Asian Studies Review
September 2005, Vol. 29, pp. 233–246

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Piña Cloth, Identity and the Project of Philippine Nationalism

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Introduction

In the early 1990s, with increasing pressure from the economic and cultural effects of post-modern development, Philippine President Fidel Ramos orchestrated a nationalist construction under the rubric of "Filipinism" (Bankoff and Weekley, 2002, pp. 37–39). Anchored in the writings of the national hero Jose Rizal, Filipinism was a special kind of nationalism that could be used only by Filipinos; it attempted to unite people through reference to a shared past, albeit an invented one, by employing mainstream symbols of citizenship such as the flag, national anthem, and historic myths of military conquests (Bankoff and Weekley, 2002, p. 38).

Within the current global framework exploring the flows of persons, places and things, new research questions the extent to which such visions of the nation remain the pre-eminent entity around which people shape identity. Past studies of national identity construction, often housed within political economy and history, focused on elements of so-called "high" culture (e.g., major works of art and notable religious or state monuments), or on spectacular and heroic events and ceremonies commemorating the "birth" of a nation. These are reified notions of culture and identity that, while still relevant to some degree, comprise only a small part of the mix of things that people use to situate themselves within regions. Much of the discourse on identity in the Philippines, for example, suggests that Filipinos are notably unattached to such portrayals of the imaginary nation (Pertierra, 2002). Yet, research on national identity in Southeast Asia has, until recently, provided few insights into alternative sources on which people draw to experience and manifest nationhood (see Rosaldo, 2003). An emerging new literature suggests that people increasingly craft personalised forms of identity by drawing on the "banal" material culture of everyday life – the mundane experiences of daily cultural practice (see, for example, Billig, 1995; Edensor, 2002).

In this paper, I explore the varied channels through which Philippine designers use such quotidian forms of expression, namely garments made from local piña [pineapple] cloth,

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ISSN 1035-7823 print/ISSN 1467-8403 online/05/030233-14
DOI: 10.1080/10357820500270144

to fashion a national identity that is contested, multiple and fluid. Piña garments, once the preferred – albeit expensive – clothing form of the lowland Philippine majority (in the 1700s), fell out of favour and use by the mid-1800s with the adoption of more "modern" Western imports. As often occurs with such indigenous cloth production, piña was subsequently marginalised as a minor material cultural form.[1] In the 1980s, however, a new breed of Philippine designer revived piña production and reconfigured this alienated symbol of locality into a flexible marker of the nation – a marker whose contemporary application makes and remakes connections between the local and the national, the national and the global, the everyday and the extraordinary. As creators of alternative meanings, these players call on piña cloth and dress to imagine the nation in ways that contrast with the more prevalent conventional symbols of national heroics.

I argue, then, like Geoffrey Cubitt (1998, p. 3), that although nations may appear rigidly institutionalised with well-defined symbols that denote immediate recognition, an individual's sense of identity can, in fact, remain "elusive and indeterminate, perpetually open to context, to elaboration and to imaginative reconstruction". Thus national identity is most often constituted from a broad "cultural matrix" that provides "innumerable points of [inter]connection" through which different players can fix meaning to a variety of cultural forms (Edensor, 2002, p. vii). As Michael Billig's (1995, p. 8) concept of "banal nationalism" demonstrates, identity is rooted in the "embodied habits" and in the "forgotten reminders" of daily social life, rather than in mainstream symbols. Philippine designers have nurtured the revival of piña cloth, an historically-rooted yet everyday cultural form, by distributing it through contemporary popular culture such as fashion shows and new garment styles. In this way, it mingles with other iconic elements (e.g., music, body painting) that signify the nation in multiple and contested ways, and thus mitigates against exclusive and singular representations.

In the section that follows, I examine some of the literature on nation-building projects among established nation-states. To situate contemporary piña production, I briefly outline the history of piña weaving in the central Philippines; I then highlight some of the channels through which contemporary Philippine designers using piña cloth materialise and engage interregional nationhood in the realms of design, production and cultural performance.

Materialising Nations

The island geography and varied cultures of the Filipino nation-state make it difficult to imagine any sense of natural nationhood. The Philippines is an anomalous country within Southeast Asia because it has not experienced any enduring pre-modern cultural or religious history from which the "ideological or symbolic aspects of modern nation states" are usually forged; and the central government's initiatives to introduce unifying economic and ideological projects are fairly recent (Bankoff and Weekley, 2002, pp. 2, 9). The resultant character of the Philippine postcolonial state, then, is one that illustrates uneven success in portraying "a unified, imagined community through 'nation-building exercises'" as implemented, for example, in Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore (Bankoff and Weekley, 2002, p. 9; Pertierra, 2002, p. 85). The legacy of American occupation (1898–1946) left all too familiar Western practices that have generated a discourse bemoaning the "damaged [Philippine] culture ... a nation not only without nationalism, but also without much national pride" (Fallows, 1987, p. 49). The Philippines emerges as an entity whose different histories have established its political borders, while the

idea of a national identity is "largely a contrived one" resulting more from government "manipulation of appropriate images" than from any "sense of racial or cultural homogeneity" (Bankoff and Weekley, 2002, p. 2).

Mainstream symbols (flag, anthem, founding fathers/heroes) sanctioned by the state, and including popular accepted icons (e.g., national flower, animal), have thus become powerful building blocks in the manufacture and "continual flagging" of a national consciousness (Billig, 1995, p. 8; Bankoff and Weekley, 2002, p. 3). The lack of a "pre-existing 'centralizing force'" (Bankoff and Weekley, 2002, p. 10) in the Philippines, however, has left cultural gaps or contested spaces in the invention of Filipinism that can be potentially captured by emergent symbols such as piña.

Benedict Anderson's (1991) concept of nationhood highlights how the Philippine state has been complicit in manipulating the country's constructed identity. He points out (1991, p. 4) that Western manifestations of nationhood are historically contingent: "... nationality ... nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artifacts of a particular kind" that only came into being towards the end of the eighteenth century. Anderson (1991, pp. 6–7) identifies "the nation" as "an imagined political community", which is imagined as "both limited and sovereign".

Whereas Anderson (1991, pp. 33–35) identifies the crucial role of print media in the formation of nations, Richard Handler (1985) suggests a broader role for cultural phenomena by tracing the construction of a distinctive regional ideology in the French-Canadian province of Québec. He demonstrates (1985, pp. 209, 211) how the provincial government, through a series of initiatives in heritage legislation, "sacrialised" particular monuments and objects of art to consciously establish a naturalised "culture-bearing" nation, or in this case, province. In so doing, "cultural content becomes the very body of the nation" (e.g., Québec), attributing an inclusive identity to those within provincial boundaries and excluding people and elements from outside as "not authentic" (Handler, 1985, p. 211). Orvar Löfgren (1993, pp. 162–63) similarly observes that the concept of the nation provides "fixed ideas about what a national cultural heritage should include"; nations thus "amass a symbolic capital of myths, heroes, occasions of national destiny and pomp, and develop patterns for national iconography and aesthetics".

While nation-building projects are customarily premised on such overt and self-conscious displays, new research explores how previously overlooked spheres of material and popular culture are emerging as essential components of such identity constructions (e.g., Edensor, 2002; Schrift, 2001). For Edensor (2002, pp. vi–vii, p. 2), national identity does not reside in "high" or "official[ly sanctioned]" creations, but rather emerges out of the objects that people use in everyday life and in performance – dance, sport and carnival. Melissa Schrift (2001), in her study of the history and contemporary revival of Chairman Mao badges in China, similarly demonstrates the power of material goods to parallel, intersect and eventually subvert a centralised national voice. The government believed that by requiring its citizens to wear standardised Mao badges, people would internalise the dogmatic nationalist ideology of the Chinese Cultural Revolution (Schrift, 2001, p. 4). Instead, people have diverted this ubiquitous item of dress from state-inspired propaganda to personalised statements that "resist an essentialised Chinese national identity" (Schrift, 2001, p. 201). Schrift (2001), like Edensor (2002), demonstrates that people mobilise a variety of cultural forms, both formal and popular, to construct an eclectic national identity that dispels any notion of nations as natural.

Renato Rosaldo (2003, pp. 2–3) focuses on the concerns of "subordinated subjects" or peripheral groups to reposition nationhood within the concept of "cultural citizenship". This term emphasises how marginalised people claim rights of citizenship – their entitlements and aspirations (jobs, voting, dignity) – through socially and historically constructed means premised on "local definitions" of community, identity and membership (Rosaldo, 2003, p. 3; 1994, pp. 243–44, p. 251). Rosaldo thus shifts attention away from the international conventions most often used in the service of nationhood. Instead, employing cultural citizenship, he (2003, p. 13) identifies specific kinds of participation that diverse groups and individuals use to realise cohesiveness and difference in national social projects.

In this light, Featherstone (1991, p. 22) argues that the values expressed by the old cultural guardians are currently being challenged by what he terms "new cultural intermediaries" – a small segment of the contemporary middle class who possess knowledge of popular and material culture, and claim status on the basis of this expertise. The national-cultural terrain, then, is now characterised by a plethora of interest groups – experts, aficionados and consumers who champion a bewildering range of cultural forms and practices. This is particularly relevant to the Philippine case. By challenging and transforming imposed ideologies and policies these emergent players decentre mainstream symbols of nationhood and move alternative cultural forms to the forefront of popular attention.

The formation of a Filipino nation began at the end of the nineteenth century with the deposition of Spanish colonisers (1565–1898). No sooner had the new republic been claimed, however, than it, in turn, was deposed in 1898 by a new American colonial power. Even Philippine independence in 1946 and the lengthy and rigid regime of President Ferdinand Marcos (see Quizon, this issue) could not refocus the country's myriad historical past. As Raul Pertierra (1999, p. 301) argues, such circumstances of national birth mean that "the nexus in the [Philippine] nation state is insufficiently" developed among the country's many component parts.

Building on the optimism of the post-revolution promise of Corazon Aquino's presidency (1986), and to reassert a place for the Philippines in a globalising Southeast Asia, in the early 1990s, President Fidel Ramos fashioned Filipinism as the new state ideology – the true Filipino "spirit" (Bankoff and Weekley, 2002, p. 38). As a national policy it mirrored that of other Asian regimes that have sought political legitimacy through historical validation whether or not that "past was authenticated" (Bankoff and Weekley, 2002, p. 37; Rafael, 2000). The policy's goals were to be achieved through a "people empowerment strategy" that encouraged social initiatives primarily from the economic projects of communities and businesses (Bankoff and Weekley, 2002, pp. 22–23, pp. 37–39).[2] The time was ripe for non-governmental players to call into service alternative cultural ingredients to fill the so-called hollow centre of Philippine culture.

Piña Culture and History

Piña – a diaphanous cloth woven from the fibres of the leaves of the pineapple plant – fulfils the spirit of this initiative. It is generally thought that the pineapple, a New World plant, was brought to the Philippines in the first half of the sixteenth century by Spanish colonisers who stocked it on their ships as food. When the pineapple grew

successfully in early central island settlements, mid-sixteenth century accounts report that artisans already skilled in weaving fabrics from local plants such as banana [abaca] utilised piña as an additional resource (Montinola, 1991, pp. 10–11). Most piña cloth is still produced in small workshops in the central Visayan provinces of Aklan and Iloilo, Panay Island, the lowland Christian areas of the Philippines most influenced by Spanish colonialism. Due to the limited supplies of raw materials and to the labour-intensive character of production, piña cloth was expensive to purchase and, thus, was most often used by the wealthier elite. In the seventeenth century, Spanish missionaries, building on indigenous skills and on new techniques and patterns introduced by immigrant Chinese and Indian artisans, encouraged the art of embroidery by artisans in Lumban, Laguna province, south of Manila (Davis, 1991). Piña cloth woven on Panay Island and embroidered in Lumban sold for triple the value of plain piña (Montinola, 1991, p. 43). Piña, most popular from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries, was used in women's blouses [*baro* or *camisa*] worn with a detachable shawl collar [*pañuelo*], skirts [*saya*] and the now generic men's national shirt [*barong Tagalog*] (Welters, 1997).

During this time, Manila functioned as an international port servicing the Spanish galleon trade between Acapulco, Mexico, and the Philippines, as well as hosting European and American ships involved in Asian trade. By the 1840s, piña, and other textiles, formed a substantial part of Philippine exports. Piña, in particular, was used locally by the elite classes as a sign of status, and was exported by the Spanish as a commodity that could compete with European lace, in vogue in Europe at this time (Montinola, 1991, p. 13). By the 1860s, European royalty received gifts of Philippine piña from loyal subjects to commemorate coronations and weddings (Montinola, 1991, pp. 18–19). In the second half of the nineteenth century, however, textile exports from the Philippines dwindled dramatically as economic development shifted to sugar cane. Indigenous cloth production, generally, continued to decline as less expensive British and American factory-made fabrics that signalled the move to modernity increasingly claimed the market for textiles. By the early twentieth century, piña weaving had all but disappeared, reduced to a marginalised cottage industry that responded to small, irregular orders (Montinola, 1991; McCoy, 1982).

It was not until 1988 that the Patrones de Casa Manila, a group of art businesspeople and designers, spearheaded the revival of the piña industry by working with both government and non-government associations.[3] Building on the wave of Filipinism, but refashioning it to better suit their vision, these designers crafted piña cloth into an alternative and multifaceted symbol of nationhood.

Designing Nationalisms

Because material culture such as clothing is often so entirely integrated into daily life, earlier scholarship saw little need to document this functional cultural form. Current research clearly demonstrates, however, that people innovatively use clothing and textiles to fashion individualised identities in a globalising world (see, for example, Barnes and Eicher, 1993; Entwistle and Wilson, 2001; Hendrickson, 1996; Hodkinson, 2002; Jones and Leshkowich, 2003; O'Kelly, 1992). As Karen Tranberg Hansen (2000, p. 2) argues, dress is unique in the manner in which it continues to mediate between self and society in varied ways. Analysing transformations in piña clothing – an ethnic dress style with its own unique history – makes visible how previously marginal cultural ingredients can manifest a national identity, but one

that is polysemic and contested. Within the Philippines, group affiliation through identification with specific places remains a strong bond. Thus people adopt new dress forms that simultaneously speak of their inclusion as Filipinos while asserting a distinctive style indicative of social change. As Joanne Finkelstein (1998, pp. 5–6, quoted in Hansen, 2003, p. 303) suggests, "the actual function of fashion is to give the appearance of change and novelty without actually precipitating any ruptures in the status quo".

The edgy position of contemporary piña speaks to this premise. Designers chose piña because it is a textile that is seen as unique to Filipinos. At the same time, it is an expensive item that retains its value as a symbol of status, and that, to survive, must continue to be supported by the upper class. The challenge for designers' national project of Filipinism, then, is to resolve how to use piña and make it a Filipino thing when in fact only a minority can afford it. The Philippine elites of the 1990s were more interested in dressing in haute couture (Roces, forthcoming); thus, in order to revive piña, designers had to make it equal, or elevate it, to the status of this desirable dress style. Philippine designers succeeded in reviving piña cloth, not only by reinventing it as haute couture, but also by producing a more economical, albeit hybrid, consumer-accessible, ready-to-wear line of garments.

One of the main objectives of Philippine designers, then, is to build on the predilection for interrelated dress forms by grounding their designs in both mainstream fashion styles and indigenous Philippine fabrics. In so doing, they create a "conflated" (Causey, 1999, pp. 432–33), yet culturally distinct, clothing statement. As Philippine journalist Ching Alano (2000, p. 39) explains, designers seek to "balance innovative adaptations and clothing heritage preservation". Designer Ruth Tapala[4] similarly explains that her "vision" is to "[m]erge art with fashion and forge links between ancient heritage and modern society" (Alano, 2000, p. 40). These designers formulate new aesthetic standards that, while remaining rooted in fabrics and styles with a distinctive historical and cultural heritage, selectively incorporate both regional and non-Philippine elements to proclaim broader appeal and availability.

Many of the most prominent Philippine fashion personalities, for example, work in both Filipiniana and mainstream silhouettes, and commonly apply to both dress forms easily recognisable embellishments such as the distinctive Lumban-style embroidery and beadwork. They take a "this plus that" sort of construction to their design strategy – the "this of global modernity plus the that" of timeless indigenous tradition (Silverstein, 2001, p. 23) – the same formula that characterises the nation-building projects of recognised nation-states (Chattergee, 1993, p. 6; Löfgren, 1993, p. 169, quoted in Silverstein, 2001, p. 23).

Both scholars and the public have often decried such crossing of "aesthetic boundaries" as indicative of cultural contamination (Kapchan and Strong, 1999, p. 239). Recent studies, however, in conjunction with the expanding literature on globalisation, welcome such cultural graftings by employing different analytical terms. These include "hybridity", "syncretism", "bricolage" (Kapchan and Strong, 1999, pp. 239–40), "creolisation" (Howes, 1996, pp. 5–8), and "conflation" (Causey, 1999, pp. 432–33). Concepts such as "border zones" celebrate the "piecing together [of things] out of heterogeneous elements"; they highlight the ongoing oscillations in objects that make material relations between people, things and broader identities (Spyer, 1998, p. 3; see also Friedman, 1999, p. 247).

Historically, piña cloth has always been subject to different cross-cultural influences experienced through its role as a commodity in international trade. The revival of piña, then, needs to be situated within the social and political movements in which such border crossings take place. When we focus on national identity as envisioned, for example, by piña designers, we see how it is peoples' agency, at various levels, that

formulates cultural conditions of creativity and determines how mixed expressive forms may be "reassessed, redrawn and at times, overturned" (Spyer, 1998, p. 3).

With the new brand of Philippine democracy in the 1990s, fashion designers such as Carol Abay used piña textiles to reclaim a sense of national pride in place by casting this cloth within the national fashion discourse, albeit in a number of forms. The following case studies draw on the innovative work of Abay and other prominent designers to explore the shifting dynamics of Philippine nationhood through shifts in this banal material form.

Crafting a National Style

Carol Abay began her career in the textile industry in the mid-1970s, working as a designer of flat textile patterns in her family's manufacturing business in Iloilo province. She moved into the fashion industry in the early 1980s with the drive to revive the older Filipino garb – the *baro't saya* [blouse and skirt] that, along with piña, had almost disappeared from popular usage. As one of the key players in the Patrones de Casa Manila, Carol explains that she wants to create a composite style that simultaneously says "Filipiniana" and encompasses the many vernacular textile traditions that comprise the Philippines. Although she admits to browsing through European and American fashion and lifestyle magazines, Carol retains a distinctively Filipino quality in her designs. She explains: "The Filipino style has always been an ever-changing one. And I make my clothes so as not to deviate from this idea and our history" (Carcamo, 1995, p. 24).

Carol works closely with small workshops in Kalibo, Aklan province to produce piña fabrics specifically suited to the design and style of her garments including unique colour and pattern combinations. After securing the woven piña yardage from Aklan, Carol ships the fabric to Lumban where artisans embellish the cloth with her versions of classic Philippine embroidery motifs. The fabrics are then sent back to her Manila workshop where still other craftswomen apply beads and sequins to her Filipiniana and more Western silhouette garments. A collection of five square piña shawls or *pañuelo*, the characteristic stole of Visayan women, featured in a 2003 exhibition at the Textile Museum of Canada, displays Carol's prowess in innovative Philippine design. Maintaining the square shawl form enables women today to wear this cloth around their shoulders either folded into a triangle or into the traditionally pleated accordion-style. These new shawls further assert their composite nature through the embroidered and woven patterns that are drawn from a variety of sources, but rendered within the customary centrefield-border layout design of the cloth (Milgram, 2003). In addition, for higher-end items, Carol may decorate her garments with hand painted and applied gold leaf designs that recall motifs on other material media such as ceramics, wood and lacquer.

Promoting her personal discourse of Filipinism, Carol explains that she "believes in the quality of the natural materials here in the Philippines" and thus is continually looking for different ways to incorporate these elements into her work. To this end, in 1998, she initiated a practice of colouring piña cloth, usually a monochromatic off-white or beige-hued fabric, with synthetic and natural dyes, the latter obtained from the northern Luzon Cordillera provinces of Ifugao and Abra. For more extensive commissions, Carol ships her fabrics to the Cordillera where local artisans dye the cloth; for smaller orders she dyes the cloth in her Manila workshop using the stock of Cordilleran dyestuffs she keeps on hand. Since 1998, Carol has worked with the Philippine Textile and Research

Institute (PTRI) to organise a series of natural dye workshops in Aklan for local piña manufacturers, using natural dyestuffs she has collected from northern Cordillera sources. This conflated style of piña cloth – woven in Aklan, embroidered in Lumban and dyed either in the Cordillera, Manila or Aklan, but from Cordillera natural dyes – made its acclaimed national debut in the late 1990s.

Local newspapers eagerly publicise such innovations by reporting events at which Carol's new creations are unveiled. Coverage of a society wedding in January 2001 featured multiple photographs of the wedding party participants each bedecked in brilliantly tie-dyed red and blue piña fabrics (Vergara, 2002, p. E1). These fabrics, in fact, recall the signature 1970s tie-dye designs also being revived in North American dress. Although other designers are currently replicating their own versions of this popular style, Carol Abay's distinctive designs continue to hold centre stage, as evidenced in their regular appearance in the media and in fashion show performances throughout the Philippines (e.g., Carcamo, 1995; Cheng, 2002; Vergara, 2002). As Carol herself explains:

> Creating Filipiniana is how I want to be known in history. I also want to say to the younger generation that they can wear Filipino-made things without having to wear Filipiniana ... I am known for Filipiniana, but these can be translated to modern, very today, very wearable clothes (Alano, 2000, pp. 40, 41).

The mosaic-like dresses hanging in Carol's boutique rearticulate a statement of national identity that while anchored in the tradition of piña, speaks of border-crossing as integral to their meaning. Designers such as Carol bring together varied regional resources to mould a polysemic and personalised version of Filipinism. In so doing, they have usurped control of how the nation may have envisioned Filipinism being publicly portrayed; and, as the following cases demonstrate, these players have opened channels for smaller, less well-known agents to craft new livelihoods and identity projects from the so-called banality of everyday cloth.

In 1989, husband and wife team Albert and Mary Cruz established their piña weaving business in Kalibo, Aklan province. In response to the chronic shortage of piña fibres for weaving, and in order to meet the growing demand for piña cloth from young designers, the Cruz workshop introduced the idea of mixing fibres in piña cloth construction. In 1995, shortly after Philippine agricultural colleges developed local sources of silk, the Cruzes started to use silk as the warp (foundation) yarns to create what is now termed piña-seda – or pineapple-silk – cloth. This initiative revolutionised the piña industry. Piña-seda is easier to weave, more flexible to wear and less expensive to produce than pure piña. The practice of combining pineapple and silk yarns has now been widely adopted by other small Aklan producers, resulting in the cloth's wider availability.

The Cruz workshop further distinguishes its production by altering the application of the *suksuk* or inlay weaving technique. Formerly used exclusively to weave classic Philippine floral motifs, the Cruzes currently use *suksuk* to weave narrative designs with local themes. These include pictorial scenes of vernacular architecture [nipa huts] set amidst coconut groves, or scenes more characteristic of "folk" paintings such as that of *carabao* [water buffalo], the Philippine national animal, ploughing rice fields. These heritage motifs are often woven on fabrics tailored into Western-style rectangular shawls or on their new (in 2001) line of narrow mini-scarves designed for everyday wear. The Cruzes also design and produce an extraordinary line of piña-seda shawls that feature shaggy

cut-weft floats protruding from the woven fabric surface. These unique garments, some of which were mounted in the Textile Museum of Canada's 2003 exhibition of Philippine textiles (Milgram, 2003), recall the most edgy innovations in contemporary garment design.[5] Another emerging designer-manufacturer, Margorie Vistro, of Aklan Piña Textiles, combines piña with a variety of different fibres to create innovative textiles for home furnishing and fashion accessories. In her Kalibo workshop she mixes piña with cotton, abaca [banana] and even polyester to weave stronger fabrics that are more suitable for use in cushion covers, table and furniture throws, and small utility bags (see also Baga-Reyes, 2003, pp. F2–5). Such initiatives dispute the lingering dichotomy between the modernity of global fashion and the tradition of "past-oriented" or "ethnic" dress as suggested in some scholarship (e.g., Eicher and Sumberg, 1995, pp. 300–02). By developing such diversity in the style and composition of piña cloth, Philippine designers have, in effect, democratised this material culture form.[6]

Performing Nationalism

In close partnership with piña production is the performative channel through which these textiles manifest identity, namely the fashion show. For example, each of Carol Abay's fashion shows, many of which I have attended since 1995, is contextualised within national Filipino themes. Through this very public forum, a Philippine functional cloth such as piña is called into the service of nation building, as well as private industry. In March 1995, for example, Carol presented a fashion show entitled *Pintados. Pintados* is the name given by the Spaniards to the sixteenth-century tattooed Visayans of the central Philippines (Casal and Jose, 1981, p. 88). To remind Filipinos that Philippine culture was richly varied before the arrival of Europeans, Carol's signature line of piña garments was accompanied by, and in some cases overlain with, regional handwoven textiles, beaded necklaces and armbands, and feathered headpieces, "all inspired by regional designs and handmade by Filipino craftspeople," as she explains in a well-illustrated Philippine newspaper report (Azarcon, 1995, p. 15).

In 1998, in conjunction with celebrations of the centennial of Philippine independence (12 June), Carol mounted a fashion show entitled *Ninay.* A mix of fashion and theatre, *Ninay* was based on Pablo Paterno's late nineteenth-century novel that depicted customs of daily life in different parts of the Philippines. Interviewed before the show, Carol explained: "This is a fashion show with a difference; this is not a production where clothes and costumes are featured one-dimensionally – they are worn and used to perform the varied aspects of Philippine culture and tradition" (Herrera, 1998, p. 32). Indeed, the set designer manufactured an equally nation-speak stage using indigenous objects such as *capiz* [shell] windows, rattan latticework, bamboo furniture, banana plants, coconuts and coconut leaves, but still arranged in accordance with his personal statement of the local. Recalling the floats of the 1998 centennial parade that displayed historical vignettes commemorating the political development of the nation in the spirit of Ramos' Filipinism (Bankoff and Weekley, 2002, p. 45), *Ninay*'s extraordinary staging similarly narrated a national story, but one told through the performance of popular culture: courting, dance, dress, music and food.

The country's predominant religion, Catholicism, to which more than 80 per cent of Filipinos adhere, has also provided fertile ground on which Philippine identity can be expressed through piña textile production and performance. Catholicism remains a

legacy of 300 years of Spanish colonisation of the lowlands and of aggressive missionisation in the highlands by Americans after the 1920s (Rafael, 2000). Catholic teachings have left indelible marks on Philippine culture, and this set of values provides an important source of identity for the majority of the population (Pertierra, 2002, pp. 90–91).

In 1998, inspired by the centennial celebrations, Dom Jose Miguel, OSB, a Benedictine monk, obtained the support of his Monastery in the southern Philippines to research indigenous Philippine weaving and cloth embellishment that could be used in the construction of Catholic liturgical vestments. The monastery regarded the incorporation of local fabrics into the design of contemporary liturgical vestments as a way to more closely relate Church practice to people's daily lives (San Juan, 1998). In his designs, Dom Jose Miguel substituted the ornately embellished fabrics more characteristic of earlier Church vestments with, among other fabrics, local piña and piña-seda textiles woven in Panay Island workshops. He tailored his fabrics into spare, minimalist styles and coloured them with natural dyes to differentiate the various vestments of the ministries within the Catholic Church. His simple patterns, such as assemblages of woven cross motifs and Celtic cross designs, rendered on stoles, albs, copes and chasubles, evoked their religious roots and, in turn, a component of Philippine national identity.[7] Whether or not the monastery can, in fact, highlight its intentions by employing piña garments, by using such liturgical vestments, the clergy have opened other avenues through which this alternative fabric can carve out its own version of a Philippine identity.

Conclusion

Filipiniana attire has become the appropriate dress for special occasions such as the State of the Nation Address, inaugurations into political office, and life-rite ceremonies such as weddings. Indeed, at the peak of Ramos' Filipinism project, the government initiated "Philippine Mondays" – a practice, albeit short-lived, in which government employees were encouraged to don Filipiniana attire every Monday. Piña becomes part of this new tradition since those politicians, in particular, who are expected to wear Filipiniana and who want to represent themselves as nationalist icons choose piña, not only for its "Filipino quality" but also for the status it represents. At the same time, contemporary Philippine designers have refashioned the character of Filipiniana attire into a style that speaks of multiplicity. At such special occasions and on national holidays, then, one is as likely to see attendees wearing Filipiniana that innovatively combines mainstream and Filipino garment styles, fabrics and embellishments as one is to see participants wearing traditional Filipino styles in pure piña.[8]

Nationalist agendas thus cannot possibly incorporate the whole matrix of peoples' concerns and positions. In her work in the United States and Australia, Lyn Spillman (1997) argues that national identity is the symbolic elaboration of an imagined community into which members of that community insert themselves in different ways and to varying degrees. Assuming that people will wholeheartedly adopt official symbols denies the alternate paths that individuals pursue to capture and craft personalised spaces within the nation state. The current initiatives of Philippine designers clearly speak to Spillman's premise. Drawing on a formerly marginalised, albeit exclusive, material culture form, piña designers have usurped symbols of Filipinism, the sanctioned nationalist agenda.

Through unofficial channels, they negotiate multiple and fluid constructs of nationhood, acknowledging the pre-existing disparate communities that comprise the Philippines.

Designers thus recast and innovatively stage insignia such as piña textiles to challenge sanctioned representations expected to duplicate past practice. Indeed, revitalisation rarely duplicates what it purports to revitalise; typically, it is a reinterpretation, ergo, a new creation. Mapping new colours, motifs and embellishments rooted in different trans-regional practices onto familiar forms, designers reconstruct a material culture that is, at once, mimesis and innovation (see also Milgram, 2000). They use this new idiom to both fix and unsettle borders and, in so doing, dissolve any essentialisms it may have held. The porous channels of Philippine nationalist discourse, in fact, enable such varied ideas to breech its walls.

In this cultural oscillation in which the formerly marginalised has been reconceived as valuable, what is important is the "sociality of value", not rarefied aesthetic debates about the authenticity of certain cultural forms vis-à-vis others (McGuigan, 1997, p. 146; see also Aragon, 1999, pp. 161–62). Where previously the central positioning of particular objects was evident, currently, material and popular culture, embedded in the everyday, emerge as key sites for asserting and contesting value.

One of the problems, however, with such a blurring of genres and the promotion of such new forms, especially in the service of nationhood, is that it is ill-equipped to deal with the complex histories of power and class, relations that such objects also embody. Indeed, such mixtures, rather than being everyone's identity project, may instead emerge as that of the "cosmopolitan elites" (Friedman, 1999, p. 252), that section of the middle class with the resources and education to direct such initiatives. Although middle-class designers are largely responsible for foregrounding piña as a nationalist symbol, they have, at the same time, opened up novel spaces of agency for new players (see also Spyer, 1998). Carol Abay, for example, supports younger emerging designers by sponsoring exhibitions of local artists' work mounted at her fashion shows. On different occasions, I have travelled with Carol on buying and exploratory missions to different regions of the Philippines when she has put young designers in contact with her suppliers. In this respect, contemporary Philippine artists such as Carol respect and practise local community expectations for mentoring, social responsibility and reciprocity, setting the stage for the on-the-ground mobility of people and things among different projects.

These cases have demonstrated, as Ana Labrador (1999, p. 53) points out for contemporary Philippine art, that stereotypes of objects are continually recontextualised, and beliefs changed, by different players, despite the desire of nations to fix them through political motivation and imagined historical accounts. Restricting symbols of nationalism to predictable cultural flagships overlooks cultural ingredients of identity that are mediated, "fissured", and subject to change (Edensor, 2002, p. 17). The reconfirmation of piña as a cross-cultural textile leaves open avenues for further negotiation in a "contested arena of judgement, perception and value where [such] artworks . . . operate not as adjudicators of fixed principles but as probes for meaning, prods for thought" (Bernstein, 1997, p. 41, quoted in Aragon, 1999, p. 165). I suggest that the counter-appropriation of such fashion movements by younger designers will, in turn, reconfigure constructions of national identity through everyday material things such as piña cloth. Within this revised framework we can resituate elements of Philippine material culture to understand how objects like piña continue to negotiate the multifaceted nature of nation-building and craft sites of identity difference.

Acknowledgments

Field research for this paper was conducted over several periods in 1995, 1998, 2000, 2001 and 2003. Financial support for this research was provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) through a Doctoral Fellowship (1993–95), Postdoctoral Fellowship (1997–99) and a Standard Research Grant (2000–03) and by the Ontario College of Art and Design, Faculty Research Grants. In the Philippines, I am affiliated with the Cordillera Studies Center, University of the Philippines Baguio, Baguio City. I thank my colleagues at CSC for their generous support for my research. I also thank the anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful comments on my paper. To the artisans and designers who have responded to my many questions, I owe a debt of gratitude.

Notes

1. Although garments manufactured from piña fibre cloth were popular among the more well-to-do Philippine lowland majority, this sphere of material culture production – textiles – was largely overlooked in the mainstream art historical or anthropological literature until the 1990s. Indeed, colonial or local governments similarly marginalised this production by considering it a minor, small-scale and rural production dominated primarily by women and thus not a marker worthy of national endorsement. This has been the case, moreover, for much of the scholarship on Southeast Asian textiles generally. Indeed, when piña finally received scholarly attention, it was within the narrow, albeit valuable, focus of art history that looked to the past to document "traditional" patterns, motifs, uses and garment types (e.g., Montinola, 1991).
2. President Fidel Ramos's concept of "Filipinism" had to do with redefining nationalism as entrepreneurship, not civil society. At this time, the Philippines was classified as the "Sick Man of Asia" (Bankoff and Weekley, 2002, p. 37). Ramos thus defined Filipino nationalists as the entrepreneurs who would resuscitate the Philippines by stimulating the economy and thus economic growth. In this sense, dress designers fit with this scheme, but their revival of piña took its own unique course.
3. Government organisations involved with the early piña revival include the Department of Trade and Industry, Philippine Textile and Research Institute; Fiber Industry Development Authority; National Agricultural and Fishery Council; and Aklan Agricultural College. The efforts of the Patrones de Casa Manila culminated in the establishment of The Piña Weaving Demonstration and Training Center in Balete, Aklan province. In addition, small manufacturers gained financial support through increased access to credit as well as support with product development through the Department of Trade and Industry's workshops.
4. All personal names used are pseudonyms.
5. Nuno, Inc., a textile design collective in Japan, is renowned for its innovative textile design. In early 2001, the Cruz workshop started to supply piña to Japanese clients; and on one visit I noticed the similarity between the new Cruz designs ("ragged" edges and embellished surfaces) and the designs they had received from Japan.
6. Production of piña cloth, however, remains relatively small due to the labour-intensive processing practices still in use; and the persistence of low prices paid to farmers and to fibre extractors does not encourage new producers to enter the field. To an extent, then, the cloth's special status (especially that of pure piña) remains intact despite the cry of purists bemoaning the denigration of an imagined pristine form.
7. This group of liturgical vestments also includes garments made from other indigenous Philippine textiles. Exhibitions of selected pieces have been featured in the Philippines and in Canada (see Milgram, 2003; The Monastery of the Transfiguration, 2000).
8. The current "pastiche" character of Filipiniana was clearly illustrated during US President George W. Bush's official visit to the Philippines in 2003. The front page of the *New York Times* featured a photograph of the two national leaders sharing a toast. President Bush wore a piña (or synthetic fibre) *barong Tagalog* while Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo wore an embroidered red dress that deftly combined both Western and Filipiniana design (Sanger, 2003, p. 1, p. 10). See also Jones and Leshkowich (2003) for a provocative discussion of the issue of fashion, identity, taste, nationalism and performance with regard to aspects of dress in Asia.

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