

Postcolonial Identity Politics and Philippine Pavilions in International Expositions, 1958–1992

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Introduction

National pavilions in international expositions are important symbols of a nation's aspirations and identity. These are condensations and physical manifestations of particular notions of the status of the country in the world stage as well as constructions of how the country wants other nations to perceive it. While much has been written on the role of international expositions in empire-building processes, little is known in terms of its relationship with post-colonialism. Studies, such as those done by Robert Rydell, Timothy Mitchell, Patricia Morton, Zeynep Çelik and Paul Greenhalgh for example, focused on the ways by which international exhibitions were part of colonial practices that were inevitably inscribed within asymmetric power relations.¹ They have suggested the role of spectacle and surveillance as necessary modes for maintaining a hierarchical relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Through the physical arrangement of the countries in relation to each other as represented by their pavilions within the exposition fairgrounds, nations were then inevitably compared and placed in competition with each other.² Aside from the spatial positioning, displays of colonized peoples emphasized the evolutionary rhetoric of imperialism where colonized peoples were always relegated to the periphery, rendered secondary and inferior to the decidedly European-American center. The great exhibitions were inextricably intertwined with colonialism.

But what happens now with international expositions once we view them after World War II, particularly within the context of post-colonialism? Using the Philippines as a case study, this

1 Robert Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991); Patricia Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exposition, Paris*, (Cambridge, MA & London: MIT Press, 2000); Zeynep Celik, *Displaying the Orient: Architecture of Islam at Nineteenth-Century World Fairs* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992); Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Exposition Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851–1939* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1988).

2 Zeynep Çelik and Leila Kinney, "Ethnography and Exhibitionism at the *Exposition Universelles*," *Assemblage*, no. 13 (December 1990): 34–59; Raymond Corbey, "Ethnographic Showcases, 1870–1930," *Cultural Anthropology* 8, no. 3 (August 1993): 5.

paper attempts to illustrate the strategies by which these pavilions serve as emblems of postcolonial nations. “Post-colonialism” here is intended to mean both as a “historical period,” that is, the era after colonialism, and a “phenomena,” that is, the socio-cultural process of decolonization.³ Specifically, the paper poses the following questions: How was the Philippines and Filipinos represented through architecture after World War II within the context of international expositions? How is the discourse of the nation articulated in the architectures of the Philippine pavilions in international expositions?

To examine these phenomena, key Philippine pavilions and exhibits in international expositions during the post-colonial period including 1958 in Brussels, 1962 in Seattle, 1964 in New York, 1970 in Osaka, and 1992 in Seville are compared and analyzed. Through the lens of architectural history, the pavilions are intended to shed light broadly on the complex relationships between the built environment and cultural identity politics. These temporary or ephemeral architectures are specifically studied according to themes of negotiations between colonial and postcolonial identity, mediations of exoticism and self-orientalism, and commodification of identity. This article would argue that these pavilions not only emerge as symbols of the postcolonial nations but also document the continuities and transformation of conceptions of self and nation.

1 Postcolonial Philippine Pavilions in Expositions

By 1946, after World War II, the Philippines officially declared independence from the United States.⁴ For the Philippines, this ushered in a new era not only in terms of political sovereignty but also economical and cultural independence. Post-war reconstruction efforts allowed the rebuilding of war-torn areas, such as Manila, which prompted massive building activity during the

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- 3 There is a dialogue as to the appropriate use of the term “post-colonialism” and “postcolonialism” with the hyphen indicating this distinction between the idea of a period (with a hyphen) versus a cultural condition and process (without a hyphen). For this discussion refer to Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge, “What is Post(-)Colonialism” and Anne McClintock, “The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term ‘Post-colonialism’” in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 276–304. For a general discussion and overview of post-colonialism studies, see for example Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994); Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998); Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 1998); Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds. *Post-colonial Studies Reader*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2006).
- 4 Teodoro Agoncillo, *History of the Filipino People*, 8th ed. (Quezon City: Garo Tech Books, Inc., 1990), 351–370.

mid-century.⁵ Culturally, the independence period reinvigorated issues of national identity among the intelligentsia and common folk. In the field of architecture, this post-war resurgence of nationalism manifested itself in the search of a national architecture.⁶ International expositions served as one of the platforms for this search.

(1) 1958 Brussels' Universal Exposition

One of the earliest post-World War II representations of the Philippines in an international fair setting was at the 1958 Brussels' Universal Exposition. Originally aimed at promoting Belgian economic growth and the development of Belgian-controlled areas of Africa, the fair was also an important venue for countries that were defeated during the war (such as Germany, Japan and Italy) to re-establish their national images.⁷ For the Philippines this was also the first time that the country was to be presented as an independent republic. Modest in size, a mere 120 square meters in floor area, the Philippine Pavilion was a reinterpretation of the *bahay kubo*, or the lowland native hut traditionally made of dried *nipa* (*Nypa Fruticans*) palm fronds and bamboo (figure 1).⁸ Filipino architect Federico Ilustre, the consulting architect of the Philippine Bureau of Public Works at that time, designed the pavilion, and later Enrique San Juan, an associate of Ilustre in the Bureau, administered the construction on site.⁹

The design was highly evocative of



Figure 1. Philippine Pavilion at the 1958 Universal Exposition in Brussels, Belgium; designed by Federico Ilustre. Source: "Bureau of Public Works Bulletin," 1958.

- 5 United States Philippine War Damage Commission, *Final Report on Public Property Rehabilitation in the Philippines Pursuant to the Philippine Rehabilitation Act of 1946* (Manila: Carmelo & Bauermann, Inc., 1950), 4–6, 24–44; A. V. Hartendorp, "The War Damage and American Aid," in *History of Industry and Trade of the Philippines*, vol. 1 (Manila: American Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines, Inc., 1958), 153–205.
- 6 Refer to discussions by Geronimo Manahan, *Philippine Architecture in the 20th Century* (San Juan, Metro Manila: Kanlungan Foundation, 1994); Gerard Lico, *Edifice Complex: Power, Myth and Marcos State Architecture* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2003).
- 7 John Findling and Kimberly Pelle, ed., *Historical Dictionary of World's Fairs and Expositions, 1851–1998* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 313.
- 8 "The Philippine Pavilion in the 1959 Brussels' Universal Exposition," *Bureau of Public Works Bulletin*, April–June 1958, 16
- 9 Epifanio San Juan, "On the Philippine Pavilion in Brussels," *Bureau of Public Works Bulletin*, April–June 1958, 32.

the native houses that were also present in the early 20th-century world's fairs but differs greatly with the treatment of the materials.¹⁰ The steep gable roof for example was made of translucent corrugated acrylic sheets instead of the traditional grass and palm-thatched crown. Natural light was further filtered in the interiors with the *capiz* or mother-of-pearl skylight diffusers. Structurally, the pavilion was also modern in its form as it employed round reinforced concrete columns for its main structural system and concrete hollow blocks for its walls.¹¹ The exterior wall surfaces were rendered in bright colors and decorated with patterns inspired from the Muslim arts of Southern Philippines. Inside the pavilion, displays introduced visitors to the scientific achievements, cultural traditions, folk arts and plants from the Philippines.¹² As the pavilion was envisioned to be expressing “a symbolic summation of cultural and scientific achievement of the Filipino people,” the design clearly demonstrated that for Ilustre, a return to vernacular traditions seemed to satisfy this symbolic requirement.¹³

The juxtaposition of vernacular forms and modern materials attempted to portray the country as an agricultural nation, but on its way to modernization. The reference for the form of the pavilion was derived from a traditional house, which in the original context utilized ephemeral materials available in the area, such as wood, bamboo, and grass. Transplanted to Brussels, the pavilion in this case alluded to the traditional stilt-raised house with steep roofing but was reinterpreted with more industrialized materials such as metal, concrete and glass. In an effort to portray the modernization of the Philippines, the materiality of the pavilion suggests the move of the country to a more industrialized direction. However, the presence of the indigenous house forms still acknowledged the extant cultural traditions that gave the Philippines its supposed distinctive character. Here, the country was coming to terms with its agricultural past and with the desired industrialization of the future.

(2) 1962 Seattle World's Fair

The Philippine's contribution to the 1962 Seattle World's Fair was situated within the International Mall on the northeastern corner of the grounds. Together with the Philippines in the module were Thailand, Africa and the United Nations. In the same vicinity were the exhibits of India, Korea and San Marino. The International Mall featured a series of thin-shell concrete

10 For an extended discussion on Philippine pavilions in international expositions, refer to my dissertation “Nation as Spectacle: Identity Politics in the Architectures of Philippine Displays in International Expositions, 1887–1998” (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 2012).

11 “The Philippine Pavilion in the 1959 Brussels’ Universal Exposition,” 16.

12 “As Others See Us in Our Pavilion,” *Bureau of Public Works Bulletin*, December 1958, 41.

13 “The Philippine Pavilion in the 1959 Brussels’ Universal Exposition,” *Bureau of Public Works Bulletin*, April–June 1958, 16.



Figure 2. Exterior of the Philippine Pavilion at the 1962 World's Fair in Seattle, Washington; designed by Luis Araneta.
Source: University of Washington Archives.

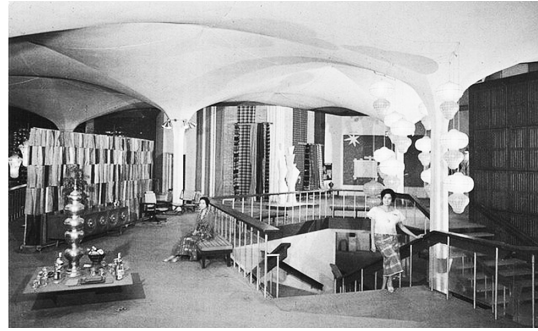


Figure 3. Interiors of the Philippine Pavilion at the 1962 World's Fair in Seattle, Washington; designed by Luis Araneta.
Source: University of Washington Archives.

parasols, which provided the overhead shelter for the exhibits underneath. The exposition organizers provided these parasols and later the international exhibitors built their own displays under the shared roof.

A similar vernacular trope is apparent at the Philippine pavilion for the 1962 Seattle World's Fair. Composed of two levels, the fifty four square-meter pavilion prominently displayed Philippine hardwood species as applied to slat screens, wall panels and handicrafts. Hardwood slats, strung on metal rods and suspended from the parasols, created a porous visual screen in front of the pavilion. From the outside of the pavilion *capiz* or mother-of pearl chandeliers immediately welcomed visitors (figure 2).¹⁴ Designed by Filipino architect Luis Araneta, the Seattle pavilion, comparable to the Brussels pavilion, also celebrated indigenous materials as the distinctive mark of Filipino-ness in the architectures.

The open-plan interiors of the pavilion displayed *capiz*-shell lanterns suspended at the top of the stairwell, Philippine fabrics hung on the walls, and hardwood screens separated the exhibitions. Filipino sculptor Napoleon Abueva executed a bas-relief sculpture made from sugar cane. The handrail along the stairs also was made of Philippine hardwood. Other items displayed featured traditional brassware from Mindanao, furniture, home furnishings and artwork (figure 3).¹⁵ The displays were relatively austere and projected the atmosphere of a residential space rather than that of a commercial display.

14 "1962 Seattle World's Fair," *Philippine Architecture and Building Journal* 2, no. 3 (1962): 31.

15 "1962 Seattle World's Fair," *Philippine Architecture and Building Journal* 2, no. 3 (1962): 31.



Figure 4. Philippine Pavilion at the 1964 New York World's Fair, Flushing Meadows, Queens, New York; designed by Otillo Arellano. Source: Museum of Filipino Architecture collection.

(3) 1964 New York World's Fair

At the 1964 New York World's Fair,¹⁶ the Philippines' exhibition pavilion was primarily inspired from an everyday object. Filipino architect Otillo Arellano created a 1,500 square meter round-shaped pavilion covered with a roof form derived from the *salakot* or the wide-brimmed and conical-topped farmer's hat (figure 4).¹⁷ The symbolic gesture of the hat alluded to the agricultural and tropical nature of the islands. It also suggested the hardworking

character of the Filipino people, upon whom the agricultural industry relied considerably. Instead of using palm fronds as traditionally the primary material for the farmer's hat, however, Arellano designed the roof in this case as made of anodized aluminum roof sheets to protect the exhibitions under it. The overall plan of the pavilion was circular with elements radiating from its center.

The entire pavilion was raised on steel pipe pylons and underneath are twelve *acacia* carved wooden mural relief panels by famed Filipino artist Carlos V. Francisco depicting various events in Philippine history, both mythical and real.¹⁸ The four-meter high by six-meter long mural panels formed the centerpiece exhibit in the ground level while the second floor highlighted industrial and cultural activities as well as the natural resources found in the Philippines. Although the inspiration for the pavilion was derived not necessarily from a vernacular form of architecture, it nevertheless represented a bucolic, almost primitive, representation of the Philippines, interpreted in a modern way.

Other displays included a wall of dolls in various multi-colored costumes and accouterments depicting Philippine scenes and ethnic groups. Mannequins featuring traditional costumes and fabrics dotted the exhibition floor. Photographs showing scenes from Philippine agriculture, industry, society and culture covered the walls on the second floor. A yellow-colored "jeepney," representing the creative appropriation by Filipinos of war surplus jeeps after World

16 John Findling and Kimberly Pelle, eds., *Historical Dictionary of World's Fairs and Expositions, 1851–1998*, 322–328.

17 "Philippine Pavilion at the New York World's Fair 1964–1965," *Philippine Architecture and Building Journal* 3, no. 2 (1963).

18 "Preview of the Philippine Pavilion for the New York 1964 World's Fair," *Philippine Institute of Architects Journal* 1, no. 1 (1964).

War II, was parked outside the first level. A shallow pool surrounded the pavilion, reminding visitors of the archipelagic character of the country. The second level, also being a showcase of Filipino technology, introduced for the first time pre-stressed laminated Philippine wood beams and stair stringers.¹⁹ Large glass panels framed in slender steel mullions with aluminum casing surrounded the second level exhibition area. Completing the Philippine experience, performances featuring folk and ethnic dances were featured during “Philippine Week” celebrations at the fair.²⁰

(4) 1970 Osaka Expo

Somewhat veering away from the trope of vernacular architectures of the earlier Philippine Pavilions, the Philippine’s entry to the 1970 Osaka Expo this time advocated a more abstract representation of the country. Filipino architect Leandro V. Locsin (1928–1994) designed a sweeping mass of glass, steel, wood, and concrete forms that can be interpreted in various ways, whether “a leaf, a bird in flight, or a prow of a Muslim *vinta*” (boat with multi-color panel sail from Mindanao) as one journalist describes it, and as an “Oriental” roof as another reported (figure 5).²¹ The jutting roof was supposedly an abstracted representation of the Philippines’ “surge to progress and modernity.”²²

The crevice between the two curving roof forms straddled a dramatic skylight of *Narra* (*pterocarpus indicus*) Philippine mahogany wood lattice inserted with *capiz* (*placuna placenta*) or mother-of-pearl discs, which gently dispersed the light into the interior (figure 6). Under the roof, *narra* wood and Philippine mahogany wrapped the ceiling and other structural members giving the interiors a warm ambience for the exhibitions. Hand

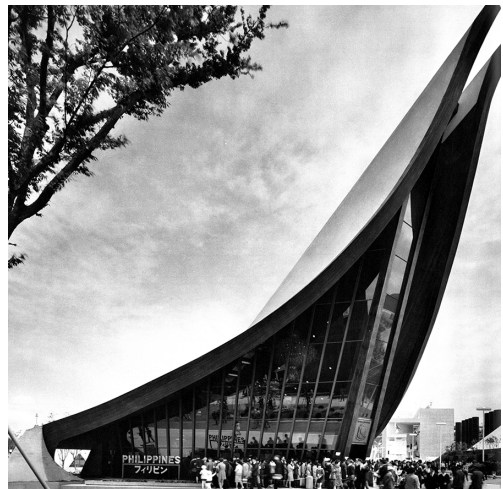


Figure 5. Philippine Pavilion at the 1970 World’s Fair in Osaka, Japan; designed by Leandro V. Locsin. Source: Nicolas Polites, *The Architecture of Leandro V. Locsin*, New York: Weatherhill, 1977.

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- 19 “Philippine Pavilion at the New York World’s Fair 1964–1965,” *Philippine Architecture and Building Journal* 3, no. 2 (1963).
- 20 Isabel Santos, *Bayanihan, The National Folk Dance Company of the Philippines: A Memory of Six Continents* (Manila: Anvil and Bayanihan Folk Arts Foundation, 2004), 97.
- 21 “Philippine Pavilion, 1970 Osaka Expo,” *Philippine Architecture and Building Journal* 5, no. 2 (1970); “Expo ’70 Pavilion: ‘Progress Through the Harmony of Diverse Cultures’—RP Theme,” *Architectscope*, February 1970, 1–2.
- 22 “Expo ’70 Pavilion: ‘Progress Through the Harmony of Diverse Cultures’—RP Theme,” 2.



Figure 6. Interior of the Philippine Pavilion at the 1970 World's Fair in Osaka, Japan; designed by Leandro V. Locsin. Source: Nicolas Polites, *The Architecture of Leandro V. Locsin*, New York: Weatherhill, 1977.



Figure 7. Interior of the Philippine Pavilion at the 1970 World's Fair in Osaka, Japan; designed by Leandro V. Locsin. Source: Nicolas Polites, *The Architecture of Leandro V. Locsin*, New York: Weatherhill, 1977.

woven fabrics from the Visayas, called *hablon*, also graced the walls of the interiors, adding color and further softening the hard wood and steel structure.²³ Consistent with the dominant geometric language of the pavilion, the *hablon* textiles also featured highly abstracted patterns (figure 7). The feel of the interiors was intended to be slick and crisp, achieved through the high-gloss finishes of the highly polished *narra* wood, translucent *capiz* and the glistening glass surfaces.

With a mixture of photographs, displays, paintings and other Philippine-made products, the exhibition highlighted the country as a multi-ethnic archipelago. The exhibits for this pavilion consciously veered away from a purely commercial affair by avoiding displays on trade materials and actual products that characterized earlier Philippine pavilions. Instead, the pavilion utilized around four hundred black and white photographs, projected images from eight projectors, color slides and movies that highlight Philippine “history, culture, life and progress.”²⁴ Wood samples from the Philippines are subtly incorporated with the exhibit as abstracted sculptures and interior paneling. To portray the country as a civilized and cultured people, the pavilion displayed Philippine antiques, paintings, sculptures and handicrafts in the basement level.

23 Nicholas Polites, *The Architecture of Leandro V. Locsin* (New York: Weatherhill, 1977), 212.

24 “Expo ’70 Pavilion: ‘Progress Through the Harmony of Diverse Cultures’—RP Theme,” 2.

The allusion to wood as a source of identity for the Philippines also lies in the fact that wood was and still is considered an important export product. Wood was heavily promoted as a key product in the 1970 Osaka Expo. In fact, between 1969 and 1971, sugar, coconut and forestry products generated almost seventy percent of export value for the Philippines.²⁵ From the 1980s until the present however, the share of wood products in exports and the Gross Value Added (also known as GVA or the measure in economic pertaining to the value of goods or services produced in a sector of an economy), for forestry products fell sharply, especially in the light of depleting forest reserves.²⁶

(5) 1992 Seville Universal Exposition

At the 1992 Seville Universal Exposition, we witnessed somehow a return to the vernacular rhetoric when Filipino architect Francisco Mañosa built a bamboo-roofed structure on top of an existing building for the Philippine Pavilion. The existing structure, donated by the Spanish government, was shared between Indonesia and the Philippines.²⁷ Located along the First Avenue, the Philippine pavilion was clustered around other Southeast nations, including Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Indonesia.

Echoing the forms of traditional huts from the Philippines, the hipped-roof structure exploited cut bamboo nodes successively layered to form a protective shield over the exhibition areas (figure 8). With the theme of “The Philippines: A Manifold Land” for the two-level pavilion, the displays focused on the various cultural influences on the Philippines as well as its diverse natural resources.²⁸



Figure 8. Philippine Pavilion at the 1992 Universal Exposition at Seville, Spain; designed by Francisco Mañosa,. Source: Raul Cesar Alonso de los Rios Rispa and Maria Jose Aguaza, eds., *Expo '92 Seville: Architecture and Design*, Milan and New York: Electa and Abberville, 1993.

25 Patricio Abinales and Donna Amoroso, *State and Society in the Philippines* (Manila: Anvil, 2005), 197.

26 Hal Hill, “Industry” and Cristina David, “Agriculture” in *Philippine Economy: Development, Policies and Challenges*, ed. Arsenio Balisacan and Hal Hill (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2003), 176–177, 227–229.

27 Elpidio Refuerzo Cruz, “Expo '92 and an Extravaganza of Discoveries,” *Philippine Panorama*, April 26, 1992, 4.

28 “Age of Discovery: RP to Participate in the Seville Expo,” *Architectscope*, March 1992; Elpidio Refuerzo Cruz, “Expo '92 and an Extravaganza of Discoveries,” 4, 6–7.



Figure 9. Detail of polychromatic *Capiz* (Mother of Pearl) shell tower of the Philippine Pavilion at the 1992 Universal Exposition at Seville, Spain; designed by Francisco Mañosa. Source: Eric S. Caruncho, *Designing Filipino: The Architecture of Francisco Mañosa*, Manila: Tukod Foundation, 2003.

Mañosa translated this multi-cultural aspect of the country through a large three-sided tower-like structure whose two faces notably displayed a mural made of six thousand pieces of painted *capiz* (mother-of-pearl) shells. Noted Filipino artist Eduardo Castrillo designed the mural. When illuminated at night, the tower glowed with its polychromatic translucent mural portraying a Philippine *fiesta* or festival usually associated with the feast day of a patron saint (figure 9).²⁹ The mural was ostensibly a celebration of the Spanish influence on Philippine culture and society. Inside the pavilion, a twenty four by thirty meter glass-etching centerpiece prominently showcased the Banaue Rice Terraces from the northern part of the Philippines.³⁰

Aside from the bamboo structure, a restaurant served traditional Filipino cuisine and featured performances by top artists, dance troupes, theater companies and choral groups, completing the sensorial spectacle of the pavilion.³¹ The pro-

fessional dance troupe of *Bayanihan*, again much like in the Philippine pavilions of the 1958 and 1964, fairs performed during the Philippine Week Celebration, provided the dynamic quality to an otherwise static exhibit.³² As tourism and marketing tool developed by the Department of Tourism, the pavilion was designed to serve as a preview of some of the unique experiences potential visitors could encounter in the Philippines.

29 Eric S. Caruncho, *Designing Filipino: The Architecture of Francisco Mañosa* (Manila: Tukod Foundation, 2003), 232; Raúl Rispa, César Alonso de los Rios, and María José Aguaza, eds., *Expo '92 Sevilla: Arquitectura y Diseño* (Sevilla and Milan: Sociedad Estatal para la Exposición Universal Sevilla 92 and Electa, 1992), 212.

30 Elpidio Refuerzo Cruz, "Expo '92 and an Extravaganza of Discoveries," 7.

31 Felix R. de los Santos, "Viva Filipinas," *Starweek: The Sunday Magazine of the Philippine STAR*, June 7, 1992, 12, 15.

32 Santos, *Bayanihan, The National Folk Dance Company of the Philippines*, 130.

2 Problematizing Postwar Philippine Pavilions

The Philippine Pavilions at the various expositions after World War II signified the unfolding of a new phase of Philippine history as an independent country. As such, the pavilions had the monumental task of summarizing the aspirations and efforts in a succinct manner. The pavilions also had to shed the old image as colony of Spain and the United States to be able to fully declare the nation's sovereignty. A new republic meant the creation of a new image. But did the Philippines really escape its previous image?

Most of the postcolonial pavilions were reinterpreted vernacular architectures that embodied a nostalgic return to pre-colonial times. Some pavilions were abstract representations of the country's aspirations. Mannequins, dolls and professional performers now replace the problematic live displays of natives that were pervasive during the colonial period. However, upon closer inspection, the post-war pavilions in fact reiterate if not recreate and reproduce the same colonial rhetoric about Filipinos and the Philippines during the early twentieth century. The use of materials indigenous to the Philippines, such as wood, mother-of-pearl and bamboo defined the supposed essential character of the country. Natural materials, seen as derived from nature, were understood as immutable, essential and therefore legitimate sources of a country's unique character.³³ This, of course, is fraught with problems, but for the designers of the 20th century, it seemed unproblematic. If ostensibly nature were to be the sole basis of a national identity, then what would distinguish the Philippines from other countries who are also tropical by nature and blessed with similar materials? Indeed, probably one of the reasons why the same rhetoric survived throughout the 20th century was due to the seeming naturalness and therefore normalizing tendency of the trope.

Nonetheless, the architectures of the pavilions were seen as a vital mode of self-fashioning for the new republic. If the Philippines was depicted by its colonizers in the last 19th- and early 20th-century expositions, the postwar expositions were at last the independent republic's chance to portray itself in an international setting. As a self-portrait, the pavilions were understood in the postcolonial context as an empowering tool, an instrument for correcting and revising the perceived backwardness of the country. This was the chance for the postcolonial to finally represent itself on the world stage.

(1) Expressions of Postcolonial National Identity

The late twentieth-century Philippine pavilions not only express the emergence of the postcolo-

33 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 143.

nial Philippine nation on the world stage but also emphasize the struggles of a new nation in coming to terms with its colonial past. How do you portray yourself as a country when in the past your identity as a nation was inextricably intertwined with that of your colonizers? For the Philippines, the postcolonial situation was not just about a repudiation of the American colonial experience but was also about negotiating with the Spanish colonial tradition. Which parts of history do you highlight and which aspects do you denounce? In this constant layering of colonial experience, how do you delaminate the different layers and choose which to retain and which to remove? As national identity in post-World War II Philippines was defined as an anti-colonial stance, the search of a legitimate source for Filipino-ness meant a disavowal of the colonial past and at the same time a return to primordial pre-colonial roots. In the design of exhibition architectures, Spanish colonial or American colonial styles or types of architecture were explicitly avoided, but instead were replaced with what was imagined as neutral forms of representation. For Filipino designers and architects at that point, pre-colonial indigenous architectures were deemed as apolitical architectural statements because they were not associated with the cultures of the colonial masters. As statements of empowerment, the use of cultural elements allegedly untouched by foreign influence somehow eludes political bias.

In other cases, the quotidian was elevated to the national. We thus have seen the use of the *bahay kubo*, or the lowland native huts on stilts, the *salakot*, or the wide-brimmed farmer's hat, or the *vinta*, the multi-colored boats from southern Philippines, as sources of design inspiration. Folk cultures, which may or may not have been influenced by colonial culture, have entered the consciousness of the "everyday" or the "common." Because of the seeming ordinariness or commonplaceness, these cultures are rendered "typical." The everyday and the indigenous consequently were presented as neutral, innocent and inert.

But what becomes challenging is the fact that no matter how pre-colonial or the everyday folk cultures are perceived as neutral or inert, they are in fact highly politicized and cannot remain innocent. So when some of the houses are described as "typical" representation of Philippine shelters, the label somehow simplifies the culture and reduces it to a caricature of a truly complex phenomenon. The supposed "typical" houses shown are in fact not "typical" because there are so many variations and permutations of the tropical house as exemplified by the multifarious creative approaches of the different ethnic groups in building their homes. For example, as historic anthropologist William Henry Scott has shown that the houses which are labeled "Cordilleran" found in the Mountain Province area of Luzon in reality are distinguished by a range of regional variations distinguished by nuances in building form, material and symbolism.³⁴ By this normalizing tendency, a political and politicized act by itself, in fact, flattens and

34 William Henry Scott, "Cordillera Architecture of Northern Luzon," *Folklore Studies* 21 (1962), 186–220.

renders invisible the specificities of the various cultures.

While not everything can be shown in the national pavilions, exhibitions necessarily become a highly selective and edited point of view of the Philippines. The limitation of space necessitates an abbreviation of the imagery of the country. But the act of curatorship is also in itself a politicized operation, where the act of selection, arrangement, ordering and interpretation creates a construct of the country and effectively the world.³⁵ By virtue of selecting specific handicrafts, commercial products, dances and photographs of the country, the portrayal of the Philippines as perceived by the fair visitor is always connected to that edited view. While it is understandable why the Philippines selected supposedly “positive” representation of the country to depict an optimistic and encouraging view to lure investors and tourists, one also begins to wonder why certain elements are deemed as “positive” over others. What value judgments are then used to curate the exhibitions for these exhibits? How certain things are qualified as “positive” and others as “negative” still remains a question.

As a way to put a positive spin on the portrayal of the country, the postcolonial pavilions attempted to paint a more somber and neutral representation. The festive and happy depiction of the country through the colorful festivals, elaborate costumes, and lively dances belies the underlying challenges of nation building. The agrarian industries, through the showcasing of products, did not reveal the struggles of land tenants who had been fighting for agrarian land reform. Questions of land tenancy that stem all the way back to the Spanish colonial period with the *hacienda* system and continued until the post-war period, had been marked by peasant grievances against inequitable distribution of land and the continual marginalization and exploitation of land tenants and workers.³⁶ The peasant revolution and the Communist insurgency raging in the Philippine countryside were often ignored in the Philippine pavilions. The use of indigenous motifs taken from Mindanao and juxtaposed with the lowland houses, or the rendition of various dances from the northern part to the southern islands in a seemingly innocent repertoire, also ignores the tensions between Christians and Muslims and the continued struggle of Muslim Filipinos to create a separate *Bangsa Moro* (“Moro Nation”).³⁷ Even the use of Philippine wood and *capiz* shells as testament to the supposed authenticity of the pavilions and effectively the country similarly do not divulge the problems connected with continual unregulated deforesta-

35 See for example Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Random House, 1970).

36 U.S. Department of State, “Hukbalahaps” in *The Philippines Reader: A History of Colonialism, Neocolonialism, Dictatorship and Resistance*, eds. Daniel Schirmer and Stephen Roskamm Shalom (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1987), 70–77.

37 Lela Noble, “The Philippines: Muslims Fight for an independent State.” *Southeast Asia Chronicle*, no. 75 (October 1980), 12–17, as cited in Sally Swenson, “Philippines” in *The Philippines Reader*, 193–199.

tion, mining and fishing which lead to the incessant destruction of natural habitats and extinction of animal species and the displacement of indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands.³⁸

Philosopher and political scientist Anthony Smith noted that nationalism conflates three core ideals. These are: “collective self-determination of a people, expression of national character and individuality, and finally the vertical division of the world into unique nations each contributing its special genius to the common fund of humanity.”³⁹ Following this logic then, for the Philippines to be able to participate in the larger international community, the nation has to prove its uniqueness in terms of what it can contribute to the “common fund of humanity.” But what is the nation’s “special genius”? For some countries it is their scientific and technological advancements. For the Philippines, as the pavilions tried to show, the contribution lay in its unique culture and natural resources. In this sense, the exposition pavilions attempted to portray visually the nation’s uniqueness.

(2) Instruments of Self-exoticism and Exclusion

In addition, the exhibitions served as the medium of the Philippine government to project the nation as a homogenous whole while featuring the country’s cultural and ethnic plurality and the fragmented archipelagic geography. To be able to do this, the national project invariably exoticized and excluded other cultures within the Philippines. The process of exoticizing cultures relegated certain Philippine ethno-linguistic groups as extraordinary and fantastic. Illustrating this was the use of Muslim arts in the 1958 Brussels’ exposition, which focused on the brilliant colors and intricate decorative designs, and the traditional *bahay kubo* of lowland rural Tagalogs, which celebrated the simple geometric quality of the structure at the 1992 Seville Exposition. Even the humble farmer’s hat inspired the 1964 New York Fair pavilion, which according to the organizers was considered as a distinctive symbol for the country “teeming of rural folks, who have upheld the principles of democracy in peace and war.”⁴⁰ The farmer’s hat, the Muslims from the south and the Igorots of the north, portrayed as exotic cultures during the colonial exhibitions, were still treated as exotic during the postcolonial period.

While it is important to recognize the rural areas and Muslim communities in the Philippines, the pavilions fail to acknowledge the large urban areas and predominantly Christian pop-

38 Sally Swenson, “Philippines,” in *Background Documents prepared for the Conference on Native Resource Control and the Multinational Corporate Challenge: Aboriginal Rights in International Perspective* (Boston, MA: Anthropology Resource Center, 1982), 36–38, as cited in *The Philippines Reader*, 199–204.

39 Anthony Smith, *Theories of Nationalism* (London, Duckworth, 1971), 23, as cited in Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 8.

40 “Philippine Pavilion at the New York World’s Fair 1964–1965,” *Philippine Architecture and Building Journal* 3, no. 2 (1963).

ulation. In fact, the urban centers and the Christian populations tend to be the dominant *de facto* culture of the Philippines. Thus, the countryside and the Muslims were considered as the “other” to the hegemonic official national discourse. The government therefore also projected the country as dramatically mysterious and exotic to be able to sell the country in the world market.⁴¹ Again, going back to the idea of the nation’s “special genius,” the “other” cultural minorities of the Muslims and the rural countryside provided the evidence of this unique cultural tradition. The urban and the Christian populations of the Philippines, as these were understood to exist in other countries, were considered not unique.

Aside from the self-exoticizing tendency of the exhibitions, the pavilions in this attempt to paint a unified vision of the country necessarily excluded other cultures in the Philippines. If in principle the pavilions were to be construed as a true representation of the country, then wouldn’t the pavilions require the representation of each and every ethno-linguistic group in the Philippines? In terms of languages alone, there are at least seventy-eight distinct languages and five hundred dialects spread over around fifty-one ethno-linguistic groups in the archipelago.⁴² In terms of identities, this does not include yet the variety of cultures such as the lowland and seafaring peoples, Christian, Muslim and animist practitioners, the cosmopolitan urban and the rural agricultural populations, the *mestizos* and mixed-race peoples, as well as the other marginalized cultures in the Philippines. But as the 20th-century pavilions have shown, only a select few of these groups were ever portrayed. As earlier pointed out, the Igorots of the north and the Muslim groups of the south are often depicted as representative Filipinos. But what happens to the Hanunoo-Mangyan of Mindoro or the Ilonggos of the Visayas or even the *Tsinoy*s or Filipino-Chinese *mestizos* that undoubtedly form part of the contemporary Filipino nation? Part of nationalism’s tragedy is that for a country to be able to forge its national identity, it often requires the exclusion and erasure of ethnicities and identities within the nation. Describing Filipino nationalism, historian Arnold Azurin maintains, that as it demands the “erasure of ethnicity . . . in order to become full-fledged Filipino or a nationalist . . . has made [our] sense of nationhood quite callously chauvinistic because it is anti-cultural, and thus rife for the label of ‘internal colonialism.’”⁴³ This idea of what Azurin calls “internal colonialism” is thus connected to the self-exoticizing methods of the exhibits, where the new postcolonial elites takes over the

41 Brian Wallis, “Selling Nations: International Exhibitions and Cultural Diplomacy” in *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*, ed. Daniel Sherman and Irit Rogoff (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 265–291.

42 The term “ethno-linguistic groups” have been used as an alternative parlance to “tribes” to reflect the ethnic, language and geographic distinctions rather than religious or political differentiation. Nicanor Tiongson, ed., introduction to *Peoples of the Philippines, Aeta to Jama Mapun*, vol. 1 and 2 of *CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Arts* (Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines, 1994), 3–8; Abinales and Amoroso, *State and Society in the Philippines*, 11.

role of the former colonizers and applies the same instruments of colonization internally. Nationalist discourse does not only wage its war politically, but also of equal weight, culturally. Again, the same exoticizing narrative and the exclusionary process continues from the 19th-century to the 20th-century exhibitions.

(3) Sites of Identity Politics and Commodification

With the presence of the country's multiple identities and layered historical experiences, it necessitates the editing of the narrative that the nation wants to depict in the exhibition pavilions. Due to restrictions of physical space and the limits of the attention span of the viewers, the exhibit has to be concise and succinct. Thus in the planning of these exhibition pavilions, oftentimes a master narrative emerges, which, in the end dictates the presentation of history and identity. While we do acknowledge the physical limitations of architecture and its impact in the narration of the nation, we must also recognize that the creation of this narrative is embedded within power relations. Who gets to weave the national story? Who gets to choose who or what will be included in the displays? As respective governments sponsor their national pavilions and will therefore represent the official nationalism, other voices are rendered mute and counter-discourses made invisible.

Philippine pavilions should also be understood in the context of commodification. In the exposition and world's fair settings, the pavilions are logos or branding strategies for nations. As a form of brand, the nation's unique culture, natural resources and touristic sites are the commodities marketed to the international audience. As a tourism strategy, it not only serves didactic purposes in teaching the world about the nation's history and culture, but also entices the viewer to visit the countries and hopefully spend money in the country. The pavilions are promotional tools and advertising materials. Architecture also becomes instruments for promotion and performance of tourism.⁴⁴ But we should also be critical of the ways these promotions work. Which parts of the country are promoted and which segments are invisible? To what extent is the country being didactic and to what lengths is the country being exaggerated?

As the country becomes a commodity, the pavilion has to become a logo. For the country to be easily identified in the sea of signs within the fair, the pavilion needed to portray the country as a distinct and self-contained image that is consumed and reproduced. Political scientist

43 Arnold Azurin, *Reinventing the Filipino Sense of Being and Becoming* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1995), 77.

44 For discussions on the burgeoning discourse on the intersections of architecture and tourism, refer to D. Medina Lasansky and Brian McLaren, eds., *Architecture and Tourism: Perception, Performance and Place* (New York: Berg, 2004); Joan Ockman and Salomon Frausto, eds., *Architourism* (London and New York: Prestel Books, 2005).

and historian Benedict Anderson argues that part of the nation-building process is the transformation of a country in its “infinite reproducibility” and he has shown this through technologies of print and photography.⁴⁵ I would like to extend his argument by adding that the exposition pavilions, aside from photography, mapping and stamps,⁴⁶ also provided the ability of the country to be infinitely reproduced. Although these pavilions are often destroyed after the event, the inherent messages continue to live and perpetuated through images, photographs, and ephemera. Pavilions are thus enmeshed in tourism practices as instruments for transforming the nation into saleable, reproducible and digestible products.

It seems that there is a need to reassess ideas and concepts in the design and planning of national pavilions for postcolonial nations such as the Philippines. Tropes that dwell on the vernacular traditions as source of inspiration have to be critically re-examined in terms of its theoretical validity and ethical legitimacy. A national identity that is solely predicated on pre-colonial and vernacular cultural traditions is doomed to fail. By consigning the vernacular architecture as merely part of a supposed pre-colonial past, ethno-linguistic groups are frozen in time and expected not to change. I am not arguing that we totally reject vernacular traditions, rather these indigenous traditions has to be recast in a different light to be able to respond to the imperatives of contemporary nation-building projects.

An architecture that aims to define its national identity must come to terms with the politics of identity-formation. How do you deal with the ever-changing identities of contemporary Philippines? How would you represent these multiple meanings and identities architecturally? If we understand these ephemeral architectures as logos and brands of the nation, then how can we transform them from symbols that continually perpetuate primitivist and exoticized images into a liberative icon? An identity expressed in architecture cannot also be just the official narrative. Oftentimes, an official national identity imposed from the top tends to be rejected by the majority because of hegemonic nature of this identity formation. How do you construct the process of identity-formation as a democratic operation? In the end, more questions do actually arise from these interrogations, but somehow, by posing more questions, we hope that our approaches in representing the postcolonial nation can become an empowering strategy.

45 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 182.

46 See for example Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of the Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994); Stanley Brunn, “Stamps as Iconography: Celebrating the Independence of New European States and Central Asian States,” *GeoJournal* 52 (2000), 315–323.