

The *Bakla* and Gay Globality in Chris Martinez's *Here Comes the Bride*

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1. In this paper I explore the portrayal of a Filipino gendered identity, the *bakla*, and its differentiation from a hegemonic construct of 'global gay identity' in the film *Here Comes the Bride*, released in 2010 and directed by Christ Martinez. Bakla is a construct that conflates cross-dressing, effeminacy, male homosexuality and low class status. Utilising Nancy Fox's method of multimodal critical discourse analysis, as demonstrated in her analysis of the Hollywood film *The Kids are All Right* (Lisa Cholodenko, 2010), [1] I study the film in terms of three component modes: linguistic, visual and performative. The linguistic mode examines the film's use of language as reflected in all aspects of the scripting; the visual mode examines the use of mise-en-scène such as costumes, props and settings; and the performative mode examines how the characters are shaped by the actors in terms of body movement, facial expression, speech patterns and type-casting. These three modes intersect and together construct and reflect discourses on gender in film.
2. The primary theoretical interest of my method is Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity; and her general work in Queer Theory that denaturalises concepts of sex, gender and sexuality by claiming no essential meaning or necessary interrelation. [2] Butler exposed the social construction of each in orthodox feminist discourse which she claims essentialises the idea of gender by rooting it in the sexed body. She calls the easy assignation of gender and the assumption of a 'natural' sexuality the 'heterosexual matrix,' where a person's sex is held to determine her gender and gender determines desire. [3] Butler proposes that instead of understanding gender as a predetermined given, we can understand it as the result of a constant repetition of behaviours that constitute a set of socially sanctioned actions for one sex or the other. [4] Gender, in other words, is the result of performance rather than a stable, fixed attribute.
3. The universalising implications here are, of course, problematic. The academic and writer J. Neil Garcia has problematised Butler's notion of performativity for the Philippine context by critically examining her example of drag performance—how cross-dressing exposes the fluid conditions of gender and sexuality—in relation to the *bakla*. [5] In Philippine culture, identity is rooted in ideas of the interior self: the *kalooban*, [6] which literally means 'that which is inside.' While Butler's heterosexual matrix does exist materially in the Philippines, gender does not strictly operate on binaries of male/female and masculine/feminine. [7] A popular childhood rhyme 'Girl, Boy, *Bakla*, Tomboy' features four genders: between heteronormative (girl, boy) and non-heteronormative (*bakla*, tomboy). [8] The two [purportedly] non-heteronormative genders are understood as people whose interior genders do not match their exterior bodies. The *bakla*, for example, has traditionally been defined as a 'woman-hearted man.' [9] This rooting of the self in the interior explains why the *bakla* cannot sufficiently expose the fluidity of gender, unlike the performance of drag does. Further, *kabaklaan*—being *bakla*—does not disrupt ideas of gender but is an embodiment of the otherness of the female sex. Local discourses on the ontological nature of the *bakla* (including 'woman trapped inside the body of a man') claim that the feminine expression of this gender is essential and that *bakla* are women. The incursion of western-derived identity discourses could, of course, allow the *bakla* to adopt other labels for their gender and sexuality; gay, for example, has become a more politically correct term for *bakla* in contemporary times.

4. The *bakla* has its historical roots in the practice of *babaylan* shamanism in pre-colonial societies in the Philippines. It was considered a primarily feminine occupation but not exclusive to female-sexed individuals.^[10] Male-bodied persons became *babaylan* when they donned feminine garb and adopted feminine manners and behaviour.^[11] This accounts for the modern *bakla*'s performance of effeminacy as an exaggerated mimicry of essentialised femininity. Another reason for the *bakla*'s effeminacy and feminine dress is the belief that the *bakla* possesses a '*pusong babae*' (female heart),^[12] which also accounts for a sexual preference toward the masculine, heterosexual man or *lalake*. However, while the *babaylan* occupied the highest rungs of ancient pre-colonial cultures,^[13] this privileged position declined due to the influx of religious discourses during the Spanish colonial times that branded this identity—as well as the act of same-sex sexuality—as sinful and immoral. The introduction of medical-psychological discourses during the American colonial era, which pathologised same-sex sexuality, also contributed to this decline in status.^[14]
5. This downgrading in social importance also linked the *bakla* to the idea of lower class, a phenomenon best exemplified by the most common of all *bakla* stereotypes, the flamboyant hairdresser—the *parlorista*—an image that is commonly used in Philippine cinema, as in the many caricatured roles of Dolphy, Roderick Paulate and Joey De Leon. While this image may sometimes be divorced from its purported lower-class status, most films situate the *parlorista* in a state of relative wealth.^[15] Mel Chionglo's *Macho Dancer* film trilogy (1994–2006), for example, is rife with *bakla* who, despite living amidst poverty, enjoy enough economic freedom to visit gay bars regularly and pay men for sexual favours.^[16]
6. Bobby Benedicto argues in 'The Haunting of Gay Manila'^[17] that the *bakla* identity is slowly but unsuccessfully being effaced by a gay identity formed in middle- and upper-class societies in urban Manila. As a counterpoint to the endemic *bakla* identity, this arguably 'global' or 'western' gay identity emphasises hypermasculinity, gender-normative dress codes, same-sex sexuality (directed toward other gay men/desiring sameness)^[18] and upper-class status. 'Gay globality' is the 'global' image of gayness projected by mainstream media.^[19] Here we can note that the masculinised image of the gay man is itself the problematic product of homonormative gay rights discourse that seeks the abjection of effeminacy,^[20] ignores issues of class and race, and subscribes to neoliberal moralities of privacy and state governance. Gay globality is an idealised, upper-class lifestyle imagined and adopted by urban Filipino homosexual men and made popular by a variety of media texts. Another method through which gay globality is materialised in contemporary urban culture is the so-called circuit lifestyle, as evidenced by the prominence of many gay clubs, gyms, saunas and events in Metro Manila.
7. The performance of gay globality contrasts sharply with that of the *bakla*. In terms of behaviour, the *bakla* prioritises 'femininity' over hegemonic notions of masculinity. The global gay image prioritises hypermasculine codes such as buff bodies and facial hair and restricts cross-dressing to performances of drag or as an outward manifestation of transgenderism. The sexuality of the *bakla* is constructed as being directed toward the masculine *lalake* while gay globality allows for a reciprocal desire between men. Finally, gay globality and the *bakla* are distinguished by social class. Certain economic, spatial and social restrictions allow the image of gay globality to distance itself from the *bakla*'s purported lower-class status.^[21]
8. But *bakla* identity has not been 'dis-appeared' by the 'modern' gay man. I contend that both the *bakla* and the image of global gayness co-exist in contemporary Philippine culture despite their performance of gendered subjectivities in radically different ways. Benedicto writes that the image of western gay globality is slowly effacing the local *bakla* identity and this effacement occurs because of effeminacy and economics. Through an analysis of *Here Comes the Bride* I argue that the potential effacement occurs not only because of social class but also because of sexual object choice.
9. *Here Comes the Bride* features Toffee, a cross-dressing 'image stylist' who realises the stereotypical *bakla* dream of becoming a woman when his soul enters the body of Stephanie in a freak accident during

a solar eclipse. Body switching also happens to four other characters: bride-to-be Stephanie's soul enters her aunt Precy's body, while Precy enters nanny Medelyn's body. Medelyn's soul enters the wealthy septuagenarian Bien's body, while he enters Toffee's. All five characters struggle to come to terms with their new bodies as they wait for the next solar eclipse and the possibility of switching back to their original bodies.

Linguistic mode

10. Martinez's film uses language to code all the characters as unique: Bien uses Spanish, Medelyn uses Ilonggo, Precy peppers her speech with legal jargon, Stephanie speaks English, and Toffee uses swardspeak, a vernacular slang that hybridises different languages and codes. When the body switch occurs language becomes one of the primary markers that signify each character's true persona. Toffee's swardspeak becomes hyperfeminised when he is embodied within Stephanie.^[22] Stephanie begins calling Doris 'Mamu instead of Mom and uses gay lingo terms such as spluk (speak) and campy witticisms like 'Ang haba ng hair ko' (my hair is so long). At the movie's climax, swardspeak is used to decide which body the *bakla* has entered.
11. The use of swardspeak, an aspect of language commonly associated with the *bakla*,^[23] also codes this identity as a particularly sexual identity. Just before the accident Toffee and his gender-normative gay friends, JR and Alfie, talk about Stephanie and her groom-to-be Harold. Alfie describes Stephanie as pretty but '*baduy*' (old fashioned). Toffee asks about the groom with '*Yumminess ba?*' (Is he yummy?) and Alfie answers with an exaggerated, '*Si Harry, my love? 'Day! Sobrang yumminess ng o!*' (Harry, my love? Girl! He's super yummy!). When Toffee becomes Stephanie, however, the hyper-sexuality of the *bakla* identity becomes even more prominent. When he awakens as Stephanie, Toffee prays to thank God for 'this face, this body, this *pechay*. I am a woman now!' (*Pechay*—Tagalog term for Chinese cabbage—is swardspeak for vagina). He hurriedly dresses in Stephanie's swimwear and rushes to the beach in order to flirt with random men.
12. The euphemism of 'image stylist' serves a purpose in the film to purge the lower-class connotations that accompany the word and profession of beautician; Toffee calls himself an image stylist and indignantly points this out when referred to as a beautician. This theme is repeated throughout the film with Stephanie's narration, '*Sa isang iglap, sa isang kisapmata, gitna ng national highway, sa gitna ng magnetic area, sa gitna ng temporary darkness, kaming lima—si Ninang Precy, ako, ang beautician, I mean ang image stylist na si Toffee, si lolo Bien, at si yaya—ay temporary ring nawalan ng ulirat*' (In one instant, in the blink of an eye, in the middle of a national highway, in a magnetic area, during temporary darkness, the five of us—Aunt Precy, me, the beautician, I mean, the image stylist, Toffee, grandfather Bien, and the maid—all blacked out).
13. The film also uses the very word *bakla* in a liberal manner, both as a marker for the *bakla* identity and as pejorative. The three beauticians/image stylists freely refer to each other as 'sis' (sisters) and in one scene JR calls Alfie and Toffee's attention by yelling 'Hoy, mga *bakla* ng taon!' (Hey, fags of the year!). But homophobic language is already pervasive. When she first discovers the soul-switching, Stephanie seeks out the other parties. She first finds Bien in Toffee's body, and then Medelyn in Bien's, then later Precy in Medelyn's. When Stephanie realises who is in her body, she becomes flustered and panicked and says, 'There's a gay man inside my body!' to which Precy says, 'My God!' When Harold realises that the person he married was not Stephanie but Toffee, Bien comments, '*Si hijo, na-tanso ka,*' a term that means one has been hoodwinked into thinking that something fake is actually the real thing. This suggests discourses regarding *kabaklaan* and mimicry: the *bakla* is an identity that is an in-between,^[24] neither authentically male/masculine nor female/feminine. Finally, when Toffee gives chase in an effort to experience sex using Stephanie's body, the others call after him with words like '*Pigilan ang baklang yan*' (Stop that faggot!) and, in Spanish, '*Vuelve maricon! Vuelve aqui!*' (Stop you faggot! Come back here!). When they capture him, Toffee ends up bound and gagged. He stays this way for the rest of the film until they try to re-create the accident and switch their respective souls back.

14. The clash between the *bakla* and gay globality becomes apparent by examining the film's dialogue. Toffee's friends, JR and Alfie, deride him for insisting on wanting a *lalake* as his partner. They suggest that he should fall for 'boys who like boys,' to which Toffee replies with an indignant retort that those two are just as objectionable by their dating of effeminate partners. However, the *bakla*'s protest against this model of same-sex relationships is quickly shut down when Toffee's friends comment on how old-fashioned and stereotypical he is. But it is notable that JR and Alfie—who embody the image of gay globality in the film—are also coded with aspects of swardspeak, a phenomenon supposedly rejected by urban gay men because of its ties with lower class *bakla*.^[25] The popularity of Youtube videos of Bern Pernia, known colloquially by the pseudonym Bekimon, has sparked a recent resurgence in the popularity of swardspeak^[26] which can perhaps account for the film's insistence on coding both types of *bakla* with the lingo. Louie Cano refers to swardspeak as '*baklese*' in his two recently published books^[27] and in this respect it remains a key aspect of the *bakla* identity, however bifurcated.
15. But JR and Alfie police boundaries between gender hierarchies to stereotypical effect. When Bien awakens in Toffee's body, in full drag, he is confused and then confronted by Alfie who says, 'Hoy Miss Catatonia! *Naririnig mo ba ako? baklang 'to!*' (Hey, Miss Catatonia! Can you hear me? Fag!) and Bien replies angrily, '*Sinong bakla? Ayus-ayusin mo nga yung kilos mo. Kung maka-kembot daig pa ang babae. Sin verguenza!*' (Who are you calling a faggot? Act like a man. You swing your hips more than a woman. Shameless!) Alfie then replies sarcastically, 'Wow, best actress! *Mukha kang tomboy!*' (You look like a tomboy). Further, when Alfie and JR observe Bien using Toffee's body to seduce one of the bridesmaids they call him disgusting and liken him to a tomboy: '*Para siyang manyak no? Talo pa niya ang D.O.M. Eww! Para ngang tomboy! Nakakadir!*' (He's like a sex maniac, no? Worse than a dirty old man. Eww. He's acting like a tomboy! It's disgusting!). A *bakla* who chooses a *babae* (woman) as a sexual partner cannot be a heterosexual *lalake* (or even a bisexual) but is insulted as a tomboy, reinforcing the hierarchic rhyme of 'girl, boy, *bakla*, tomboy.'^[28]

Visual mode

16. The film's visual mode codes the *bakla* identity with aspects of camp aesthetics and elevates his economic status by coding him as a successful entrepreneur, but also equates traditional *kabaklaan* with aspects of transgenderism and sexual promiscuity. When Toffee first appears in the film the camera zooms in on his boots and tilts up to reveal his full appearance which is a stark contrast to JR and Alfie's masculine-coded dress. Toffee is the embodiment of camp because of his excessive style and this becomes heightened once he enters Stephanie's body (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Publicity image of Toffee in *Here Comes the Bride*.
Source: Public domain

17. In contrast to Toffee, Alfie's and JR's costumes reflect a concept of gay globality. Alfie also drives

an expensive SUV and owns his own salon. These men are not the *parloristas* of decades past, those who lived in relative wealth amidst the abject; their sense of the aesthetic seeks to project upper-class status. When Toffee enters Stephanie's body he realises the *bakla's* purported dream of becoming a woman. When Stephanie first appears in the film she wears little cosmetics and dresses very conservatively. Toffee changes this look once he is in her body: putting on more make-up and skimpier clothes while accessorising outlandishly. In one scene Toffee wears Stephanie's wedding gown and complains that it is too conservative. He then re-makes the wedding gown using fake flowers, beaded and lace curtains and even ceiling lamps, improvising from the room's décor. The result is the gown's hemline raised to above Stephanie's knees and the neckline has been lowered drastically while her cleavage is concealed by the improvised jewellery. The gown's train is made from the lace curtains and trimmed with fake



Figure 2. Stephanie's gown after it is 'enhanced' by Toffee. Source: Public domain

flowers that also adorn her hair. Her bouquet is attached to a curtain rod and seems more like a majorette baton than wedding flowers. When Stephanie (in Precy's body) confronts Toffee about ruining her gown Toffee answers, '*Sinira? More like in-enhance ko pa 'to!*' (Ruined? I enhanced it!) (Figure 2).

18. Toffee's campy conduct signifies the 'traditional' *bakla's* attempt to elevate his social status. Camp is the style of exaggeration, excess, and artifice but can also be associated with aristocratic taste and upper-class frivolity.^[29] Toffee's occupation as an image stylist reinforces the *bakla's* traditional economic position associated with the aesthetic industries (cosmetics, fashion etc.), but it is his employment of camp and his resourceful use of random objects in Stephanie's room as well as the way he accessorises his own body that makes his 'upper-class taste' evident. It is also Toffee's sense of camp that lends further credence to the film as a comedy consistent with the idea that camp is not supposed to be taken too seriously.^[30]
19. Toffee's 'camping up' of Stephanie's body, however, is not a simple form of self-expression. More than announcing the *bakla* as transgender, the donning of revealing outfits also codes *bakla* sexuality as the film focuses on Toffee's newly acquired power to obtain sexual partners while occupying Stephanie's body. Toffee uses this new body to seduce various men, reinforcing pervasive discourses on the *bakla's* preference for the *lalake*.

Performative mode

20. Marked differences in speech patterns and mannerisms also seek to code each of the five characters as different from one another. The nanny, Medelyn, tends to mutter under her breath while speaking with an Ilonggo accent while Precy, a lawyer, is loud and aggressive. Bien speaks in Spanish and is always defensive about his age and frail health. Stephanie is shy and demure, and has a habit of biting her nails when she becomes nervous. Toffee, as I have sketched, speaks in an overtly feminised way and acts in a typically exaggerated manner. When he invades Stephanie's body her actions change from prim and proper to wilfully provocative. While the photographers take pre-ceremony photos of the bride with her veil, bouquet, shoes, and dress, Toffee begins striking strange poses. And he walks Stephanie's body down the aisle as if he were on a fashion runway rather than doing a traditional bridal march.
21. More importantly, Toffee's *kabaklaan* is a performance of the *bakla* as an identity whose sole purpose is to experience sex with masculine, heterosexual-identified men. At the beach, while surrounded by half-

naked men, Toffee/Stephanie acts seductively by gyrating and dancing while people look on in shock and confusion. Here the female body is essentially performed to lure men for sex (Figure 3). When the body switch is discovered the other characters detain Toffee to stop him from using Stephanie's body for sex. In a penultimate scene when the five characters decide to live together as they wait to undo the effects of the switch, Toffee continues to dress Stephanie in provocative outfits but is persistently policed by the other characters: his hands remain bound by ropes as the other characters celebrate birthdays, Christmas, and even while watching television or working out on the treadmill. During a Christmas celebration, Toffee/Stephanie is depicted away from all the merriment, sitting and skulking alone with his hands tied. In one scene he is chained to the foot of his bed as others serve him food.



Figure 3: Toffee uses Stephanie's body provocatively. Source: Public domain

22. This kind of policing can be understood as a signifier of heteronormative panic over non-heterosexual sex. Because Toffee is coded as a person whose primary goal is sex, he has to be tied up and gagged so that he is not able to 'abuse' the female body. And because it is the female body that is restrained, the film also becomes a metaphor for the containment of female sexuality within a patriarchal system. Stephanie is apparently a virgin since she has made a vow that she and her fiancé Harold will not consummate their relationship until wed. This is a reinforcement of what Gayle Rubin has called the 'sex hierarchy,' where only certain forms of sexuality are considered acceptable or 'good' (heterosexual, married, reproductive sex) while other forms are 'bad' (homosexual, unmarried, non-procreative).[\[31\]](#)
23. It is important to note, however, that it is not only Toffee's sexuality that is policed throughout the film but all same-sex sexuality. At the film's end—when they re-create the accident—identities are switched around several times. Harold is seen seeking Stephanie in the body of the other characters as they complain and ask him to set things right. When Stephanie enters Medelyn's body, Harold gives her a kiss on the lips. But when Stephanie enters Toffee's body, Harold backs away confused, kisses his own fingers and taps Toffee's cheek.
24. When they finally return to their proper bodies, Toffee lies in his hospital bed crying and lamenting, complaining about his masculine voice and his missed opportunities. His mood starts to lift when three male nurses enter with the offer of a sponge bath. Toffee wipes away his tears and immediately starts flirting with each of the three nurses.
25. A counterpoint to Toffee's performance of *kabaklaan* while in a female body is Bien's performance of masculinity while in the *bakla* body. His speech becomes more masculine, relinquishing swardspeak in

favour of Spanish and thus rendering his voice less shrill. He also walks in a less campy manner. But the ultimate mark that suggests *Bien*, despite being in a *bakla* body, is truly *lalake* is when he successfully seduces the maid of honour, Maris. Here it is suggested that through sexual intercourse *Bien* can truly distance himself from being coded as *bakla*, which reinforces discourses on *kabaklaan* as a sexual orientation.

26. JR and Alfie also perform their *kabaklaan* with certain nuances and offer an insight into the performance of gay globality in a localised setting. They do not cross-dress or seem to desire to become women unlike Toffee. More importantly, they direct their sexual desires toward other gays. However, despite being divorced from cross-dressing, 'lower-class status,' and desiring sameness, these *bakla* are nevertheless effeminate and unlike the idealised masculine global gay. In terms of mannerisms, both *bakla* are as effeminate as Toffee; they speak using swardspeak and force their voices to be shrill and feminine.

Conclusion

27. The film's three modes create an image of the *bakla* that is polarised by a binary of masculinity and femininity. The linguistic mode codes the *bakla* with aspects of swardspeak while the visual mode codes it with camp and economic elevation and the performative mode codes it with notions of effeminacy, while attempting to police the expression of same-sex sexual desire.
28. The word *bakla* is used in different ways: as pejorative, a mark of affiliation, and as an umbrella term to refer to male-sexed persons whose gender performance falls outside heteronormative standards. The film creates an image of the *bakla* performed as either gender-transitive or gender non-transitive; [32] the cross-dressing *bakla* as opposed to the non-cross-dressing *bakla*, or what Benedicto refers to as the very image of gay globality. The gender-transitive *bakla* closely resembles transgender identity as the exterior manifestation of an interior femininity. The normative definition of transgenderism is a person whose gender identity does not match his/her assigned sex at birth, [33] which echoes discourses on the *bakla's pusong babae* (woman-heartedness). [34] This is an image that is perennial in many other contemporary mainstream films which feature *bakla* characters: Peter in *Petrang Kabayo* (both in the original 1988 version, directed by Luciano B. Carlo, and the 2010 remake, directed by Wenn Deramas); Hillary in Olivia Lamasan's *In My Life* (2009); and Benjie in Wenn Deramas' *The Unkabogable Praybeyt Benjamin* (2011). Despite resembling the transgender identity, the traditional *bakla* in mainstream cinema is not titled transgender or transsexual. In Wenn Deramas' *Moron 5 and the Crying Lady* (2012), for example, Beckie openly talks about her sexual reassignment surgery but calls herself *bakla*. Mainstream cinema allows for the interiority of the *bakla's pusong babae* to manifest itself through transvestic practices and effeminacy. This cross-dressing variety of the *bakla* challenges the western construct of the transgender/transsexual by rendering it redundant.
29. However, many Filipino transgender women do not accept the label of *bakla*. The Society of Transsexual Women of the Philippines (STRAP), for example, prefer to name themselves *Transpinays* instead of other labels in an attempt to differentiate themselves from other cross-dressers, drag queens and male-sexed non-heteronormative identities. [35] The label was created to purge the transgender identity of any masculine indication and situate the gender locally. In doing so STRAP wishes to re-imagine the Filipino transgender woman to allow for the possibility of performing this gender regardless of surgical status (pre-, post-, or non-op) or sexual orientation (hetero-, homo-, bi-, or asexual). This re-imagining of the transgender identity is not reflected in mainstream Philippine cinema. While the diegetic portrayals of many *bakla* identities may more closely resemble western-derived understandings of transgender women than gay men, transgenderism is not quite accepted by cinema goers where transgender women are labelled as *bakla*. Perhaps this can be seen as mainstream Philippine cinema's attempt to reclaim and ameliorate local gendered identities through shunning foreign identities in favour of the former.
30. In *Here Comes the Bride* the gender non-transitive *bakla* do not cross-dress but they express aspects of effeminacy. This raises the question of whether *kabaklaan* can be divorced from effeminacy. Mainstream

cinema has yet to work outside an endemic framework for gender, one based on the childhood rhyme of 'girl, boy, *bakla*, tomboy.' This framework is challenged by the incursion of foreign identities—particularly the image of gay globality—which allows for homosexual men to be 'purged' of effeminacy through the performance of classical (hegemonic) masculinity. This purging is evident in contemporary gay-themed independent Philippine films where the *bakla* can be both queered and masculinised to conform to the global gay image. For example, Cristobal Catalan looks at the masculinisation of the *bakla* as well as its resistance to global gay constructs, which allows for the *lalake* to engage in same-sex sexuality with other *lalake* without either identifying as *bakla*.^[36]

31. Between mainstream and independent film, ideas of effeminacy (and, by implication, misogyny) are complex and 'allow' for effeminacy only if sexuality is policed. A close analysis of the linguistic mode shows how this phenomenon works. Benedicto writes that the traditional *bakla* is becoming effaced in urban Manila because of effeminacy's association with lower-class status.^[37] *Here Comes the Bride* offers an alternative view: the effacement is not so much a question of effeminacy or social class as much as an issue of the traditional *bakla*'s insistence on romantic relationships with the *lalake*. The same discourse can be seen in other mainstream films like Olivia Lamasan's *In My Life* (2009) where the traditional *bakla* (Hillary) is the only celibate character in the film while the other *bakla* (Noel and Mark) are free to indulge in their love affairs. Mainstream cinema allows for the non-cross-dressing *bakla* to be just as effeminate as its cross-dressing counterpart but polices the latter's insistence on partnering with the *lalake*.
32. Unlike cinematic representations of the *bakla* in previous decades, mainstream cinema now codes the identity as affluent or economically elevated. While *Here Comes the Bride* situates the *bakla* in its traditional occupation in the beauty industry, he is no longer the small-time *parlorista* but an entrepreneur. Other contemporary mainstream films portray this economic elevation: Benjie in *Praybeyt Benjamin* is heir to his father's legacy just as Peter in *Petrang Kabayo* (2010) is heir to his mother's estate. In this state of economic elevation, the *bakla* can act as an agent of change. In *Here Comes the Bride*, Toffee re-makes and updates Stephanie's look in the same way that Hillary in *In My Life* updates Shirley's look and trains her for her new life in New York. This agency is much more prominent (and literal) in the 2010 remake of *Petrang Kabayo* where Dyobayo, the Goddess of Horses, turns Peter into a horse in an attempt to change his attitudes and behaviour. Once Peter breaks the curse he uses his riches to make amends and transform the lives of his staff and family.
33. Traditionally, *bakla* are represented as indulging in the fantasy of supplanting the *babae* through economic sexual liaisons with the *lalake*. This is a relationship that has been featured prominently in many gay-themed films in the past; one can recall several Lino Brocka and Mel Chionglo films in the macho dancer genre. Contemporary mainstream films attempt to distance the *bakla* from this kind of economic relationship despite elevating his social status and retaining the *bakla*'s preference for the *lalake* instead of gay men. The result of this divorce is a policing of *bakla* sexuality and the subjection of the *bakla* to unfulfilled desires. This policing of *bakla* sexuality is two-fold: he is restricted by heterosexuals for the very practice of his sexuality; and also policed by fellow homosexuals for being old-fashioned or outdated. It is important to note that it is neither effeminacy nor cross-dressing that leads the modern *bakla* to code the traditional *bakla* as sexually unviable as Benedicto proposes; rather, it is the traditional *bakla*'s insistence on finding a *lalake* for a partner that leads to him being alone and constantly looking for sexual trysts.
34. In contemporary Philippine mainstream cinema any kind of practice related to *bakla* sexuality is policed and vilified, which signifies that while *kabaklaan* may be socially acceptable, same-sex sexuality must still be policed and guarded against. This kind of policing is common in many films and is often critically ignored because it is used for comic effect. In *Petrang Kabayo* (2010), for example, Peter attempts to take a peek at three stable hands while they bathe and is rewarded with a brutal beating from one of the horses. This violence is reflective of the violence experienced by *bakla* individuals on-screen and in real life. Cinema shows this violence against non-heteronormative sexualities as justifiable and a source of humour.

35. *Here Comes the Bride* reinforces this theme by painting a portrait of the *bakla* as subjected to physical violence because he is both sexually frustrated and sex-obsessed. Throughout the film, the primary motivation of the *bakla* character is sex, whether in his own body or through his female surrogate. He is bound in order to keep him from experiencing sex with a *lalake* but is also homophobically derided as a lesbian when he is perceived to shift his object of desire to the *babae*. Despite successfully seducing Maris, the other characters consider Toffee as essentially *bakla* and he is unable to transgress the identity's sexual restrictions and become a *lalake* himself. The film reinforces discourses of the fluidity of gender and sexuality but only insofar as a person may move down the hierarchy of 'girl, boy, *bakla*, tomboy' and therefore never up. The *bakla* becomes restricted in its practice of heterosexual sexuality by relegating his practice of heterosexuality to the label of tomboy. No mention is made of the bisexual category, which once again reinforces this local hierarchy of genders/sexualities.
36. This film is indicative of how contemporary Philippine mainstream cinema can attempt to re-appropriate global gender constructs while working within the constraints of local gender frameworks. I would argue that two western concepts—the transgender and the gay man—are re embodied within the endemic *bakla*. These contemporary depictions of the *bakla* differ markedly from their predecessors—while those older portrayals were equally flamboyant, the primary difference is that contemporary *bakla* imagery is divorced from a state of relative wealth in abject poverty, in which the former revelled. This economic elevation allows the new *bakla* to be seen as more 'global,' opening up possibilities of gender performance which may not have been available to their impoverished ancestors. One such performance is that of the global gay image which attempts to purge homosexual men of effeminacy while reinforcing aspects of classical masculinity; another is the transgender identity which very closely resembles the historical roots of *kabaklaan* in its emphasis of the interiority of gender; it is widely believed in the Philippines that the self is rooted in the 'inside' rather than the external, and that the external is the outward manifestation of the internal essence.^[38] This is a belief that allows for the *bakla*'s interior femininity to be reflected in his actions, dress, sexuality, etc. Mainstream cinema, however, challenges both constructs by creating two kinds of *bakla* identities: the cross-dressing *bakla* whose object of desire is the *lalake*; and the non-cross-dressing person who directs desire at other gays, both of which are amalgamations of local and global gender constructs.
37. Mainstream cinema, however, sanitises the *bakla*'s practice of sexuality. The *bakla* is coded as an essentially sexual identity which must be policed, through violence if necessary. While the *bakla*'s social status may have been ameliorated, he loses the power that he used to derive from the practice of an altogether subversive sexuality. This is a stark contrast to representations of the *bakla* in Philippine cinema from decades past and from contemporary independent films. For example, much has been written about how the representation of *bakla* sexuality has been used as a metaphor for the subversion of political oppression and social injustice during the Marcos dictatorship. Nick Deocampo's films, *Oliver* (1983) and *Revolutions Happen like Refrains in a Song* (1988), aim to make connections among the concepts of homosexuality, poverty and dictatorship. Deocampo sees the *bakla* as doubly-oppressed by economics and sexuality but therefore holding the potential to become doubly subversive.^[39] Independent cinema is also rife with representations of *bakla* sexuality that openly challenge hegemonic heterosexual models. The films *Bathroom* (Crisaldo Pablo, 2003) and *Day Break* (Adolfo B. Alix, Jr., 2008) present stories of loving same-sex couples but both films feature masculinised gay men rather than the effeminate *bakla*. It is a common theme found in many other independent queer films: effeminacy makes the *bakla* an unsuitable partner. In divorcing the *bakla* from lower-class status but not from effeminacy, mainstream cinema also disallows the *bakla* any kind of sexuality, leaving him frustrated, victimised and subjected to his desires.

Notes

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[4] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 25.

[5] J. Neil Garcia, *Performing the Self: Occasional Prose*, Diliman, Quezon City: The University of the Philippines Press, 2003.

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[9] Garcia, *Philippine Gay Culture*, p. 268.

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[11] Garcia, *Philippine Gay Culture*, pp. 165–67.

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[16] Catalan, 'Reconstructing the Filipino homosexual,' p. 95.

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[19] Benedicto, 'The haunting of gay Manila,' p. 322.

[20] *The Butch Factor*, directed by Christopher Hines. U.S.: Wolfe, 2009. Film.

[21] Benedicto, 'The haunting of gay Manila,' p. 327.

[22] Benedicto, 'The haunting of gay Manila,' p. 321.

[23] Martin Manalansan, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003, p. 47.

[24] Manalansan, *Global Divas*, p. 25.

[25] Benedicto, 'The haunting of gay Manila,' p. 321.

[26] [Karen Flores](http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/lifestyle/08/04/10/bekimon-fresh-take-pinoy-gay-lingo), 'Bekimon: A fresh take on Pinoy gay lingo,' *ABS-CBN News.com* (4 August 2010), online: <http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/lifestyle/08/04/10/bekimon-fresh-take-pinoy-gay-lingo> (accessed 4 February 2015).

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