRC’s *Thriller* in light of the 1904 Philippine Exposition performances at St. Louis. As photographs and memorabilia from both events steadily become part of an ever-expanding online archive, history and the digital serve to level out, compress and decontextualise. Both the St. Louis and Cebuano performances stress ideologies of progress made visible – “progress” according to Western tastes and standards. The Philippine Exhibit at St. Louis explicitly and implicitly served as an exercise in governmental propaganda, to justify the United States’ recent acquisition, purposely depicting the native tribes and villages in such a way as to reinforce the US as paternalistic missionaries, dutifully “taming” the wayward Philippine peoples. At the most

fundamental level, both displays were presented to international audiences without the performers' full consent. And both performances serve to illustrate the contemporary close, complex Philippine-US relationship that remains as close and nonetheless complicated today as it was one hundred years ago. By conflating two performances of the subaltern Filipino – the displaced slave forced into exhibition, and the hybrid, postcolonial dancing inmate – both performances display how inter- or transcultural, globalised communication can occur in ostensibly innocuous performances, that simultaneously split subjectivity, existing in Bhabha's much-discussed "third space." Third space theory, first put forward in Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994), becomes relevant in the CPDRC's digitised and archived performances, performances that are in constant transition and interpretation. Here, the third space might signify a particularly subversive place (or non-place) exemplified through the mimicry of hybridised cultures and identities, whose agency can be read against the authority of the state – in this case, the US. As much as the St. Louis World's Fair enforced exhibition of indigenous Filipinos, which reflects the orientalist, racist values of the organisers at the turn of the century, such ideology has been widely critiqued by many both in and outside the academe. Yet we – the public, mass media audience – find ourselves, a century later, seduced and (however temporarily) excited by portrayals of incarcerated, Filipino men, dancing to a host of Western soundtracks from Michael Jackson to Queen and the Village People. Audiences make, due to the implied rehabilitative nature of the programme, the widespread assumption that popular music could only but equate pleasure. Because of its initial appearance on the user-generated website YouTube, audiences – and inmates too – assume that their "musicking" (Small 1998) performances could only be an irrevocable force for good.

As this essay has shown, performance of US popular music and dance continues to play a dual role in contemporary Philippine culture that is more often than not projected online. This serves, on the one hand, to legitimise and maintain imperialist or authoritarian rule while, on the other, to resist the "forces of oppression while articulating a vision of freedom" (Lockard 170). In troubling the pervasive academic marketability of the term "postcolonial," McClintock asked,

if "post-colonial" theory has sought to challenge the grand march of western historicism with its entourage of binaries (self-other, metropolis-colony, center-periphery, etc.), the term 'post-colonialism' nonetheless re-orientes the globe once more around a single, binary opposition: colonial/ post-colonial. (85)

This case study demonstrates the extent to which the CPDRC inmates perform the postcolonial not as a single binary opposition, but rather as a continuing and lived process that remains today. Their performances can be considered "post"-colonial in that their existence, allegedly as a kind of rehabilitation for the inmates, subconsciously makes attempts to go "beyond" the St. Louis Fair (to evoke Patajo-Legasto's key question). Yet

if one considers the postcolonial as a temporal dimension, the constant replay, global recirculation, and international interpretation of their performances fail in the impossible task of signifying the closure of the American colonial event. Their performance (and re-performances) of postcoloniality force us to consider a more nuanced concept of colonialisms, both post- and neo-, that can be comprehended outside of such fixed axes of power.

The challenges of establishing a Philippine cultural identity after three hundred years in a monastery and a half-century in Hollywood highlights the inherent paradox faced by new mediated subjects. On the one hand, digital media platforms have given a voice to postcolonial and subaltern subjects; on the other, new media technologies simultaneously problematise the Filipino performers, presenting them as uniform, “highly trainable” (US Embassy 2007), Orientalist stereotypes, powerless to personally participate in the digital swirl within which they operate. As such, I suggest that this quasi-MTV style video, with hundreds upon hundreds of clearly marked Filipino prisoners at its core, becomes a metaphor for twenty-first-century postcolonial Philippine attempts to assert independence from the US. The dancing inmates continue to dance *for their lives*, reinforcing essentialism with every step day in day out, while simultaneously attempting to assert agency through the very moves that bind them. The digital circulation of CPDRC’s performances are at once complex extensions of the US colonial education experience, through the imposition of American popular music and dance performance onto captive subjects, mirroring US acts of patriarchal imperialism upon the Philippines. In CPDRC’s performances, we see how warden Garcia has *replaced* the US, as the warden enacts the role of contemporary “bearer of benevolence” (Racelis and Ick), a father-like figure tending to his wayward flock. Garcia commands, or commandeers, the mandatory performances of 1500 Cebuano inmates to dance in unison and sing along to Anglo-American pop songs in the language originally enforced by the US colonial project. Moreover, in celebrating such spectacles uncritically we divert attention from the fact that imperialisms may just as easily be perpetuated from within.

The dancing inmates’ continuing performances since 2006, both live in the prison yard and mediated through computer screens around the world, are parallel to and “bound up with the audience’s perception and expectations, which shape and are shaped by technological change,” a change that echoes what Philip Auslander terms the “technology of reproduction” (158-9). As exceptional as the first viewing of *Thriller* may seem for many audiences, and I count myself among them, the truth is that the endless repetition of CPDRC’s pop dance videos on social networking sites like YouTube, Dailymotion, and Facebook, transforms the exceptional into the mundane to the point that such videos become part and parcel of a perfectly banal online experience. Nonetheless, the symbiotic relationship between the live and technologically transmitted remains; attempts to curtail the live performances and recordings of the

dance performances in 2010 caused over half of the inmates to refuse to participate. Legacies of colonialism and what French theorist Louis Althusser (1971) terms the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) of subjection run deep. The inmates' physical movements embody their remoulding as social subjects, and thus what is normally invisible to the outside world, the shaping of human subjects, is made visible within CPDRC and beyond through globally disseminated YouTube videos.

However, it would be erroneous to ignore the potential benefits that may be experienced through participation in a large-scale exercise activity. Through their choreographed reinventions of iconic popular songs, the CPDRC inmates have demonstrated several facts. They prove that although a person may be incarcerated, through the permeable nature of popular music and dance they can remain a valued and *valuable* part of their community, playing an active role in the shaping of their island and their country by establishing and participating in a tourism and performance site. The prisoners' status as social waste has been confronted, albeit because of society's voracious appetite for consumption, the cost is in becoming "conspicuously consumed" themselves (Adams 106). The CPDRC's performances are deemed powerful – valued and valuable both by the crowds of live tourists present in the prison yard to those viewing from their mobile technologies thousands of miles away from Cebu – in their concealment of neocolonial nostalgia while being at once entrenched in an obvious 80s nostalgic rhetoric. This twofold exploration of nostalgia both inflates and reduces the significance of their YouTube performance, which conveys and reproduces a complex ideology of neocolonial progress at the expense of other experiences.

That the CPDRC's performances recreate nostalgic fantasy is imperative to this spectacular pop music production, and is manifested threefold. First, the prison performances reveal a longing for an idealized past: through enacting Garcia's projected nostalgia for a universal language of rehabilitation on criminal bodies. Secondly, this enforced performance of nostalgia can create a longing for autonomy as well as immunise inmate performers through the momentary liberty afforded through musical performance. Thirdly, it displays a kind of cultural hybridization, calling to mind what McClintock's neocolonial nostalgia through combining American pop iconography and Eighties archival choreography within the confines of a contemporary Philippine prison setting. Yet whilst I consider their performance to be entrenched in nostalgic rhetoric this should not in any way depoliticise their performance. In reality, I argue for the opposite. To read the inmates' performance simply as an exploration of (80s) nostalgia, as it so often is in YouTube comments and media coverage, both inflates and reduces the significance of their YouTube video, which conveys and reproduces a complex ideology of neocolonial progress. Their thrilling, nostalgic performances, that continue to be disseminated globally on digital screens,

are politically productive despite and precisely *because* of the range of embedded nostalgic gazes we identify without necessarily noticing.

Notes

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