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with Philippine Women's Centre of British Columbia

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WOMEN'S FASHION SHOWS AS FEMINIST TRANS-FORMATION

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Abstract

This article has emerged from a research partnership between Filipino activists and an academic researcher and ally. In this discussion, we explore a unique arts-based feminist popular education project that used the format of a fashion show (not usually associated with women's emancipation) to tell stories about the colonization of the Philippines, its history and present neo-colonial realities, and the relationship between this history and Filipino women's exploitation. In 2004, 2005, and 2008, the Philippine Women's Centre of British Columbia (PWCBC), one of the longest-standing feminist organizations in Vancouver, created and launched three political fashion shows. Framed by feminist perspectives of transnationalism and global capitalism, as well as feminist approaches to popular education, we dialogue about three scenes/dresses from these shows, selected as examples of the power of visual and performative art to tell about, wear, and learn about colonial history and neo-colonial realities. We conclude that the political fashion shows of the PWCBC created spaces of public pedagogy and feminist empowerment and praxis.

Résumé

Cet article est le produit d'un partenariat de recherche entre des activistes philippins et un chercheur universitaire. Dans cette discussion, nous explorons un projet unique d'éducation populaire féministe basé sur les arts. Ce projet se présente sous forme de défilé de mode (non nécessairement lié à l'émancipation des femmes) pour raconter des histoires au sujet de la colonisation des Philippines, de l'histoire et des réalités néocoloniales philippines, ainsi que des rapports entre cette histoire et l'exploitation des femmes philippines. En 2004, 2005 et 2008, le Centre des femmes philippines de la Colombie-Britannique (PWCBC), une des organisations féministes les plus

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anciennes de Vancouver, a créé et lancé trois défilés de mode politiques. En nous inspirant des perspectives féministes du transnationalisme et du capitalisme mondial ainsi que des approches féministes de l’éducation populaire, nous faisons dialoguer trois scènes/robes de ces spectacles, choisies comme exemples du pouvoir de l’art visuel et performatif pour raconter, porter et apprendre l’histoire coloniale et les réalités néocoloniales. Nous concluons que les défilés de mode politiques du PWCBC créent des espaces pour la pédagogie publique ainsi que la responsabilisation et la praxis féministes.

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to explore the political fashion shows created by the Philippine Women’s Centre of British Columbia (PWCBC). The PWCBC was formed in 1989 “to empower Filipino women to understand the roots of their challenges as migrants, immigrants, women of colour, and low-income earners, and to collectively assert their struggle for their rights and welfare” (Philippine Women’s Centre of British Columbia [PWCBC], n.d.). Through the fashion shows, the PWCBC was “breaking traditions in one medium [and] welcoming the traditions of another” (Jackson, 2011, p. 2). Using the format of a political fashion show, an idea that originated in the Philippines, enabled those involved to learn about, wear, and perform their history and thereby created spaces of public pedagogy and feminist empowerment and praxis. We see these fashion shows as an example of feminist popular education. In what follows, we begin by locating ourselves within this partnership and then outline the conceptual framework we brought to this study, which includes feminist theorizing about the transnational character of women’s exploitation and movements of resistance and feminist approaches to popular education. We then provide an overview of the colonial history and neo-colonial reality of the Philippines and Filipino immigration to Canada. The remainder of the article shares the story of three dresses shown during the political fashion shows.

Our Collaboration

This research is a collaboration between academically and community-located feminist activists. Shauna has a university faculty position in adult education and identifies as a second-generation immigrant and member of a White settler nation¹. Prior to her academic work, she had many years of active participation in local and national feminist groups. During these activist years, she met Marilou, who was a long-standing member of the PWCBC; Marilou was born in the Philippines and came to North America to complete her post-secondary education. We reconnected when Shauna was invited by members of the National Alliance of Philippine Women’s Centres (NAPWC, of which Marilou was a member) to serve as external evaluator of a multi-year national project (2006–2009) that

1 Paulette Regan (2010), a non-indigenous scholar, speaks to the responsibility of the ancestors of White settlers to join in solidarity with indigenous struggles for self-determination. This requires understanding and telling the truth about how the nation of Canada was built on the colonization of First Nations and how this colonial legacy continues to inform indigenous and non-indigenous relations.

involved community-organizing in different cities and led to the building of a national network of Filipino activists. Our connections were deepened when Shauna joined Marilou's doctoral research committee, which focused on the transnational feminist experiences of Filipino activists in Canada, Europe, and the Philippines (Carrillo, 2009).

This current project, which focuses on the political fashion shows of the PWCBC, grew out of that national NAPWC project in which many art forms (song, theatre, dance, visuals, etc.) were employed. This led to the creation of a SSHRC-funded partnership to explore "The Arts-Based Social Movement Learning of the Philippine Women's Centre of BC: Arts and the Development of Community, Political Consciousness and Social Action²." Once funding was secured, Kim, a Canadian-born Filipino woman and member of the PWCBC, became the community researcher assigned to work on the project.

Transnational Feminism

The PWCBC's focus is on illuminating and interrupting the exploitation of Filipino women and illustrating how sexism, racism, and classism underpin the commodification of majority world women through globalized capitalism (e.g., Cohen, 1991; Khan, 2009; Lindio-McGovern & Wassiman, 2009; Ong, 1999). Sassen (2002, p. 1) identified this process of majority women's exploitation as "the feminization of survival," noting the increasing dependence of families and nations on the exploited labour of women. These exploitative labour practices are transnational; that is, they take place "on a recurrent basis across national borders that require a regular and significant commitment of time by participants" (Portes, 1999³). Tackling these exploitative policies, programs, and structures is also a transnational project (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997; Nagar & Swarr, 2010), one grounded in "particular local, feminist praxis . . . [and] understand[ing] the local in relation to larger cross national processes" (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994, p. xix). Central to the PWCBC's work, as with other forms of transnational feminism, is "avert[ing] the destructive and dehumanizing nature of neoliberal globalization" (Lindio-McGovern, 1999; Lindio-McGovern & Wassiman, 2009, p. 8). As Khan (2009) noted, women's work within globalized capitalism is "intimately linked with social exclusion, abysmal working conditions, sub-standard living accommodations, sexual and racial discrimination, and exploitation on the part of employers, labour brokers, and employment agencies" (p. 23).

Historical Consciousness

Foundational to feminist resistance to women's exploitation is the development of historical and oppositional consciousness. Thorpe (2014), referring to Gadamer's major contributions on this topic, defined historical consciousness as being "fully conscious of the fact that everything around us is historical and, consequently, that everything is relative to this fact, this historicity," and that this awareness "enables us to critically assess the world around us" (p. 15). As de Lauretis (1990) and others have noted, consciousness-raising is a key methodology of feminism. Illuminating how the personal is political is a process of

2 This study has been funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

3 <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/international-migration/glossary/trans-nationalism/>

politicization that involves the discovery of how in dominant patriarchal culture women are always "other" and how their oppression makes them both "captive and absent in discourse" (p. 115). Sandoval (2000) described the development of feminist consciousness as a "methodology of the oppressed," a dialectical process of identity construction and social action involving both inner sensibilities and outer forms of social praxis.

Feminist Popular Education

Developing such political consciousness involves "intentional and facilitated processes of collective learning and knowledge production that enable and provoke self- and social transformation toward the realization of contextually determined feminist goals" (Manicom & Walters, 2012, p. 3). These are the goals of feminist popular education that create "pedagogies of possibility" (p. 3), imaginations of "what might become thinkable and actionable when prevailing relations of power are made visible, when understandings shake loose from normative perspectives and generate new knowledge and possibilities of engagement" (p. 4). Feminist popular education has been the focus of study within the field of adult education, with more recent attention given to the roles of arts-based activities in developing feminist consciousness (e.g., Butterwick & Lawrence, 2009; Clover & Sandford, 2013; Clover & Stalker, 2007; Clover, Stalker, & McGauley, 2004; West & Stalker, 2007). These studies pointed to how arts and creative expression can facilitate political engagement. Our inquiry and these other studies recognize the powerful link between "arts-informed learning and more reflexive and transformational learning" (McGregor, 2012, p. 310) and how creative expression can bear witness to a "defiant imagination," one that offers hope as well as "alternative analysis and reflection" (Clover & Stalker, 2007, p. 15).

The embodied dimension and the engagement with all the senses are key elements of social praxis that are exemplified in these political fashion shows. The body is a location of knowledge and learning, as Haraway (1988, p. 584) observed. "I am arguing for a view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body versus the view from above from nowhere from simplicity." Lawrence (2012) also called for "reclaim[ing] the body as a source of knowledge" (p. 10), as did Yakhlef (2010), who drew attention to how the body is "an active producer of culture, at the same time being a product thereof" (p. 411).

Background on the Philippines

The Spanish ruled the Philippines for 300 years, followed by about half a century of American domination. Despite having achieved "independence" in 1946, the Philippines, a nation made up of over 7,000 islands, continues to struggle with the legacy of colonization (Carrillo, 2009). Like many other countries that achieved independence in the post-World War Two period, the movements for social justice in the Philippines are closely tied to its struggle with neo-colonialism. Neo-colonialism, according to Nkrumah (thought to be the originator of the concept) is a situation in which the state is "in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty [but] in reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside" (1966, p. xi). Of particular importance to the work of the PWCBC is the neo-colonial reality of increasing dependence of Filipinos on temporary labour contracts. Filipino overseas foreign workers (OFWs), found in over 190 countries around the world, contribute over USD\$12 billion to the annual economy of

the Philippines in the form of remittances. Foreign domestic workers make up a significant portion.

Canada is one of the key destinations for Filipino OFWs, many of whom enter as temporary domestic migrant workers. In Canada, Filipinos (over 600,000) are the largest Southeast Asian group. Most live in large urban centres, and 65% are women. Paradoxically, while they are the most educated of all visible minority immigrant groups in Canada, they are also the poorest (Kelly, 2006). This condition of impoverishment has not always been the case. When Filipinos began immigrating to Canada (via the United States) in the 1930s and then during the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, many found work in their respective professional fields (e.g., nursing and teaching). The picture has changed dramatically; filling Canada's labour needs has shifted away from immigration toward bringing in migrant workers on temporary labour contracts⁴. As the Canadian Council on Refugees (n.d.) noted, "In 2008 for the first time, the number of temporary foreign workers in Canada exceeded the total number of permanent residents admitted in the same year" (para. 1).

Foreign Domestic Workers: Formation of a Neo-colonial Subject

In the 1980s, Canadian women entering the paid workforce in significant numbers were seeking quality and affordable child and elder care. For decades, feminists had been calling for a national child care program (Newman & White, 2007); however, rather than instituting such a program, the federal government brought in temporary foreign domestic workers. Thus, the federal government institutionalized the process of exploiting one group of women (particularly racialized women) to serve the needs of another, an initiative that illustrates how a patriarchal (and we would also argue racist) ideology continues to shape Canada's social welfare policy (Evans & Werkerle, 1997). Initially, women from Caribbean countries filled most of the positions (Brigham, 2002), but in 1992, the program changed to become the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP). At that time, Canada began to aggressively tap into the vast pool of highly desirable Filipino migrant workers who had high levels of education and good English skills. The proportion of Filipino women participating in the LCP has grown steadily since then; currently over 95% of all LCP workers in Canada are Filipino women.

Filipino domestic workers are everywhere in our major Canadian cities; they are tending our children in parks, bringing our children to school and other activities, and caring for the elderly and persons with disability. Many Canadians are oblivious to the lived realities of these workers and the terrible sacrifice they make. To earn an income for their families and their children, these women must leave their children in the Philippines, migrate to Canada, and care for the children (and elderly) of other families. On the surface, the LCP seems to meet the caregiving needs of Canadian families and provide Filipinos employment and better economic opportunities, at least compared with the Philippines. This "happy discourse," as Pratt (2012a) defined it, is often used to justify the poor working conditions facing many in the LCP. Challenging these assumptions is central to the advocacy work of the PWCBC, which brings attention to how programs like the LCP and its attendant restrictions are based on a "seduction of hope" and an illusory citizenship (Rosca, 2010).

4 In the fall of 2014, the federal government made major changes to the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, many resulting in significant barriers for migrant workers to apply for permanent residency.

Through grassroots advocacy and policy activism, as well as its own research (PWCBC, 1996, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 2000) often conducted in partnership with academic researchers (e.g., Pratt, 1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2012a, 2012b; Pratt & Johnston, 2009; Zaman, 2006, 2012; Zaman, Diocson, & West, 2007), the PWCBC has examined and challenged the exploitation and economic marginalization of Filipino women and their families. Their research pointed to how the LCP has contributed to deskilling and the creation of a subclass of hidden exploited migrant workers and to a vicious cycle of intergenerational poverty (Moors, 2003). Until October 2014, these women were required to live with their employers (no other foreign worker program requires this⁵). Their wages are low and they must pay for their room and board from those wages; they send most of what is left back to the Philippines. While in the LCP, these women cannot work in any other jobs, must leave their children in the Philippines, and are significantly restricted from accessing training and education. They can apply for permanent residency in Canada, but it is a costly and lengthy process that can take many years⁶, which extends family separation⁷.

In addition to family separations and estrangement between mothers, their children, and their spouses, the LCP also leads to deskilling. Many Filipino women who come to Canada through the LCP are professionals; however, after spending several years as LCP workers, they face significant hurdles finding work in these careers. They have not been working in their profession and they face barriers to the recognition of their foreign credentials⁸. Thus, they become trapped in a vicious circle of low-waged domestic and service work, and a cycle of intergenerational poverty begins. LCP workers' children, when reunited with their mothers, face their own struggles. In addition to family estrangement, many encounter racism in schools and the wider society and, as a result, drop out of school, thus limiting their work options to the low-waged service industry (PWCBC, 1997b).

Methodology and Analytic Approach

This retrospective case study began in 2011 and is ongoing. It involved gathering stories and information through qualitative exploratory interviews, focus groups, and the collection

5 Major changes to the LCP were announced in the fall of 2014, including the live-in requirement. Employers, however, still have power. For caregivers to live out, employers must submit a Labour Market Impact Assessment, and caregivers must apply for and pay fees to get a new work permit based on that LMIA.

6 On October 9, 2014, CBC News reported the following: "The current wait time for 80 per cent of permanent resident applications received under the caregiver program between April 1, 2013, and March 31 was 39 months, according to the government's citizenship and immigration web site" (Mas, 2014).

7 In the fall of 2014, changes were made to the process of applying for permanent residency that have resulted in significant restrictions, including a quota now set for the number of applicants that will be accepted. Applicants must also now have, in addition to two years of full-time employment, one year of Canadian post-secondary education or an equivalent foreign credential and pass a language proficiency test. Since the 1980s, academic upgrading was not mandatory for caregivers fulfilling requirements for permanent residency. With these new requirements, fewer caregivers will be granted permanent residency, and many will be sent back to the Philippines after working for many years in Canada (Government of Canada, 2014b).

8 On October 24, 2014, the federal government announced a new panel that will look into the issue of recognizing foreign credentials (Government of Canada, 2014a).

and examination of documents and artifacts such as photos, scripts, press releases, and videos. Given the passage of time since the fashion shows, we were unable to speak with everyone who participated in their creation, but we did connect with 35 participants. Our research and analytic approach are informed by feminist, participatory, and democratic principles of research (Mohanty, 2003; Naples, 2003; Wolfe, 1996) that involve a spiral process of action and reflection; as we gathered photos and stories, we shared these materials with participants, leading to further stories and reflections. This process was more than a simple member check; it involved, as Koelsch (2013) has outlined, a dialogic process of interpretation. We engaged as much as possible with co-analysis and co-theorizing (Rappaport, 2007). Co-analyzing is a strategy that addresses matters of representation and power in academic work (Smith, 1999), which has historically excluded marginalized groups from participating in knowledge production. Fine (1994) underscored this concern and troubled the assumption that marginalized groups cannot or should not engage in intellectual work. Focus groups were key sites for sharing stories and themes, gathering further information, and engaging in co-analysis. As we shared some of our findings, including showing images of the dresses and scenes from the fashion shows, more reflections on the fashion shows emerged. In one of the focus groups, we used arts-based processes⁹.

This article is an example of the spiral process of sharing findings and co-analysis. To prepare for this writing, we met several times and reviewed photos of all the dresses, then selected three dresses and scenes to analyze; the selections represented those performances that illustrated in some way the story of colonization and neo-colonization as it is lived through body and land. As we zeroed in on the three scenes and images, we then engaged in further dialogue about the story behind these creations and the story told in their enactment. We have attempted to capture this dialogic process in the next sections.

The Political Fashion Shows of the PWCBC

In 2004, 2005, and 2008, the PWCBC created and produced three political fashion shows (see Figure 1). The performances were based on fashion shows developed by GABRIELA (General Assembly Binding Women for Reforms, Integrity, Equality, Leadership, and Action), a national feminist coalition in the Philippines that used this format to raise political awareness among the masses prior to an election. The PWCBC was the first organization in North America to use the genre. Subsequently, PWC-QC and PWC-ON (Philippine Women's Centres in Quebec and Ontario, respectively) and the Los Angeles GABRIELA group also launched political fashion shows.

The first two PWCBC fashion shows focused on the history of colonization of the Philippines and migration, issues that PWCBC and the Kalayaan Centre¹⁰ had been

9 In our first report back to the PWCBC after sharing photos and doing a round of reflections, small groups were formed and fabric was used by each group to tell a story that built on the themes of the fashion shows.

10 The Kalayaan Centre on Powell Street in Vancouver was an umbrella organization with which the PWCBC was affiliated. Kalayaan is a Tagalog word for "freedom," a key word for those involved in the struggle for national and social liberation of Filipino people. The centre was called "Kalayaan" to symbolize that freedom and to signify the centre as a political and liberating space.

Figure 1: Political Fashion Show Posters¹¹

2004

2005

2008

exploring for several years. The third and last show shifted its focus to the larger problem of violence against women, which included the struggles with settlement and integration of Filipinos living in Canada. The shows were created through a communal, intergenerational, and collaborative approach that involved the PWCBC and other groups that were part of the Kalayaan Centre, including SIKLAB¹² and UKPC¹³.

The “From Indigenous Woman to Maria Clara” Dress

Shauna: This scene (see Figures 2–4) was part of the first PWCBC fashion show held at the Capri Hall, a local venue that could accommodate 200 people. It illustrates so powerfully how the genre of a fashion show created space for telling complex stories about the colonization of the Philippines and how it is lived in the body. In our interviews with participants, we learned that creating this first fashion show was exciting for the Kalayaan Centre and involved the engagement of many groups and individuals. In addition to SIKLAB and UKPC, Sinag Bayan, the cultural arm of the Kalayaan Centre, was also involved, as were friends and family members of these groups. Many artists contributed their respective skills. Work study groups and a writing committee were also formed. For most of the participants we spoke with, creating a fashion show was a totally new experience.

The first few scenes of the initial show included music and dancing depicting Filipino indigenous culture. This narrative shifted when Marilou entered the stage wearing indigenous garb, followed by two soldiers, each carrying what looked like wooden crosses. At the back of the stage, another model stood wearing a long robe also painted with a cross.

11 The 2004 and 2008 posters were created by Carlo Sayo; the 2005 poster was created by Reva Diana. The artists who created these images have given their permission to use these photos.

12 SIKLAB, a migrant workers’ group, stands for *Sulong, Itaguyod ang Karapatan ng Manggagawang Pilipino sa Labas ng Bansa*, which in English means “Advance the Rights and Welfare of Overseas Filipinos Workers.”

13 UKPC is the acronym for *Ugnayan ng Kabataang Pilipino sa Canada*. Members of this group are youth born in Canada, immigrants, and children of women in the LCP.



Figure 2: Indigenous Woman

Figure 3: Undressing



Figure 4: Maria Clara Dress



As Marilou walked forward, she was seized by the two soldiers, who flipped over their crosses so they now resembled swords. Several other women came on stage and removed Marilou's indigenous garments and redressed her. Figures 2–4 show the costumes and dresses and the theatre involved with this scene. Marilou then speaks to her lived experience as the central model.

Marilou: When I was informed I would wear an—albeit generic—colourful, woven indigenous dress at the first fashion show, I was hesitant. I had to process the idea that I, an urban, academically trained immigrant to Canada of many years ago, would wear a “native” dress at a political fashion show. This skepticism gave way to understanding when it became clear that the second dress was to be the Maria Clara¹⁴ embroidered dress with butterfly sleeves. This scene illustrated Spanish, theocratic colonization and the associated policies of domesticating local women who would shed their well-defined indigeneity for Roman Catholic submission in speech, beliefs, and dress. The transition from having others remove my woven indigenous dress and put on the embroidered dress was a deeply felt understanding of how Filipino people, and women in particular, were stripped of their identity and history. When the bright, earth-toned dress was removed, I stood there, in white underwear, in front of an audience of about 100 people. The vulnerability I experienced was a reflection of the violence of colonization. For me, it broke through colonization as an abstract idea and showed its truth as a violent process of invasion of the mind and body. I felt utterly powerless; I could only stand there and wait for the next historical move. The cream-coloured embroidered dress was placed slowly over my head. There was relief in my being garbed again. The prayer book and rosary beads placed in my hands completed my feelings of irrevocable submission to conquest.

There is much history behind these scenes and the costumes. Prior to Spanish conquest, the Philippines was a group of island-based, seafaring Malay kingdoms. In pre-colonial times, it is known that there were different levels of development among the many islands of the archipelago encountered by the Spaniards. There was little class stratification or division of labour, as men and women participated equally in subsistence fishing, hunting, and agricultural activities. As a class system developed, so did gender roles. Women were assigned more domestic and agricultural work, planting and food gathering, while men moved to hunting, development of weaponry, claiming of territory, and eventually warfare. Class lines emerged with the beginnings of private ownership.

The earlier indigenous social groups were sometimes matriarchal and generally egalitarian. Their genderless deity—*Bathala*, a Filipino creation myth—evoked the union,

14 Maria Clara is a character in the epic *Noli Me Tangere* by José Rizal, declared the national hero of the Philippines during the Commonwealth government under the US. Her character is a demure, “domesticated” Filipino woman among the privileged classes and whom Rizal also used as a symbol of the Philippines subdued by Spain. “Maria Clara” has entered the lexicon to mean demure, submissive, religiously devout Filipino women.

not subordination, of women and men.¹⁵ A woman was valued with a bride price because she was a major loss for the family; there was no equivalent to the modern notion of marriage. Reproductive labour was considered most important, and polyandry (when a woman takes two or more husbands) was common¹⁶. Inheritance was based not on gender lines but on birth order. In pre-colonial times, indigenous women were diwatas, healers or spiritual mentors, and babaylanes (priestesses). Their positions of leadership and prominence are well known from documents left by Spanish friars and oral traditions in indigenous communities today. They had great influence over the people and an important role in leading rituals as healers, midwives, and religious practitioners with special training to contact the spirit world (Mananzan, 1998, pp. 2–4).

Encountering women completely different from those in the streets of Spain, the Spanish colonizers set out to domesticate the indigenous women through education and religion (Mananzan, 1998). From 1521 to 1898, Spain conquered the islands by force through its army and by deception through Catholicism. The Church established schools, translated training manuals for young girls, and promoted the cult of the obedient Virgin Mary. Later, the Spaniards also used the model of a *doncella* (a little *dona*) named Maria Clara, who was sweet, docile, obedient, and self-sacrificing. Maria Clara became the image of the ideal Filipino woman, an image that also looms large in the reverse image of the Filipino woman as prostitute.

The Rice Terrace Dress

Shauna: Another dress shown in the second fashion show was the Rice Terrace Dress (see Figures 5 and 6), which was the first in a series of scenes that depicted the history of the Philippines' abundant natural resources. While the front of the strapless dress, constructed out of potato sack fabric, looked rather plain, the audience could see a more complex construction as the model moved down the walkway. There were four levels, exemplifying the rich rice terraces of the Philippines. While it appeared to be a heavy garment, participants described it as quite light, although entering the stage was challenging because of its structure. Creating this dress was very labour-intensive and involved a workshop process. Parts of the dress would be created and then others would participate in adding another dimension. There was a lot of learning and teaching as some members who had more sewing skills helped others with little experience. Participants also remarked on how, despite the awkward dimensions of the dress, the model appeared very serene and beautiful.

Marilou: The difficulty of making this dress reflects the many years of labour it took to create the Banaue Rice Terraces of Ifugao of the northern Cordillera mountain region, which are now a UNESCO World Heritage site. Carved out of steep mountains by

15 This was explained by Sister Mary John Mananzan (1998) in *Woman and Religion* (p. 3). The first consonant in *Ba-Tha-La* is the first syllable of *babae* (woman), and the last consonant is the first syllable of *lalake* (man). The middle consonant is an aspirated sound that means light or spirit. In a Filipino creation myth, a bird similar to a crane opens a bamboo stalk. Upon splitting it open, the first humans, *Maganda* (woman) and *Malakas* (man), emerge. It is the mutuality of the creation of male and female that is emphasized, without which neither one would be created.

16 Helena Norberg-Hodge (1991) described the polyandric relationships among the Ladakhi people today as a means to preserve and sustain the community and their resources in the subsistence regions of the Himalayas; the situation may have been similar in parts of the Philippines.

Figure 5: Rice Terrace Dress, Front



Figure 6: Rice Terrace Dress, Back



indigenous people 2,000 years ago, it remains a most endeared ancient site and a source of authentic history and national pride. Today, minority indigenous tribes continue to fight for their cultural and economic survival as transnational corporations, including those from the United States, Canada, Australia, Japan, etc., engage in extensive mining in the region (Norberg-Hodge, Goering, & Page, 2001).

During the 333 years of colonization, the Spanish government extracted much of the Philippines' natural resources, including minerals such as gold, silver, and copper and marketed products such as sugar and coconut materials. The Spanish galleon trade to and from Mexico and the Philippines, and from there to Europe, was a global transport system. The opulent structures seen in Spain today were built during this era of colonization. They are evidence of economic plunder of resources from the colonies (of Central and South America and the Philippines in Asia), goods transported to the markets of Europe, and profits transferred to the coffers of the Spanish Crown.

It is not a coincidence that the valuable minerals mined after Spanish rule were taken from the northern Cordillera region, this area not having been fully exhausted by Spanish extraction. The indigenous peoples of the Cordilleras continue to struggle for land, the environment, and their livelihood to this day. In the Cordilleras, since the 1970s, there have been local protests, marked by political killings, against the collaboration of transnational mining companies and the Philippine state. On the opposite side of the country, warnings of a similar fate for southern Mindanao's mineral wealth are well known¹⁷.

The Family Separation Dress

Shauna: Building on the success and momentum of the first show, the second fashion show was launched in 2005. *Philippine Independence Re-veiled: A Political Fashion Show* continued to explore colonization but shifted attention to current struggles in the Philippines. In interviews with organizers, we learned that for this show, they decided to go deeper into the details of globalization, capitalism, imperialism, and commercialism, with the goal of performing and illustrating the structural dimensions of the struggles for liberation. The venue was the Russian Hall, larger than the site of the first fashion show. Many of the core members who participated in creating the first show were involved in the second, and there was no problem getting additional help from enthusiastic volunteers. This show was more ambitious, the participants were more confident, and there was more time to prepare, which allowed more thought and creativity. Some garments from the first show were reused and new ones were developed, like this Family Separation Dress (see Figure 7).

I did not see this fashion show in person, but viewing photos from this scene of family separation (see Figure 8) was yet another visceral moment for me. Working in solidarity with the PWCBC, I have read about, studied, and discussed the issues facing domestic migrant workers, particularly the terrible paradox of Filipino women having to leave their families in order to earn an income to care for them. When we showed the photos to a focus group of PWCBC members, including this scene, many wept. It is a simple yet powerful creation that speaks to the educative power of showing and not simply telling.

In this scene, a woman modelled a costume that included a white apron over black top and pants; the apron was stamped with a postal delivery address. A bright blue sash

17 For information about the exploitation of mineral resources in Mindanao, see Panaghuisa: A Movement for Human Rights, Peace, and Justice in Mindanao, <http://panaghuisa.org/>.

Figure 7: Family Separation Dress, Front



Figure 8: Family Separation Dress, Back



was wrapped around the model's wrists and waist, with a long train following behind. The audience was very quiet as she moved ever so slowly, as if she and time were controlled by forces beyond and outside of her. As she moved farther down the walkway, there were murmurs from the audience as they turned to see what followed the blue train. Slowly walking many metres behind were two little children and a man, all holding onto the woman's blue train.

Marilou: Like the knowledge I gained from the "indigenous to Maria Clara" scene, through this performance I experienced another visceral disturbance that came with deepening knowledge of the suffering of family separation that occurs through the LCP. It seems the group studies and analysis we had done previously and this dress and scene were an integration of what we knew, lived, and were fighting for. It confirmed our reality in Vancouver and strengthened the clarity that we were on firm ground in fighting the LCP policy and thereby transforming our lives.

Ten percent of 80 million Filipinos now leave their families to work abroad, and 70% of the 3,000 Filipinos who leave daily are women. Analyses of the Philippine economic and political situation confirm the slave-like coercion of overseas work. Today, 80% of Filipinos in the Philippines are unemployed or underemployed and live in semi-feudal conditions in an economy that officially has 12% unemployment. The minimum wage is not a living wage in light of rising commodity and food prices (Aguilar, 2003; IBON, 2005). As Sassen (2002) argued, this migration is feminized and is associated with deskilling. These women, who are often well educated, are relegated to low-paying domestic work, low-status manufacturing jobs, or sexual exploitation for profit. These jobs illustrate a deep connection between globalized capitalism and women's productive and reproductive roles. A Filipino woman in the Philippines today with no employment (even though she is well trained) has only three forced "choices" (PWCBC, 1997c). She can either work in a factory in export processing zones, which are not likely to be close to her home; enter the "entertainment" industry (i.e., prostitution or the sex trade); or go abroad as a domestic worker or mail-order bride. Women's contribution to monopoly capitalism, whether at home or abroad, is a continuation of their role in the early days of Western industrialization. This consists of no-pay or low-wage domestic or production work or serving as sexual partners for reproduction or male gratification. This family separation dress offered a poignant reminder of the struggle for reproductive justice for Filipino women.

Shauna: This costume and scene had the power to evoke what Khan (2009, p. 29) wrote about migrant worker policies like the LCP. These programs have contributed to the construction of a "singular feminized identity" of an ideal domestic worker as "obedient, nurturing, complacent," a process of subjectification that, as Rosca (2010) argued, is part of "re-feudalization" of Filipino women requiring their "self-abnegation [and] self-sacrifice" (p. 6). These processes of subjectification create challenges for the recognition and exercise of their social, cultural, and political rights (Lister, 2003; Stasiulis & Bakan, 1997; Young, 2000; Yuval-Davis, 1997, 2002). What I observed in this scene spoke directly to how domestic migrant workers are facing multiple and, at times, competing loyalties to family and their own liberation.

Discussion and Conclusion

The three dresses that are the focus of this discussion were selected from the many created for the PWCBC fashion shows. They offer a kind of topography of how these fashion shows engaged in a popular education process in which historical consciousness grew through both cognitive as well as embodied processes. Creating and wearing these dresses enabled a telling of a colonial history that has not been public knowledge. Creating and wearing this history interrupted the colonial and neo-colonial relationship, bringing agency to the historical enactment of the history of colonialization of the Philippines and the current neo-colonial realities fueled by global capitalism and its hunger for cheap human labour and natural resources. The “From Indigenous Woman to Maria Clara” Dress, which was part of the first fashion show, told the story of the colonization of the Philippines and the subjugation of women through the imposition of the Catholic religion. The Rice Terrace Dress spoke to how globalized capitalism involves not only exploitation of human labour but also of the land, specifically the rich resources of the Philippines. The Family Separation Dress then signalled more current struggles and how the Canadian Live-in Caregiver Program exploits Filipino women who, as domestic foreign workers, make a terrible sacrifice of leaving their children in order to care for their children.

This study contributes to knowledge about creative arts-based feminist popular education activities and their power to aid in the development of historical consciousness. Wearing and performing the colonial history of the Philippines as well as neo-colonial practices of globalized capitalism illustrate the powerful pedagogy of the PWCBC’s political fashion shows, a feminist popular education form. As Marilou noted, wearing this history produced a kind of visceral disturbance that we argue contributes to what Ellsworth (2005, p. 5) called “knowledge in the making,” which involves “the embodied sensation of *making sense*, the *lived experiences* of our learning selves that make the thing we call knowledge” (p. 1, emphasis in original).

Feminist popular education practices create spaces where alternative and oppositional knowledge can be generated. Fraser (1997) defined such spaces as “subaltern counterpublics”; that is, “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (p. 81). The political fashion shows of the PWCBC exemplify the dual character of these sites of practice: “On the one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics. It is precisely in the dialectic between these two functions that their emancipatory potential resides” (Fraser, p. 82).

The use of collective arts-based activity illustrated here confirms and enhances the dialectical process needed for ongoing, constantly changing social transformation. Popular education methodology and pedagogy and the principles of feminist praxis maintain the change process and avoid stagnation in social struggles. Seemingly complex local policy and transnational strategies for global economic goals are clarified and embodied through arts-based feminist collaboration. As well, community-based actions from those of the majority world, now in Canada, voice knowledge and perform activism in global politics needing feminist vigilance, where ever-changing practices and processes will be sought in the future.

Desires for a liberative national agenda or socialist future are not uncommon in struggles in many countries in the majority world in recent history. Why have Philippine women of this political persuasion been so effective? What is specific to this group? We conclude that what makes their praxis unique is that the struggle is structurally oriented from the outset, with gender equality and women's liberation at the core. The fashion shows, as political action, illustrate how what is achieved is unlikely to be sustained without the development of historical consciousness grounded in community, a process that grows from knowledge of where activists come from and where they return to. They are supported by other communities of women—locally, nationally, and transnationally—who have parallel struggles of violence.

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