

Philippine culture through some sort of medium, as demonstrated in Vince's narrative where the lack of Tagalog in his family was supplanted by media consumption. This might take the form of community interactions as well, as other Pilipinx Americans could invoke or make reference to the *bakla*. Whatever form this interaction takes, *bakla* can become a relevant figure within the lives of queer Filipinx American second generation subjects.

III. *Bakla ako?*¹²¹

In the previous section, I focused upon the ways in which queer second generation Filipinx American subjects located *bakla* and *kabaklaan* in their lives. Particularly, I focused upon the ways in which they encountered the term, as well as the ways that they identified and defined the term itself. Overwhelmingly those interviewed discussed the nature of *bakla* as a disparaging term for a wide set of performances of embodied femininities. In this section, I will answer the question, which titles this portion of the text. *Bakla ako?* Am I *bakla*? Here, I will examine the ways in which informants identify and disidentify with *bakla* and *kabaklaan*. In doing so, I will suggest that identification with and against the figure of the *bakla* is dependent at once on the "affective" relationship between the subject and the figure itself, as well as on the cultural relevance of the term to those interviewed.

Jose Esteban Muñoz in his writing on queer performance discusses the idea of "disidentification." Muñoz writes:

Disidentification is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship.¹²²

¹²¹ Am I *bakla*?

¹²² Jose Esteban Munoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: Univ of Minnesota Press 1999), 4.

The strategy of disidentification then is an act of self-formation that is dependent on the recycling and rethinking of cultural texts that additionally exposes their universalising and exclusionary tendencies, while also allowing representation for those previously excluded. That is to say that the act of disidentification is a simultaneous action of identifying with and against dominant cultural texts. It is possible to read such an act in the ways that second generation queer Filipinx American subjects interact with *bakla* as both a figure and an identity category, which will be demonstrated below.

To be certain, when writing on the act of identification, I draw upon conceptualisations of identity that move beyond essentialization and suggest the fluid and informed notion of identity as described by Anthony Ocampo and Stuart Hall. In the previous section, I discussed the ways Ocampo's study of pan-ethnicity describes how identities are informed by the socio-historical and material conditions of the subject. This same study is useful for thinking about the ways that subjects might identify, reject or disidentify with *bakla*. Additionally, I acknowledge that identity shifts and changes as certain categories become more salient than others. As Hall describes in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," identity is always in production, a personal reaction to socio-historical-political realities contained in the act of naming.¹²³ This is necessary to outline in that the feelings experienced and discussed with relation to *bakla* shift for these informants as they encounter the term less and less in the social spaces they navigate. In this portion of the analysis I look to these (dis)identifications by asking whether or not my informants identify with *bakla*, whether they would reclaim it to some capacity, what are the emotions they feel when the term is invoked and what are their opinions on the act of reclamation itself.

¹²³ Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Cultural, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 225.

To begin, I will first discuss the ways in which these participants refuse identification with *bakla* in a manner similar to the previous section wherein I analysed and contextualised each participant's experiences one-by-one. Specifically the first series of discussions will be centred on the reclamation and rejection of the term *bakla* by five of the informants (Jerry, Theodore, Gerald, Vince and Cornelius). Then I will summarise the trends that exist across these interviews and move into an analysis of Michael who is the only informant who identified with the term *bakla*.

Looking back to the interview I conducted with Jerry, his discussion of identification with or against *bakla* revolved around the act of reclamation.

[Author]: Would you ever then call yourself *bakla*? In an English versus a Tagalog speaking context?

[Jerry]: No, not necessarily. Because I don't feel like I'm in the position to reclaim [*bakla*] because I haven't necessarily been in a situation in which I've had to deal with that word. Because I lack that exposure to what that word is and where it comes from. And I don't necessarily feel like I need to derive any sort of empowerment from it.¹²⁴

The act of identifying and reclaiming the term *bakla* within the terms that Jerry uses describes a sense of empowerment but also a negativity and trauma associated with the word and its usage. Early in the interview, as previously discussed, Jerry often found the word to hold a negative connotation, being used to describe those who fall into the general category of difference. This notion of difference regulated and named by his parents produces a set of norms wherein one "[has] to be a man or a woman, and you have to dress a certain way. You can't be gay. You can't be lesbian. You can't be bi. [...] To me [the word] does have that certain edge because I know their intent was malicious."¹²⁵ That is, one must fit within the constructions of gendered normalcy dictated by cis heteropatriarchy. To exist in ways that do not fit within those definitions

¹²⁴ Jerry, "Jerry."

¹²⁵ Ibid.

normalcy, where one must be straight and passable as cis gender, is to evoke the image of the *bakla* within this framework. He thus understands the workings of the negativity associated with its utterance and usage. However as Jerry stated, the word itself was not as present in his life as he understands it has been in others. Because of this he states that he cannot draw power from reclaiming the term or identification with *bakla*. For Jerry, reclamation of the term is dependent on the ways in which one has experienced it. With regard to identification however, he recognises the ways in which *bakla* does not fit with his understandings of his own queerness, as a result of the cultural disconnect he discusses above regarding the lack of his exposure to both its origins and its usage.

Theodore discussed his feelings toward *bakla* as necessarily negative as a result of his upbringing in the Philippines in which he was bullied for presumptions of queerness.

[Author]: How would you react if someone called you *bakla* right now?

[Theodore]: Now? I would be – I feel like, to me *bakla* is synonymous to a “faggot.” So if someone called me that right now, I would probably be going ape-shit and just drag them [laughter].

[Author]: Would you ever think of reclaiming it?

[Theodore]: No.

[Author]: Why not?

[Theodore]: Just because I grew up hearing that word in a negative way. It’s just...it’s the same with “faggot.” I just don’t – even when people reclaim the word “faggot,” I still cringe. It’s just like, it’s not a good word – I don’t know, it’s something. It’s just personal preferences. Because I know some people who have reclaimed it before and they’re fine with it, but for me if someone were to call me that I would get really mad.¹²⁶

For Theodore, *bakla* serves as a synonym to “faggot,”¹²⁷ a word often held with largely negative connotations and collectively understood as a slur within my interview sample. In the same way

¹²⁶ Theodore, "Theodore."

¹²⁷ According to C.J. Pascoe's *Dude, You're a Fag*, “faggot” is not an identity but rather a discourse that serves to police the ways in which boys act. That is, that at any point in time a boy can become a fag as a result of “failing at the masculine tasks of competence, heterosexual prowess, and strength or in any way revealing weakness or femininity as it does with a sexual identity,” (54).

that “faggot” is often used within Western discourse to police the ways in which men perform masculinity within a cis heterosexist society.¹²⁸ Like *la loca*, as discussed in the previous section, “faggot” is utilised as a way to regulate performances of masculinity, it is a tool by which masculine embodiment is learned in opposition to feminine embodiment.¹²⁹ The association of *bakla* with regulatory and disciplinary power, in that throughout Theodore’s discussion it was invoked when he did not perform masculinity “correctly,” discourages identification for him. In the excerpt above, Theodore notes that if someone were to call him *bakla*, or if he were to even hear someone else refer to themselves as such, it would evoke a visceral response – “I still cringe.”¹³⁰ This is related to the history of bullying that he relates to *bakla*:

[Theodore]: It brings you back to being bullied in elementary school. And being called that by my own brothers, you know? It’s kind of just not a good word. But I mean I can say it. I just –

[Author]: It just feels weird on your tongue –

[Theodore]: Yeah.¹³¹

In this excerpt he explains the physical wretch and discomfort his body betrayed him during the interview whenever I, or he, said “*bakla*.” The negative experiences associated with the term, inhabit the space of the word that might allow for Theodore himself to identify with *bakla*. Because of these negative histories then, the term becomes a slur, a term riddled with narratives of abuse and shame that form pieces of Theodore’s memories of his childhood queerness. The physical discomfort he expressed whilst pronouncing *bakla*, perhaps serves as a measure to the impact that the homosexualization and negative-association of *bakla* can have on an individual.

Gerald, expresses similar desires to dissociate one’s self from *bakla*. When asked the question of reclamation, denial and identification, he explained to me his attempt to remove the

¹²⁸ C.J. Pascoe, *Dude You’re a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007, 2012), 52.

¹²⁹ Decena, *Tacit Subjects*, 115.

¹³⁰ Theodore, “Theodore.”

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

word from his vocabulary and the amount of discomfort that is generated whenever *bakla* is uttered around him.

I'm trying to cut that word out of my vocabulary. I mean, I know it's there, it's just detaching myself from that word. And even when it's not used towards me, there are times when it's like, "um should you really be using that word?" Like even if you're not intending on saying it, the meaning that a lot of people are familiar with, I mean it's used to describe history but I just feel like [it's] a word not to be said.¹³²

Being the second queer-identifying child of his family, Gerald bore witness to the dwindling of the relationship between his parents and his older brother. For instance, he described the ways that a powerful fight between his mother and brother led to his decision not to come out to his parents until he began his first same-gender relationship. In addition to this experience, he described numerous instances in which he would hear the word used mockingly to refer to gay and/or *bakla* performers on *The Filipino Channel*. Like Theodore, the negativity he associates with the term cautions his usage of it, and perhaps is the reason for his discomfort with its utterance.

Gerald's acknowledgement of the different histories of *bakla* in its utterance back in the Philippines and here in the U.S.-based diaspora bears consideration in a discussion of his views of identification/rejection/reclamation. He notes that because the word has a history rooted within the Philippines, it is perhaps inappropriate for those in the West to utilise the term to describe themselves. He states, "when someone tries to speak of the history of it [*bakla*] I mean that's not really relevant to us because we are diaspora."¹³³ That is to say, because the ways that *bakla*, to his understanding, circulate differently within the US-based diaspora and the homeland, the idea of reclamation and identification becomes complicated. Implicit within this statement is Gerald's experience with *bakla* as a term that had been used to denigrate, chastise and harm his

¹³² Gerald, "Gerald."

¹³³ Ibid.

relationship between his parents and himself, as well as his parents and his older brother. That is, the historical context of the term, as one that described a form of pre-colonial gender variance, is muddled by histories of imperialism, neo-colonialism and migration, which influence how *bakla* is articulated. His declaration that *bakla* does not translate well as neither “gay” nor “queer,” points to the genealogical differences between the English and Tagalog terms in his understandings of the differences between the homeland and the diaspora.

Later in the interview, Gerald suggests that the broader Pilipinx American community has not yet reached a historical moment in which reclamation of *bakla* can occur. He describes how he has experienced *bakla* as a term that degrades queer identities and embodiments in the Pilipinx American communities that he has come into contact with in his life thus far. These moments of discomfort he describes are related to the ways in which the term is used in a manner similar to the English word, “faggot.” A term that declares supposed “failed masculinity,” placing one in the position of Other on display, *bakla* thus becomes a word to be avoided, erased and forgotten. Gerald states that because “people are still very familiar – or still very connected to a very familiar meaning,”¹³⁴ by which he means its pejorative use, it is inappropriate for the term to be reclaimed in this historical moment. Like Theodore and Jerry before him, the negative affect surrounding the term renders it because of the saliency of the emotional trauma both experienced and associated with it to these individuals.

When I discussed the idea of identification and reclamation with Vince, he said that possibly the term could be reclaimed with relative ease. Although he noted that he would require more time to think about it given his lack of experience with the term in the ways that other informants have experienced it – recall that he mostly heard the term through television. As someone who had never been called *bakla* growing up, but rather had heard the term through

¹³⁴ Ibid.

television, heard his parents reactions to those who he associated the term with, it is interesting that the idea of reclamation and identification is more easily a possibility for him. This is not to say that it is necessary to have a negative relationship with the term to identify with it, but rather that a neutral affective relationship to the term reveals the relationship between affect and identification. The negativity that is often associated with the term and experienced by those who are “in the know,” of its usage within Pilipinx American communities with regard to the policing of gendered behaviours, is perhaps absent in this case.

In the interview he recognises that there is mal-intention behind the term:

“To me personally it’s always been a negative and even thinking about it right now when you asked me too, negative connotations came up. It’s really hard to separate that actually now that I think about it. Yeah it’s always been negative. Even still thinking about it still – still negative.”¹³⁵

The negative connotations that Vince describes are less related to the negativity that is described by other informants; that is, an association born from the regulation of gendered performances. Rather, his description of negativity relates, as evidenced in the analysis in the previous section, moreso to the reductive *bakla* stereotypes in Philippine media. I do not attempt to invalidate his expressions of negativity, or place them in hierarchy against those experiences and interpretations of the pejorative and emotional trauma that other informants affiliate with *bakla*, but instead to again highlight the contextual nature of reclamation, identification and rejection as it relates to *bakla*. Although he does not associate the homophobia of his family with the term *bakla*, he does describe homophobic violence within his household as a reason that *bakla* holds negative meaning.

Vince’s discussion of reclamation and identification relates less to these experiences and instead toward the fact that *bakla* is a culturally specific identity category. He states, “It would be a word that I could understand being reclaimed, easily I feel like...[because it is] so culturally

¹³⁵ Vince, "Vince."

relevant to gay people that are Filipino – Fil Am – cause it’s their word that, you know they could use to better ourselves and their image kind of.”¹³⁶ He asserts that because *bakla* is a culturally salient term for Pilipinx and Pilipinx American gay-identified people that reclamation is a possibility. To explain further he states that because it is “not that safe” back in the Philippines it might be powerful to reclaim the term “for power purposes,” which is to say that by reclaiming *bakla* one might heal from the violence of homo/queer/trans-phobia experienced within the Pilipinx community.

He does not necessarily reject the term itself however as explained when he says, “I’d have to dig into that because I haven’t thought about how linked emotionally that felt when I was thinking about it.”¹³⁷ Having never been called this word by his parents the question,¹³⁸ which prompted this discussion, gave him pause. Unlike other informants, his discussion of the term was less focused upon the ways in which the phobic ideas surrounding the word inhibit the thought of identification/reclamation and instead on the possibilities of empowerment that could potentially come from such an act.

As a trans man, the identification of Cornelius with the term *bakla* and even with the term *tomboy* reveals specific things about how the terms navigate the US-based diaspora. When asked whether he would identify with either term, Cornelius noted that he wouldn’t not only because of the negativity he had experienced with relation to both words, and the colloquial assumptions of negativity that inhabit them, but because of how he experienced the words as specifically relating to a femininity. He replied, “A lot of those terms are heavily female,” because of how the term *bakla* relates to embodied femininity amongst gay men and how *tomboy* was experienced as a term almost similar to “metrosexual.” That is, for Cornelius, *tomboy* represents a stylistic

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ This specific question was, “Could you ever find yourself identifying with the term “*bakla*?”

representation of femininity that is less about identifying with masculinity but instead with expanding the different ways in which women can express their gender and sexuality – that is butch womanhood and lesbian identity. As he described *tomboy* in the interview, “Um *tomboy* I think more like the definition is [about] the way that they dress and the way that they look. Because honestly that’s like saying, for guys who – who take care of themselves but they’re straight so people call them gay – so I guess the ‘metro-effect.’”¹³⁹ *Tomboy* then for this informant is moreso about the ways that one carries oneself through the world as a woman rather than with regard to a specific gender identification necessitating a linkage to femininity.¹⁴⁰

Cornelius contrasts the use of *tomboy* from that of *bakla* by likening the usage of *bakla* to that of the term “faggot.” However he notes that there is a negativity attached to the use of *tomboy*, just as there is with the term *bakla*. But instead of relating the term toward a possible sexuality, as is the case with *bakla*, the idea of the metrosexual, the “metro-effect,” takes prevalence. That is, *tomboy* becomes a sign for masculine stylisation for bodies gendered female and those who identify as female. Cornelius’ statement that *bakla* and *tomboy* are “heavily female,”¹⁴¹ then begins to make sense in the context of the discussion at hand. His refusal to claim either identity, the discomfort as a result of the misrecognition that arises when his parents refer to him as either, both signal a moment of trans phobic violence. Because *bakla* embodies for him the idea of the “gay man” but specifically that of the “effeminate gay man;” as well as his experiences of being compared to gay men by his mother, *bakla* embodies a form of femininity that Cornelius suggests discomfort with being associated with.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ *Tomboy* refers to “male- or masculine-identified females or transgendered subjects on the female-to-male (FTM) spectrum of embodiments, practices, and/or identities in the Philippines or diaspora who often have sexual and emotional relationships with feminine females who identify as ‘women’” (Fajardo 2008, 405)

¹⁴¹ Cornelius.

In contrast, *tomboy* as a Tagalog term within the United States context becomes trickier to interpret. It is intriguing to see Cornelius separate himself from the term *tomboy* as a result of the association between femininity the word holds for him. Whether or not this is a result of a Western interpretation of *tomboy* as a synonym for the English word “tomboy,” which “describes an extended childhood period of female masculinity”¹⁴² in which girls perform “independence and self-motivation,”¹⁴³ it is important to highlight the slippage and what it might mean to read *tomboy* as “tomboy.” That is, understanding *tomboy* as linked to an expansive definition of woman identity rather than that of working class trans masculine identity describes the ways in which discourse on queerness within the diaspora is re-articulated depending on the cultural contexts.¹⁴⁴ Though not the focus of this study, the understanding of Cornelius, a second generation Pilipinx American trans man, that *tomboy* refers closely to masculine styles on feminine bodies begs the question of how this term circulates the US-based diaspora especially because of the existence of the English term, “tomboy.”

In discussing the possibilities of reclamation, identification and rejection with *bakla*, participants expressed concern regarding both the relevancy of the term to the diaspora and the necessities of claiming the term after having experienced it in an emotionally traumatising manner. That is, participants discussed the ways in which *bakla*'s invocation has often come with the regulatory and disparaging edge referenced by Manalansan in *Global Divas*.¹⁴⁵ This has served, for many participants, as a reason for the responses of discomfort expressed by Theodore, Cornelius, Jerry and Gerald. The use of the term by their parents and by the community more broadly to disparage and regulate embodied femininities affects the

¹⁴² Judith Halberstam, "An Introduction to Female Masculinity: Masculinity without Men " in *Femal Masculinity* (1998), 5.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 6.

¹⁴⁴ Fajardo, "Transportation," 405.

¹⁴⁵ Manalansan IV, *Global Divas*, 24.

relationship between these queer subjects and the term. In contrast to Manalansan's studies, which detail the ways that first generation Pilipinx immigrants recuperate *bakla*, second generation and/or US-born/raised Pilipinx American queers experience the word as something emotionally damaging.

To avoid generalisation however, it is important to examine an instance in which recuperation of *bakla* rs. Of all of the informants I interviewed Michael was the only one that identified with the word, reclaiming it rather than rejecting its usage:

I think that word [*bakla*] has been used so many times in so many derogatory ways. [...] I do [identify] and I think I own that. And I am very aware that I use – that I – I'm more aware now of correcting people on how to use that [word] for me. [...] I think it does bring negative [feelings] but I do think, for me specifically too is that a lot of words people take them and they become negative. And for me, that word although has that – I do identify with it.¹⁴⁶

He underscores the experiences of emotional trauma that he has heard other queer community members describe with regard to the use of the word *bakla* in this excerpt from the interview and explains the specificities of how he desires the word's use. Highlighting that there is nothing inherently negative or wrong with *bakla* itself, Michael outlines the fact that he corrects the ways that others use the word to refer to him with it. That is, he actively pushes a shift in the use of the word as one of gender regulation toward one that recognises difference without consequence.

Explaining further his impetus for reclamation, he discusses the dependence on the cultural dynamics of the spaces in which he navigates his identity. "I think it's more about what space I'm in and what word I'll use to identify [myself]. Like for example, if I'm in the Philippines, which I go [to], I think I'm more keen on using *bakla* than gay than if I'm in America."¹⁴⁷ As a transnational subject, one who travels across borders, his navigation of *bakla* in this portion of the interview relates specifically to the politics of language and culture. He uses

¹⁴⁶ Michael, "Michael".

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

the two synonymously, while also recognising that they are not entirely similar. However, he further complicates this by clarifying that his use of *bakla* in Tagalog-speaking spaces allows himself to root his identity within his culture:

I think one of the biggest differences that I see with *bakla* [as opposed to gay], is that it's rooted in my culture, my history. And I don't always use it because I'm still figuring out how to properly apply that word because there's so much negative connotation associated with [it] than gay, so it's easier to say I'm gay than it is to say *bakla*.¹⁴⁸

By claiming *bakla* identity in certain spaces rather than utilising “gay,” Michael attempts to render himself intelligible within his historical and cultural roots as a member of the diaspora. That is, rather than use the English term “gay” to describe himself, the use of the word *bakla* serves to resist colonial gender and sexual paradigms that have weaponised *bakla*.

Although negative affect surrounds the term, his identification with *bakla* and perhaps his shift in the definition serves as a means to subvert its use as a tool of regulation. That is he strips the term of negative energy through proud identification, and re-interprets the word as “gay” as opposed to a synonym for “faggot.” He expresses anxieties however around this action, naming his use as something in process. He wrestles with the question of the appropriateness of its usage in contrast to the word “gay.” When we recall the way in which Michael defines *bakla* as at once having to do with gay sexuality but also with feminine embodiments, “they wouldn't call me *bakla* because I was dating a guy. They would call me *bakla* because I would talk a certain way, or walk a certain way, or look a certain way;”¹⁴⁹ his use of *bakla* and gay as “synonymous” is intriguing. His identification with the term and his persistence in re-framing its usage as to centre claims of identity rather than forms of gender regulation subverts the queer-phobic weaponising of the term.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

In order to clarify the specific way that Michael utilises *bakla* as an identity category, I asked specifically whether he describes the act of rooting one's self in history and culture as similar to invoking pre-colonial understandings of the term. He denied this model of identification and instead directed his reclamation moreso to what Jerry and Victor described in the previous portion of this chapter as an attempt to draw power and selfhood from the emotional and physical trauma associated with *bakla*.

Here might be a place in which one might view Muñoz's concept of "disidentification," in action. Although rooted in readings of performance art, the use of "disidentification" to describe identification and subversion with dominant queer-phobic understandings of queer identity is appropriate in this instance.¹⁵⁰ By identifying with a term often weaponised as a tool for the policing of queer embodiments, and by actively working through interpersonal interactions to reveal the nature of its usage to those of the mainstream, Michael redefines *bakla*. His discussion of the use of the term as a way to root one's self in history and culture serves to make a claim toward Pilipinx identity that often exclude queer identities.¹⁵¹

In this singular case of identification with the term, one of reclamation, *bakla* is recuperated. However, unlike the context of those studied by Manalansan in *Global Divas*, recuperation takes the form of a redefinition of the term devoid of *kabaklaan* practices such as swardspeak and cross-dressing. Having lived experiences in which *bakla* is used as a term to denigrate queer and/or feminine embodiments; the context of this identification is vastly different from the ways in which first generation migrant Pilipinx gay men negotiate their identities. Where those migrants described by Manalansan recuperate *bakla* in order to make sense of their immigrant experiences, in this instance of identification within the second generation *bakla* is

¹⁵⁰ That is, that, somehow queer identities are "wrong" and unnatural.

¹⁵¹ Yen Le Espiritu, "'What of the Children?' Emerging Homes and Identities," in *Homebound: Filipino American Lives across Cultures, Communities, and Countries* (University of California Press, 2003), 184.

utilised in order to negotiate experiences of gender related violence within the community.¹⁵² *Bakla* is claimed and/or re-interpreted in such a way that reveals its transformation across time and space as it navigates both the physical borders between the Philippines and the United States, as well as the generational differences between first generation migrants and their second generation kin.

IV. *Tapos na?*¹⁵³ Closing Thoughts and Turning Toward Decolonization

January of my junior year of high school was the moment I decided to come out to my parents as “gay.” In a moment of emotional desperation and angst, I rushed to name a reason for the self-harm that I had been inflicting on myself that school year. A “conclusion” to years of emotional trauma related to the ways in which I embodied queerness to my family, this would not be the first time I would come out. During the writing of this project, I came out again, only to my father, as “non-binary” and “queer,” words that describe particular formations of gender and sexuality he had not been introduced to before. Funnily enough, this occurred while discussing the contents of this text. In the midst of explaining my thought processes, I detailed the history of cultural imperialism that resulted in the shift in discourses on gender/sexuality, the treatment of the figure of *bakla* and those who embodied that identity as a result of US and Spanish imperialism. I described how gender was constructed without our people in mind – that gender itself is a racialised construction that holds White gender as the norm and Yellow, Black and Brown gender as inferior and deviant. And my father understood. And I understood. And in that moment I no longer felt hatred, or disdain for my family and my community. Instead I found a feeling of terror and love – terrified of the impact of 500 years of imperialism and continued neo-colonial influence, and compassion for the ways in which my people have learned to survive it.

¹⁵² Manalansan IV, *Global Divas*.

¹⁵³ Trans. Finished yet?

My purpose in detailing this experience at the conclusion of this paper is to begin understanding the implications, both material and academic, of this project. To go back to the questions I posed in the introduction: How do definitions from the homeland become lost or muddled as they navigate a gender and sexual paradigm in which gender and sexuality are separate categories? What role does *bakla* serve in the development of identity amongst queer US-born/raised Pilipinx Americans? What does it mean to be called *bakla*, to think about *bakla*, without having knowledge regarding *kabaklaan*?

To begin answering these questions, perhaps it is necessary to reflect upon the past academic year. As mentioned in the introduction of this project, because of the connections I made in the process of acquiring informants I was able to aid in the creation of an LGBTQIA+ space for Pilipinx Americans in the Pilipinx American campus community. In our bi-monthly meetings, one of the major concerns that arose from interviews was brought up with relation to an event in the Philippines involving homophobic comments made by a well-known Pilipinx celebrity, Manny Pacquiao.

In the early portion of the New Year, famed Pilipino boxer and politician Pacquiao stated, “gay people are worse than animals.”¹⁵⁴ Brought up as a way to help root the issues of homophobia and transphobia that Pilipinx Americans experience within their families, the facilitator for that day asked us to talk about how we approached this incident in our interactions with our families. Many fell into the trap of naming the Philippines as morally “backwards,” naming our parents and homophobic community members in the same light in the process. Quickly we descended into a discussion of our hatred and disdain for our parents and community as a result of the lack of safety that we feel and our histories regarding the word *bakla* and

¹⁵⁴ Chris Murphy, "Manny Pacquiao: Boxer Sorry for 'Gay People Are Worse Than Animals' Remark," *CNN* February 17 2016.