



**Maribel Legarda** grew up in the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA), the group she now serves as artistic director. Here's how she described this history to fellow participants in the online dialogue:

*Munira Sen wrote in her bio, "I don't know where the 'I' begins and where 'Madhyam' [the organization she directs] ends." I feel exactly the same way. It's hard to separate who I am from what PETA is and how the work has evolved me. I started my "love affair" with theater and PETA as a young primary-school student who had a PETA children's theater teacher. I loved going to her classes because it was there that I felt free and able to express who I was and what I thought. One day, she took us to a place called Fort Santiago, a part of the Walled City, which was the first settlement built by the Spaniards. Inside was a beautiful open-air theater nestled within walls of red brick and piedra china, at the center of which was a T-stage*

*which in those days seemed such an unusually shaped performance area. This was PETA's home, and as I stood there I made a vow that I would one day be part of that place, that theater called Rajah Sulayman. Ten years later, I took a six-week PETA Summer Theater Arts Workshop and I haven't left since. Twenty-two years have passed and I can say that PETA became the place where I "grew up." It has become my second home, or you can also say, my community.*

PETA is a flagship group of the community cultural development field: ambitious, adaptable and enduring, creating powerful work even when it was essentially outlawed by the Marcos regime. As this essay describes, PETA's challenge is to find effective ways to work with groups that are among the most marginalized

in a country that is one of the poorest and has felt globalization's damaging effects more intensely than most:

*We are not prepared for the onslaught of globalization, so what we sell are our human resources. We need to send our women as domestic helpers and our men as laborers abroad, and in exchange, we have more young people growing up in extended households and generating social problems because there have been little efforts to create a support system to cope with this shift from the nuclear family to extended households.*

# Imagined Communities

PETA'S COMMUNITY, CULTURE AND  
DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCE

by Maribel Legarda

**A** 7-year-old girl stands in the middle of a classroom, listening intently as she goes through the motions of the story her drama teacher is narrating. She feels free, she feels confident, she feels at ease. Here in her drama class, she can express herself. She does not feel the same way inside her classroom.

This is my own story—not unique, not isolated, but still mine. It could be the story of a child sex-worker, a child laborer, an out-of-school youth, a battered woman, a peasant farmer, a fisherman or a poor urban mother. It could belong to countless other marginalized people who, through an opportunity to participate in an intensive community theater workshop, have found a safe space to break silence, discover a voice to speak, think and feel from the wellsprings of their own beliefs and ideas.

In this essay I have attempted to share the work of PETA—the Philippine Educational Theater Association, where I serve as artistic director—in community theater, focusing on three groups: women, children and young people. How does PETA wield theater arts as tools to contribute to a community's development? What are our strategies? What philosophy drives the strategy? How does PETA sustain the work? How does the work contribute to the larger reimagining of a society under constant political and economic challenges? To address these questions, I draw from my own stories and from stories of fellow artist-teachers who have been conducting workshops with women, children and young people all over the Philippines.

The impetus for organizing the Philippine Educational Theater Association in the late '60s was the need to create a theater practice that was Filipino in both language and content and national and international in scope. PETA's founders also wished to introduce theater to both formal and community settings. At the time, there was a clear dichotomy between formal theater as practiced in schools and universities, presenting theater in English, and the practice of community-based groups performing traditional theater in the local dialects.

The wish to bridge this gap informed the vision of PETA's founder Cecile Guidote in creating a prospectus for a national theater movement, then using two major strategies to realize this vision. The first was creating a company known as the Kalinangan Ensemble that would develop into a highly skilled group of theater artists doing original plays in Filipino as well as translations and adaptations of world classics. The second was the introduction of theater arts in schools, while disseminating theater skills to the communities all over the Philippines. In short, PETA's aim was to develop a new and liberating theater pedagogy that would lead to the creation of original Filipino dramaturgy at both professional and community levels. The synergy of these two initiatives led to the birth of the national theater movement Cecile Guidote envisaged.

PETA was founded during the Marcos dictatorship. This experience of making theater under such conditions sharpened the group's stance: it was no longer enough to assert the importance of cultural identity, asserting the right to a Filipino national theater; the theater also had an obligation to oppose dictatorship. The content and form of both its aesthetic and pedagogical work were shaped by the conditions of the time.

PETA's founders believed that theater is a mirror of society: it was necessary to hold up this mirror to our audiences so they could reflect on social realities and, it was hoped, act for social change. PETA created performances tackling major social issues such as the plight of the landless farmers, workers' struggles, the rights of indigenous people and also questions of nationalism and identity. Alongside these performances, PETA also recognized the need to decentralize theater from the city center and democratize it so that anyone could create theater, whether professionally or in a community setting. Our "artist-teacher" concept was developed at this time. This meant that it was not enough to hone one's skills as an artist. The artist must be able to go into communities to share these skills, then bring these experiences back into PETA's repertory work. The need to link to communities created the impetus to network with many sectors and groups, and this became a key strategy to delivering PETA's services to our various partners. The skills that members of these communities learned were then used in organizing and in designing creative processes to enable participation and use theater in dealing with community issues.

Once this national theater movement was formed, its dependence on the capital region gradually diminished until local participants were able to organize and train their own communities. The existence of this network then enabled PETA to further develop its own aesthetics and pedagogy, but now in partnership with the regions. From the '70s to the mid-'80s, this movement swelled. During the same period, a great deal of international funding was given to the Philippines because of international support of the movement against the Marcos dictatorship. PETA responded in three ways: by developing curriculum with the objective of conscientizing various sectors in Philippine society; by doing street theater as part of the people's protest movement; and by simultaneously developing its repertory aesthetics through the Kalinangan Ensemble.

After 20 years of plunder and violence, the Marcos regime was brought down by the combined forces of the EDSA Revolution<sup>1</sup> or "People Power," as it is commonly known, the result of the relentless organizing and education by progressive forces in those 20 years.

<sup>1</sup>The February 1986 uprising, named after Epifanio de los Santos, a ring road around Manila that was the site of confrontation between pro- and anti-Marcos forces.

The Cory Aquino—and later, Fidel Ramos—administration brought back democratic institutions that created conditions for investment and what seemed to be budding prosperity. To the rest of the world we appeared to be progressing. The Philippines moved out of Third World status into the developing nation category, wanting to follow the path taken by the so-called newly industrialized countries, including the Asian tigers such as Thailand. But the "tigers" fell, revealing that economic recovery had been founded on quicksand, not solid ground. Though what was called democratic space had been established, real issues such as the equitable distribution of land and resources remained unaddressed, and genuine democratic and social reforms were never implemented. Cronyism and corruption were present in every aspect of our political institutions.

Early in 2001, we went through what is now called "EDSA 2." Inspired by the People Power Revolution of 1986, Filipinos took to the streets once more, bringing down President Joseph Estrada, whose administration had been rocked by charges of gross corruption and blatant misuse of power. In his two years in power, his administration further increased poverty in the country and left the current administration with problems of bankruptcy, terrorism and banditry, and factions within the military, all on top of the serious problems we suffer as effects of globalization.

Being ill-prepared for the onslaught of globalization, the Philippines has resorted to exporting its human resources. Overseas migrant workers have continued to swell in number since the early '80s. In 1996 alone an estimated \$7 billion U.S. was remitted to the Philippine economy, making this sector the Philippines' largest dollar earner. There are at least seven million migrant

Filipinos all over the world, a socially costly situation. The increasing number of broken homes can be traced to the continuous absence of one or both parents. Children are left without strong role models in their formative years. This then translates into youth problems with drugs and/or the law. The values of these young people are also affected as their standard of living increases due to the dollars that are sent home by parents working abroad: their spending patterns change; consumerism creates the urgent need to buy branded clothes such as Nike and Levi's. These tendencies are exacerbated by the global culture of commercial film, music and television.

It is in this context that PETA and other Filipino cultural workers now operate. Also within this context lies our next set of challenges. I will illustrate PETA's response by narrating our experience of partnership with three groups we've been working with for several years: Dulaang Smokey Mountain, a children's and youth theater group based in a poor urban area of Metro Manila; the Pukot Festival, a community youth theater festival held in the Prelature of Infanta, Quezon, a province in Southern Tagalog; and Teatro Kabbule, a community-based theater group in Ifugao province in the northern part of the Philippines, the Cordillera region.

#### **DULAANG SMOKEY MOUNTAIN**

Smokey Mountain sits on a mountain of garbage at the outskirts of Manila. Most of the children who live there work as scavengers, often rather than going to school. In this project, 20 children were gathered for a two-month workshop introducing theater performance skills through games, movement, action songs, storytelling and improvisation. Its aim was to build the child-participants' sense of self and community. PETA artist-teachers guided the children toward mounting a production about what it is like to be a child at Smokey Mountain.

The challenge was increased by the circumstances surrounding these children. Firstly, they had uneven educational backgrounds. Some were full-time students, others went to school on a part-time basis because of their scavenging work, while others dropped out of school to become full-time scavengers in order to increase their contribution to family income. Their lack of education was exacerbated by the fact that the children lived under the shadow of malnutrition, breathing the poisonous fumes that decomposing garbage emits. Even simple instructions such as stepping right and stepping left were difficult for children to execute after years of exposure to this social and physical decay.

Playful use of what PETA calls the "Basic Integrated Arts Approach" to theater transformed the workshop venue into a virtual play space. The Integrated Arts Workshop is a systematic and cumulative weaving together of creative drama, creative sound and music, body movement, creative writing,

visual arts and group dynamics. In essence, it is creative drama experienced and understood through various art disciplines. Exercises focusing on these different components are geared toward stimulating the participants to discover their creative potential for self- and collective expression. The process of creation and discovery is experiential and improvisational. The key to creation is spontaneity and the belief that we each contain a gold mine of riches, waiting to be discovered, brought into the light, polished and honed.

After months of challenging workshops and rehearsals, it was amazing to watch the children sing and dance and move and laugh as other children do. For that one moment, they were able not only to reclaim themselves but to reclaim their space. The children of Smokey Mountain realized a most fervent wish—to have a playground. For me, this is what the pedagogy of PETA's children's theater is all about: to create playgrounds in seemingly impossible environments—if not playgrounds in physical spaces, then those that grow out of the imagination.

Through the workshop, the children had become more confident, articulate and expressive, especially among their peers. They created a play which toured to other Metro Manila venues, reaching out to other children's communities and educating them on children's rights. Three years later, Smokey Mountain was leveled to the ground. The children's group, with the help of PETA playwrights, reworked their script to include the issue of relocation and its attendant problems, including related issues like child prostitution and drug abuse.

The Smokey Mountain experience illustrates how PETA continually adapts its strategies in theater-in-education to situations where formal educational systems are virtually nonexistent. In the Smokey Mountain case, theater was education. This reality requires the PETA artist-teacher to step out of the artistic confines of a conventional theater ensemble into the arena of development work, where one reinvents theater not only as a means of self-expression but as a venue for imagining, proposing and actualizing change.

The story does not end here. Ten years later, at least eight of the children who originally participated are now young adults between the ages of 17 and 21. They have sustained this group, calling themselves Dulaang Smokey Mountain (Smokey Mountain Theater). They run their small theater group themselves, performing plays that tackle different social issues. They have gone on to perform not only stories about members' own social conditions, but also issues of AIDS, child prostitution and other relevant themes. They work in consultation with PETA's children's and youth program, but can proudly say that they have produced these short pieces using their own internal resources.

These young people's skills have now evolved to a point where they are capable of analyzing the social and economic conditions that surround their poverty. They are conscious of such institutions as the World Bank and of government corruption. This deeper understanding makes it possible for them to find constructive solutions to their challenged lives. They now have a driving need to finish their educations. They realize that the power to make the changes they want in their lives rests in their creative hands.

### **THE PUKOT FESTIVAL**

The Pukot Youth Theatre Festival is conducted in the Prelature of Infanta, a province in the Southern Tagalog Region of the Philippines. This province is rich in natural resources. It has the Pacific Ocean on one side and the Central Plains of Luzon on the other. Quezon has abundant fishing resources and coconut farms. The island is split by the great mountain chain called the Sierra Madre Mountains, home to an indigenous tribe, the Agtas. This geography enriches the perspective of the population of fisherfolk, peasant farmers and indigenous peoples. The Roman Catholic Church has been a major influence in Philippine society and culture since the days of Spanish colonization, and this influence has not diminished through time. In the Philippines, the Catholic Church has played both an oppressive and liberating role in people's lives. It has burdened us with traditional church dogma as well as supporting our struggles against oppression. Quezon has been traditionally known as an outspoken region with progressive clergy. In this province, the Church has championed the establishment of Basic Christian Communities, a concept inspired by theology of liberation. In the Philippine context, this has been expressed as the "preferential option" for the poor.

*Pukot* is a manner of fishing using a net, which serves as a metaphor for the gathering of experiences in the prelature. This project was one element in a consistent partnership with the Prelature of Infanta begun in the 1980s, so the success of the Pukot Festival owes something to prior working relationships and collaborations with these communities.

This particular project's objective was to create different performances to commemorate and reflect on the past 50 years of missionary work and its effects on the community. The first step was to apply the Basic Integrated Arts Approach, beginning with research on the traditional cultural practices of their communities. The young people also went through a workshop intended not only to hone their skills as performers but also to train them for other major aspects of theatrical performance such as design, choreography and the technical aspects of production. They also created the initial improvisations and scenarios for their performance. Upon completion of this phase, PETA facilitators left the young people to work toward finalizing their pieces. The facilitators returned only three days before the festival to offer their final critique and to work on points needing improvement.



**Dulaang Smokey Mountain performs in Plaza Bonifacio, in tribute to people with HIV/AIDS. Photo by PETA.**

The five-day festival brought together 200 young people, six communities and at least 200 adult community leaders. The six major productions addressed local community issues ranging from their experience of the Catholic Church, development aggression as illustrated by the government's plan to build airports, commercial seaports and golf courses, turning agricultural land into industrial complexes, creating major shifts from local to export crops (e.g., from rice to potatoes) and so on. These moves will have a marked effect on their environment, as well as current youth problems such as drugs and family relationships. The use of several Tagalog dialects still alive in their communities is important to note. The performances mixed stylized forms using music, dance, short realistic scenes and magical characters. A beautiful dance was developed using a lamp inspired by the lamps that fisherfolk in their villages use for night fishing. The festival began with a parade for which the young people created masks and dances exploring their theme of the rainbow: in their island, a rainbow can always be seen as one arrives or departs; for them this means that God is always present in their island.

The festival allowed a collective experience of the varied histories, issues and cultural practices of diverse local communities. This enabled people to connect the problems happening in each parish to the larger problems of the province. They were able to experience simultaneously the unique expressions of each community as well as shared and collective manifestations.

This is where the PETA paradigm of the O-A-O proved most useful. O-A-O stands for the interplay of the aspects of Orientation, Artistry and Organization. Orientation deepens a project's thematic directions; Artistry

opens choices for expression; and Organization emphasizes the spirit of group cohesion and cooperation. The three-pronged O-A-O paradigm evolved over the course of years, expressing PETA's commitment to developing not only theater as an artistic expression but also theater as a pedagogical or educational process. The paradigm also emphasizes the development of leadership that can be sustained in the community.

For example, to complement the theater festival, a leadership seminar was also conducted, bringing together the youth of the Infanta community to discuss their role and their visions of society. The young people were also being prepared to conduct and manage the festival, with intervention from adult leaders only when clearly necessary. This concept of youth participation is currently one of PETA's chief thrusts in its work with young people.

This experience produced an action plan by the young people, declaring their determination to continue to come together as youth theater groups and share their learning in their schools and communities. They also recognized the power of theater to bring messages across with creativity and impact.

Bishop Julio Xavier Labayen, Head of the Prelature, has this to say of the work: "The impact on people's consciousness of our youth's theatrical presentation is indisputable. Our people enjoy the youth's entertaining presentation and, at the same time, imbibe the message in their consciousness of the ongoing story of our world today and our responsibility to save the world."

#### **TEATRO KABBULE**

I would like to further illustrate the O-A-O paradigm by discussing the PETA Women's Theater Program's work with Teatro Kabbule, a community-based theater group in Ifugao Province, located in the Cordillera Region.

The PETA Women's Theater Program facilitated the formation of Teatro Kabbule through a three-day workshop conducted in 1998. The group is composed of 25 adults and young people (students, NGO workers, government employees, etc.) from various *barangays* (communities) in Ifugao. It advocates for women, raising issues of violence against women. PETA supports the group's advocacy and education work through skills training workshops, repertory theater guidance and organizational development.

*Kabbule* is a local indigenous term for ghost or monster. It is also a traditional chant (like a children's rhyme) used by participants in the workshop as a group dynamics game. Traditionally, this chant is used to scare children about ghosts and monsters to make them sleepy and go to bed early. The chant talks about roaming ghosts moving from one house to the other. The idea of using the

game as a metaphor for the group's presentation came out of initial brainstorming during the workshop and eventually became the title of their own informational performance, and later the name of their own theater group.

In Ifugao Province, the orientation problem was how to evoke from the community an assessment of a situation that was clearly traumatic and deemed taboo by indigenous society and culture. How does one surface stories that are deeply repressed by the culture? And how does one translate frameworks of feminism and empowerment while remaining equally sensitive to highly regarded customs and traditions? Artistically, how does one tap into the rich performance traditions often undervalued by the participants themselves out of a desire to please what they perceive as artist-teachers' urban sensibilities? Organizationally, how does one ensure that the experience doesn't become a one-shot deal?

Using the chant as the organizing structure, the group was able to come up with a 30-minute play depicting actual cases of abuse of women and children in their community. The play was performed before local government officials and to several towns in Ifugao in a bid to raise public awareness, advocate and lobby for local mechanisms (e.g., laws, social services, welfare programs for women, etc.) and establish institutions such as a women's desk and crisis center in their own community.

The play narrates three true stories of family violence in Ifugao, touching on physical abuse of children, incestuous abuse and wife battering, woven together and using the Kabbule character as an image and metaphor mirroring the acts of the perpetrators of this violence. The chant became the basis for a discussion of fear and aggression. With the sensitive guidance of the artist-teachers, the young women gradually put a face to the monster: that of the grandfather who continually abused his own granddaughter, the drunken father who burned his own child in a fit of fury, the enraged husband who banged his wife's head on the house post.

Toward the end of the play, the Kabbule character says:

In our lives, there are ghosts and monsters created by our minds and there are also real ghosts and monsters that actually exist. They are people we know, people we love. They are near to us, and more often we live with them. And we must be able to know and deal with these ghosts in our lives.

The group did not merely perform the play; it also held discussion groups on domestic violence and abuse. Debriefing workshops were conducted during advocacy performances. The community audiences were able to identify and relate to the issues presented because the stories were based on cases in their own community and province that were shared during the workshops. It was also obvious during these debriefing workshops that people were still

Performance is part of a trainers' training workshop for health workers, conducted by the Women's Theater Collective. Photo by PETA.



uncomfortable in confronting these issues. But people were beginning to question why such things happen.

Yes, they want to preserve their names, they don't want dirty things to get out of their houses. They would rather keep the secret within the family.

—A MEMBER OF A LOCAL AUDIENCE IN IFUGAO

I shall backtrack a little to further detail the process by which Teatro Kabbule came into being. In 1998, PETA launched a project entitled “Tumawag Kay Libby Manaoag” (“Call Libby Manaoag”). This production was part of a larger campaign, the National Family Violence Prevention Program (NFVPP).<sup>2</sup> “Libby Manaoag” is the story of a radio-show host; many women call her program to talk about their issues. Three women who are experiencing different forms of domestic violence—physical, emotional and sexual—become the main voices that shape the stories. We hear advice from experts such as lawyers, psychiatrists and social workers. The scenes are woven together with songs and dances, and the characters are all performed in a broad acting style with much humor.

<sup>2</sup>A nationwide partnership of more than 20 NGOs, government agencies, civic groups and academic institutions initiated by the Women's Civic Center to advocate for the prevention and elimination of violence against women within the family.

An “informance” like this is a performance that carefully works information, issues and debates into a play's structure. Its objectives are clearly developmental in nature, but artistic elements are not sacrificed in favor of these developmental aims. Unlike Boal's Forum Theater, it does not ask audiences to take over actors' roles or offer possible courses of action or decisions that the characters in the story can take. It is a complete story, yet not prescriptive. Instead, after the performance, a debriefing workshop is conducted where the issue is discussed and understanding deepens.

Another crucial activity employed for this informance was the organization of action teams in each area where we performed. A team of PETA artist–teachers would return to conduct from three to five theater workshops with local women. Each workshop would focus on domestic violence as they experienced or perceived it. With this foundation, the groups would create their own performances. Some were even able to tour theirs in their towns and provinces. Teatro Kabbule is a product of this project.

Other communities opted to create other types of actions such as forums and discussions, but the Cordillera Region really focused on developing theater groups that carried issues of domestic violence through their performances. Though these groups have limited funds and resources, they are committed to sustaining their performance and training activities because they have seen how effective the process of theater can be not only for themselves—how these women have found their voices to articulate their own ideas on issues concerning their lives—but also how their performances translate within their community. Local government officials support their efforts and value their work. They have moved on to tackle other issues such as reproductive health and the need to recover and preserve their own indigenous culture. They are now moving from analyzing their domestic situations to larger issues such as globalization that have affected their lives, destroying their environment through mining and driving their young people overseas in search of contract work.

The groups, some of whom have not even finished secondary school, not only run their theater groups but have also led in the formation of other groups in their province. Through theater, they have become women’s rights activists in their communities.

Theater work has become a popular medium for information dissemination in Ifugao. Other groups, especially government agencies like the Philippine Information Agency and the Provincial Social Work and Development Agency, are now beginning to organize their own groups for women’s issue advocacy, inspired by what Teatro Kabbule has initiated.

The Teatro Kabbule group continues to experience its own unique processes of integration, consolidation and organizational dynamics—a necessary stage and a test for them. Group transformation happens alongside personal transformation within members who mirror individual experience in the stories they present: their play echoes their own reality as individuals. The experience has become a process of healing and support. Its members now consider the group a sanctuary or community whose support they miss in periods of inactivity.

Just recently, the mover and organizer of Teatro Kabbule received a regional award as an outstanding government employee in Cordillera for all her work in running the organization. The group has been conducting independent workshops within Ifugao, which in turn facilitated the formation of a children's theater group advocating for reproductive rights, now receiving support from UNICEF. They have also organized and conducted their own art camp with the strong support of the provincial government.

### **NEW CHALLENGES**

It has been 34 years since PETA was founded, so we have an unlimited stock of stories to share. I hope these three stories will suffice to give the reader a general picture of PETA's community cultural development work, which is always evolving, never static.

PETA's vision has not altered. We continue to work toward a vision of full actualization of the human person, a free society, a liberating culture and a clean, healthy and rich environment. But changes in our context have made it necessary for PETA to re-evaluate our strategies in working toward these visions.

More than ever, these last two decades have been a time for reflection and shifting paradigms. We have been affected and challenged by changing political, economic and social conditions in our country and by rifts in the progressive movement that have disrupted the basis for organized action in solidarity with other groups.

In 1986, Filipinos toppled a dictator in what is now called EDSA 1. In the succeeding decade, we once again challenged government, enduring a difficult trial leading to the downfall of a corrupt president: this historical moment was given the title of EDSA 2. However, a few months later, the EDSA 3 phenomenon unfolded as at least a million poor and disadvantaged Filipinos took to the street in support of the corrupt ex-president. The political tension seems to be turning into a class war. Yet at the core of this protest lay the issue of basic rights and participation for the majority of the disenfranchised poor.

The Philippines is a nation of paradoxes. In some ways, it exemplifies best practices in democratic participation. But haves and have-nots alike succumb to a long tradition of patriarchy and patronage. Growing poverty and the widening income gap are social bombs that ignite human rights abuses, crime and rebellion. Basic services have not reached many of the poor. Among the poorest Filipinos, participation in community development is very low. Poor access to services and lack of participation are the result of structural policies that continue to marginalize the disadvantaged sector of society. Lack of public funds, bureaucracy and lack of political will are other factors. The Asian crisis and globalization have worsened our national dilemma.

The EDSA 3 phenomena shook the intelligentsia and NGO and development workers, impelling deep reflection of the underlying causes of the Philippines' political and economic ills. One cannot address these issues without confronting the culture of poverty that has taken root in our society. We cannot ignore the long historical disempowerment that has shaped the Filipino psyche. We cannot forge lasting change if we do not penetrate the center of citizens' being, their hearts and minds. What are the deepest values by which they live? Are they based on a constitution inherited from the West, which talks of democracy, liberty and equality? Or are they traditional Filipino concepts of *tao* (person), *loob* (inner self), *labas* (outer reality), *kapwa* (other person)—of knowledge of self, acceptance of the other and the great value placed on *pakikipag-kapwa ta* (personal relationships and interactions)?

As cultural workers, these inquiries have led us to focus our work, recognizing that our work in culture is crucial to any real social change. In recognition of the realities of poverty in the Philippines, we have chosen to work with women, children and young people—those hardest hit under these conditions. We work with these sectors through several programs:

#### **1. Theater for Development**

PETA intersects with development agendas through its participation in various human rights advocacy campaigns for women, children or young people. Our participation is expressed through the development of performances and informances that tackle these concerns and through the development of a curriculum that integrates the study of these issues within a theater process.

#### **2. Theater in Education**

The role that education plays in nation building is unquestionable. But the educational system for Filipino children does not function at an optimal level for two major reasons: (1) insufficient resources from the national budget because primary importance is given to such items as infrastructure building and debt servicing; and (2) an archaic system of education which still operates on rote learning and the “banking” system of education that treats students as empty vessels to be filled with educational materials that have yet to be fully adapted to Filipino culture. Even the government recognizes these deficiencies as it tries to implement its Ten-Year Master Plan for basic education. Its objectives are: (1) enhancing relevance of the school curriculum; (2) enriching the learning experience; (3) empowering the front-line managers; (4) enhancing teachers' competence in facilitating and evaluating learning; and (5) enhancing partnership with stakeholders.

PETA involves itself in the educational system by networking with schools and conducting teachers' training, introducing the use of theater methods in the classroom and curriculum. It also coordinates with school-based drama groups and clubs, indirectly training their students. These trainings cover not

only the study of Philippine culture and theater arts but also have leadership and consciousness-raising as major objectives.

### **3. Developing Filipino Aesthetics**

For 34 years, PETA has unceasingly devoted itself to the development of Philippine theater by the creation of original Filipino plays and experimentation with traditional and contemporary Filipino theater forms as well as translations and adaptations of foreign materials. Our quest is to develop Philippine theater and ultimately Philippine culture. In a highly globalized world threatened by homogenization, erasing cultural diversity, this becomes even more crucial.

Our colonial experience—described as “300 years in the convent and 50 years in Hollywood”—has left our cultural identity confused and fractured. We were taught disdain for what is ours and admiration for what comes from the West. We have been cut off from the wealth of our cultural legacy. No nation can survive without a clear understanding and respect for its culture. Therefore PETA provides a process by which communities can reflect on their own cultural traditions and practices which in turn become the source of their performance. PETA seeks not only to rediscover what is inherent in Filipino traditions but also to revitalize it and keep it continuously evolving.

To illustrate this, let me share briefly the process of one of our most successful productions, “Macli-ing Dulag.” Macli-ing was one of the leaders of the Kalinga tribe, one of the indigenous groups in the Cordillera region. Their ancestral land was threatened by a proposed dam that would destroy sacred burial ground. He took the initiative in organizing the first intertribal *bodong* (peace pact) against the projected Chico Dam. They were eventually able to stop the construction of the Chico Dam by the National Power Corporation. Shortly after this triumph, Macli-ing was brutally murdered on April 24, 1980. His death served to unify the Kalinga tribe to oppose the military and the development aggression being carried out in their lands. Macli-ing became a hero not only to his people but even to the lowlanders, who were inspired by his integrity and commitment.

In April of 1988, PETA produced the play “Macli-ing Dulag,” inspired by this heroic story. It recognized the powerful metaphor that a life and death could inspire in the time of the dictatorship.

A group of artists including a director, designer, choreographer and musician traveled to Lubuagan, a small Kalinga town, staying there to carry out research and interact with a well-respected community leader, Cirilio Bawer. Songs, dances, rituals and philosophical visions were shared by him and the rest of the community. This process of integration and research set the tone of the whole artistic process, embodying the inspiration so generously shared by the community.

A rice terrace was built on the old brick walls of the open-air theater with bamboo pipes that allowed water to flow down as in the town of Lubuagan. The dramatic structure was woven into the rituals of the Kalinga, using their songs and dances effectively in the storytelling.

This artistic concept was inspired by the Kalinga's belief in the interconnectedness of life with land and in respect for the gifts of nature. The audience was made to experience being there through the re-creation of sights, sounds, colors, smells and textures. The theatrical fourth wall between audience and performer was broken, allowing them to interact and be part of the play, as was the traditional way. The audience would not merely watch but experience a man's life, struggle and culture; in so doing, they would involve themselves with a journey of heroism and love.

Every available space in the theater was used as the audience moved through it. The play proved to be one of PETA's most successful productions, not only bringing its message across, but artistically commended as one of PETA's most powerful productions. The standing-room-only audiences it generated every night covered a cross-section of Philippine society, from working class to the monied class.

In "Macli-ing Dulag," the fusion of elements of indigenous culture, theater aesthetics and social issues melded into a powerful experience that affected audiences not only in heart and mind, but to the inner core of their being.

Together with our educational and development theater agendas, PETA stresses the development of Filipino theatrical aesthetics. In fact, this is the spine of our educational theater work. This commitment is embodied by members who as artist-teachers become the main implementers of PETA's vision. We therefore recognize the importance of our own internal training to prepare artist-teachers to meet complex demands. The constant balance required to effectively pursue our educational, developmental and aesthetic objectives has challenged us to continuously seek effective methodology and processes, perpetually exploring new ways of delivering our services.

In our interaction with Filipino communities, sectors and institutions, the search for a Filipino cultural aesthetic is constant. After all is said and done, our greatest contribution is having been part of the journey that is constantly discovering the Filipino's true identity.

#### **4. Cultural Networking**

We also recognize the need for networking far beyond our region, not only within the sphere of cultural work, but also with institutions in many fields that share our visions, and not only locally but internationally. This strategy is practical, promoting the exchange of information and resources; and more broadly, it helps to strengthen the movement for social change.

Under the specter of globalization, this strategy becomes even more imperative: community cultural development cannot succeed in isolation. Our creative process opens a space for individual discovery of power and ability; this is then linked to the immediate community; and through the experiences that emerge, the individual consciousness opens to the larger imaginings of the country and the world. Awareness must always expand in an ever-enlarging spiral.

In the final analysis, community cultural development battles globalization by creating every possible opportunity to shape a creative mind and spirit. Every individual offered this opportunity could chart a course, claiming with certainty their own uniqueness. The destructive effects of globalization cannot prevail in a world populated by those who take pride in their own culture, having no need for validation in someone else's eyes.