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A “Coming Out” Party in Congress?:
LGBT Advocacy and Party-List Politics in the Philippines

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by

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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This thesis analyzes the journey of Ladlad, a political party in the Philippines specifically representing the country’s LGBT citizens, within the context of a broader historical-anthropological perspective on same-sex sexualities and gender diversity in the Philippine Archipelago, the historical colonial implantation and contemporary persistence of heterosexism and homophobia in the country, and the current struggle for gender and sexual equality being articulated through both local Philippine and globalized discourses and traditions. For several years, Ladlad has sought to win seats in the Philippine Congress in order to fight for the equal rights, equal protection under the law, and state-sponsored support for the advancement and wellbeing of all LGBT Filipinos. By seeking to advance LGBT rights specifically as an LGBT political party within the Philippines’ unique party-list system, Ladlad represents novel realities and future possibilities for both Filipino and global LGBT movements, electoral politics, and human rights advocacy.

The thesis of Bradley Cardozo is approved.

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PART ONE:

Introduction

On April 8, 2010, the Filipino LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) rights organization Ladlad (Filipino for “Coming Out”) was recognized by the Philippine government as an official political party that could compete for seats in the Philippine Congress (Punay 2010). Ladlad was thus legally sanctioned as the first specifically LGBT political party in the world by virtue of the Philippines’ party-list system, which designates that 20% of congressional seats in the Philippine House of Representatives (*Kapulungan ng mga Kinatawan*) must be filled by parties representing “marginalized” and “underrepresented” sectors in society (Santos 1997:6). This achievement took place after a years long struggle against the Philippine government’s Commission on Elections (Comelec), the official agency responsible for determining which organizations are qualified to compete for seats within the party-list system.

The Comelec had twice disqualified Ladlad from party-list status, first in 2007 under the dubious charge that Ladlad lacked a national constituency (Aning 2007), then again in December 2009 based on the accusation that Ladlad’s platform espoused “immorality” and offended the religious sensitivities of the Catholic-majority country (Crisostomo 2009). The decision by the Philippine Supreme Court (*Kataastaasang Hukuman*) in April 2010 to strike down the Comelec’s ruling and thus allow Ladlad to compete for congressional seats, has been considered a “milestone” by Filipino LGBT activists and human rights advocates in the struggle for gender and sexual equality in the Philippines (Yuan 2010). Ladlad has campaigned to get elected into Congress based on a platform calling for legislation that would prohibit discrimination against people based on sexual orientation or gender identity, micro-financing projects for poor and

disabled LGBT Filipinos, financial support for centers for elderly LGBTs, and more generally being a voice in the Philippine Congress and the national media for LGBT rights and empowerment (Pascual 2012). Though the party has not yet won congressional seats, rank-and-file members of the party, other LGBT activists and citizens, and heterosexual supporters and human rights advocates more generally remain compelled and determined to get an LGBT party elected into Congress.

Ladlad's emergence as both an official political party and an increasingly vocal and prominent national force for LGBT rights is not only indicative of the efforts and innovative strategizing and theorizing of Filipino LGBT activists, scholars, and community and advocacy organizations, but of the broader progressive movement in the Philippines that has struggled for generations to transform the country's oligarchic socioeconomic and political system into a more democratic, just, and egalitarian order. After the fall of the Ferdinand-Imelda Marcos dictatorship that had dominated the Philippines from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s, a new constitution was established in 1987 that reflected the concerns and prerogatives of the progressive and democratic social forces that had played a key role in both the "People Power" Revolution in 1986 that toppled the regime and in the post-revolution efforts to organize the newly re-democratized Philippine polity. The party-list system was one of the legacies of the 1987 Constitution of the Philippines (*Saligang Batas ng Pilipinas*) (Santos 1997; Wurfel 1997), and since 1998, multiple parties representing workers, peasants, women, youth, environmentalists, and indigenous peoples have been elected into the Philippine legislature, becoming important initiators and drafters of landmark laws as well as significant forces in the media and other public venues in influencing the national political discourse. Ladlad has recently emerged as the LGBT voice in this political environment.

This paper seeks to evaluate Ladlad as a unique product of the mergence between LGBT advocacy and party-list politics in the Philippines, both of which engage with, and are impacted by, global discourses, movements, and trends. In this regard, Ladlad's rise is significant for a variety of social, political, and theoretical issues, including: studies on national and global LGBTIQ movements; minority representation in electoral politics; national party-list systems (Wurfel 1997); the relationship between gender/sexual minorities and the nation-state; tolerance discourses (Brown 2006; Garcia ([1996] 2008); the moral and sociocultural dimensions to citizenship; the globalization of human rights discourses; and the intersections between religion, secularism, sexuality, and politics. How has Ladlad's achievement in gaining party-list accreditation as well as Ladlad's public discourses and actions on behalf of LGBT equal rights affected the Filipino LGBT movement and the lives of everyday LGBT Filipinos? What elements in the Philippines' unique party-list system and in Philippine democratic political culture led to the emergence of an LGBT political party? How has the existence of an LGBT political party in the Philippines in turn affected the country's electoral and political systems? What are the global implications of the existence of a Filipino LGBT political party?

1a. Methodology

I had first heard of Ladlad in December of 2009 when I saw a news article on the internet regarding the decision of the Philippine Comelec to deny Ladlad accreditation as a party-list group. I was irritated but ultimately not totally surprised; after having lived in the Philippines for a total of about two years between 2005 and 2009, and from growing up in a Filipino American household in San Jose, California, I was aware of the conservative religious current that runs deep in many Filipino communities. Regardless, I became fascinated with the very notion of a

specifically LGBT political party existing not only in the heavily Catholic Philippines but in any national context in the world at all, and I have been following Ladlad's journey ever since through news articles and videos about the group on the internet, official documents (e.g., Supreme Court decisions) posted online, an interview I conducted with Danton Remoto (one of Ladlad's co-founders and party-list nominees) in August 2010 in Ateneo de Manila University, and through the party's website, Facebook page, and Twitter account. In this paper, I am specifically deriving my analysis from these various media, interview, official documents, and official statements, in addition to academic articles, journals, books, and other scholarly material.

1b. Overview

In order to evaluate the emergence and trajectory of the Philippines' and world's first official LGBT political party, I must first situate Ladlad within the Philippine sociocultural and historical context with regards to same-sex sexualities and transgenderism in the country. I will first address the various contradictory characterizations of contemporary Filipino sociocultural attitudes toward, and sociopolitical treatment of, gender and sexual minorities – characterizations that have included openness, tolerance, acceptance, ridicule, bigotry, exploitation, and persecution. I am informed by queer theoretical contrasts between heterosexism and homophobia (Jung & Smith 1993; Boellstorff 2005), and by critical perspectives on tolerance discourses and how such discourses impact gender and sexual minorities (Garcia [1996] 2008; Brown 2006). I then provide historical background on the pluralistic traditions of sexuality and gender in the precolonial Philippine archipelago, followed by discussions of the implantation of heterosexist and homophobic traditions during the Spanish colonial era and subsequent US

colonial period. The contemporary situation, formed from the contradictory legacies of the precolonial and colonial periods, is then examined.

I then analyze the emergence of LGBT identities and discourses in the Philippines and the development of Filipino LGBT activism, particularly since the 1990s, in response to heterosexism and growing homophobia in Philippine society. Finally, I will analyze Ladlad as the convergence between Filipino LGBT activism and party-list politics. Ladlad represents the emergence of novel realities and future possibilities for both Filipino and global LGBT movements, electoral politics, and human rights advocacy. My primary aim is to demonstrate how globally circulating ideas and sociopolitical networks (including those related to global LGBT epistemologies and transnational networks, party-list systems in various national contexts, international human rights agreements and discourses, and transnational religious networks and theologies) converged with Filipino local, regional, and national political cultures and epistemologies in a way that gave rise to an innovative national party-list system as well as the world's first LGBT political party.

PART TWO:

Same-Sex Sexualities, Transgenderism, and the “Tolerance” Discourse in the Philippines

In the media, academia, and in the popular imagination, the Philippines has been subjected to a host of contradictory portrayals and perceptions with regards to Filipino attitudes towards and practices of same-sex sexualities and transgenderism. As a Catholic-majority country, it is often assumed that the Philippines would be unaccommodating, intolerant, or hostile to homosexuals and transgenders – that the Philippines, in other words, would be homophobic. On the other hand, several scholarly, touristic, journalistic, and other portrayals and studies of Philippine society refer to the high degree of “tolerance” that exists for gay and transgender people. In many ways, these apparently contradictory characterizations reflect the contradictory reality of simultaneous acceptance, “tolerance” (grudgingly or otherwise), hostility, and persecution that is lived by non-heteronormative Filipinos. The queer theoretical contrast between heterosexism and homophobia is useful here (Jung & Smith 1993:13-34; Boellstorff 2005). UC Irvine anthropologist Tom Boellstorff (2005:222), in his ethnographic analysis of LGBT Indonesians, defines “heterosexism” as “the belief that heterosexuality is superior to other sexualities” and “homophobia” as “a psychologized fear or hatred of nonnormative sexualities”. As I will explain below, heterosexism and heteronormativity have characterized much of the attitudes toward and treatment of non-heteronormative practices and relationships in the contemporary Philippines, but homophobia and homophobic violence have also occurred and, according to human rights and pro-LGBT advocacy groups, have been ominously on the rise in recent decades (Pascual 2011). In light of this, the “tolerance” discourse must be particularly scrutinized not only because of its impacts on general understandings of the situation of gender

and sexual minorities in the Philippines (and elsewhere in Southeast Asia and the Pacific region), but also due to the troublingly naïve or even dangerous and damaging consequences that the discourse has had on the possibilities for and efficacy of pro-LGBT advocacy and politics.

2a. “Tolerance”

One of the persistent themes in (particularly Western) studies on gender and sexuality in the Philippines and in other Southeast Asian and Pacific countries is that the region has been strongly “tolerant” of homosexuals, bisexuals, and transgender people. Undeniably, a degree of “tolerance” would have to exist in the region in order for the many openly transgender and transsexual men and women, drag performers, and other gender crossers or genderqueer people who are able to overtly express their gender identities, gendered sense of selves, or gendered expressions in their daily lives without “apparently” being constantly and systematically persecuted, violently attacked, or murdered (though all of this has occurred, nonetheless). Openly transgender people are overtly ubiquitous throughout the archipelagic country, in large urban areas, modest towns, and small villages and hamlets, and in Catholic, Muslim, Protestant, and Indigenous communities. Many transgender and transsexual women work in beauty parlors, outdoor markets, comedy clubs, and various other sectors in the beauty, fashion, and entertainment industries, and transgender and transsexual beauty pageants and fashion shows are also regularly held in towns and cities around the country. Moreover, several gay-owned and gay-themed businesses and establishments exist in Metropolitan Manila, particularly in the Malate district which has a popular gay scene, complete with gay-owned cafes and restaurants, gay bars and nightclubs, and transgender stand-up comedy venues and drag shows. There are also some openly LGBT actors and actresses, singers, television personalities and other media

celebrities (such as Boy Abunda, Charice Pempengco, Aiza Seguerra, and Vice Ganda) as well as a growing number of LGBT-themed films, novels, plays, magazines, and other media and artistic productions.

All of this – particularly the unconcealed ubiquity of many openly transgender Filipinos throughout the country – has led touristic publications and guides such as the *Lonely Planet* (2010) to conclude that “*Bakla* (gay men) and *binalaki* (lesbians) are almost universally accepted in the Philippines. There are well-established gay centres in major cities, but foreigners should be wary of hustlers and police harassment. Remedios Circle in Malate, Manila, is the site of a... gay-pride parade and the centre for nightlife” (Williams et al. 2010:644). The *Encyclopedia of Homosexuality* (1990) declared that “the Philippines enjoys a reputation as one of the contemporary societies most tolerant of homosexuality” (Frederick Whitam 1990). “Filipinos generally hold a benevolent attitude toward homosexuals, to be seen in their allowance of the [indigenous non-heteronormative identities of the] bakla/bayot to participate as cultural performers in big social events” (Whitam 1990, cited in Garcia [1996] 2008:402). However, as many LGBT and heterosexual Filipinos have contended, such touristic descriptions are in dire need of an appreciation of “the nuances of oppression” to which LGBT Filipinos are subjected in contemporary Philippine society (Garcia [1996] 2008:402).

To people from Western or other societies where many LGBT people face constant and violent harassment and assault, verbal abuse and humiliation, fundamentalist demonization, pseudoscientific pathologization, murder, bullying-induced suicide, and many other forms of discrimination and persecution (frequently and systematically, in some cases), the mere sight of significant numbers of openly transgendered and genderqueer Filipinos strutting around and beautifying themselves with feminine clothing, makeup, and long hair (in the case of many

transgender women), walking around town with a masculine gait while wearing baggy clothes with short and cropped hair (in the case of many transgender men), and basically living their daily lives (“seemingly”) accepted by their family and community members and without (at least “apparently”) being rebuked, attacked, or persecuted (in the moment), the Philippines can indeed seem like a very accepting and hospitable place for LGBT people. The notion, however, that universal acceptance and equality, which are often erroneously implied by the idea of “tolerance”, accurately characterizes the Philippines with regards to the situation of LGBT Filipinos, has been contested, challenged, and resented by many LGBT Filipinos themselves. The idea that, since LGBT Filipinos can “apparently” live their daily lives without the constant and immediate threat of being murdered, they should be content with being “tolerated” in society – despite numerous forms of anti-LGBT discrimination, mockery, stigmatization, pathologization, demonization, and emotional and physical violence that many of them face – is, simply put, naïve, unhelpful, and even insulting for many LGBTs in the Philippines.

It should be mentioned, however, that not all “Western” perspectives are uncritical of the “tolerance” discourse in the Philippines or elsewhere. “Western” perspectives on the issue have been, of course, plural and diverse. First of all, many Westerners, such as fundamentalist Christians, are homophobic and actively espouse and disseminate homophobic doctrines around the world. Such homophobic fundamentalists condemn and sometimes demonize LGBT activism as well as the social, political, and religious acceptance and defense of same-sex relationships and transgenderism. The very idea of the existence of communities (both historical and contemporary) that accept and affirm same-sex relationships and transgenderism is a threat to the survival of homophobia and the fundamentalist doctrines that sustain it. For homophobic Western Christian fundamentalist activists and authorities, the notion of Filipino (or other

Southeast Asian or Pacific) “tolerance” for gay and transgender people can be threatening to their attempts to both fully realize a Christian fundamentalist society and to correspondingly suppress efforts by LGBT activists and heterosexual allies to achieve sociocultural, religious, and political equality and liberation for all people regardless of gender identity and sexual orientation.

On the other hand, those Westerners (many of them being LGBT themselves) who uncritically and relatively superficially espouse the notion of “tolerance” in the Philippines are often doing so out of a sense of relief that homophobia has not been universal in all societies around the world (or, at least, not universally as horrible as it has been in several Western and other contexts), and with a desire to promote alternative imaginings (among Western communities, for example) of sociocultural environments in which queer people are accepted and able to live in dignity. In other words, the Philippines (or Southeast Asia, the Pacific Islands, and other world regions) serve as the “tolerant” Other to the homophobic West, and this “tolerant Philippines” or “tolerant Southeast Asia” can then be used in Western contexts as both a theoretical or ideological weapon against Western homophobes by debunking the claim or assumption that homosexuality and transgenderism have always been universally abhorred and denigrated,¹ or as an intellectual tool to promote LGBT political equality as well as gender and sexual liberation through alternative imaginings.

However, despite this perhaps understandable aim, the uncritical espousing of the notion that Philippine society is “tolerant” of LGBT Filipinos has often left the impression that LGBT Filipinos are free and equal, as opposed to their existence being grudgingly “tolerated” or

¹ This is complicated, however, by the frequent attempt by homophobes in non-Western countries to portray homosexuality as a symptom of the alleged immorality and decadence of the atheistic/agnostic, “ungodly” West, with queer sexualities and gender identities/expressions used to exemplify this.

acknowledged yet with the expectation that, though it would perhaps be wrong to beat or murder them, they nonetheless should know their “proper” subordinated and inferiorized place in a heterosexist system. Such accounts that have insinuated a near-universally rosy situation for non-heteronormative Filipinos, thereby effectively dismissing the notion that forms of homophobia have existed in the country for quite some time, may have been inadvertently contributing to the endeavors of certain heterosexist/homophobic forces in Filipino society that have sought to delegitimize and undercut the efforts of LGBT Filipinos and their allies in not only organizing a broad-based movement for formal political and sociocultural equality and liberation, but also in getting Filipino society to realize that there is a problem at all. If the situation is “tolerant” (again, with the erroneous implication of freedom and equality), why, for example, would there need to be an LGBT political movement in the country?²

2b. Why Should Tolerance be Tolerated by the Tolerated?

Gay Filipino scholar J. Neil Garcia ([1996] 2008:400) makes a particularly robust rebuke of the “tolerance” discourse as being an instance of Orientalism:

The most enduring theme of Western(ized) academic and popular literatures on the subject of homosexuality in the country is that it is ‘tolerated’ therein... But despite the brute fact that it is the West itself that has introduced – and thus, produced – homosexuality in the Philippines, there continues to be staunch and unequivocal denial coming from Western sociologists that the bakla/bayot are comparably as oppressed as the Western gay in any way. The reason for this may very well be that the presence of an exoticizing contrast remains necessary in imagining the Western Self and reconstituting its identity at the exotic Other’s expense ([1996] 2008:400).

Garcia also critiques how such Western scholarship “refuses to entertain the slightest notion that homosexuality’s tolerance by Filipinos is not really what it appears, or that tolerance should not even be tolerated by those homosexuals who are extravagantly given it” ([1996] 2008:400).

² Ferrer, a commissioner in the Philippine government’s Commission on Elections (ComElec), for example, has used “tolerance”-related arguments to attempt to justify the disqualification of Ladlad from the party-list system (Tubeza 2009).

Moreover, “Has anybody ever wondered if gays tolerate and/or accept nongays?” ([1996] 2008:85).

Indeed, why should LGBT Filipinos tolerate the notion that they are a peculiar breed of humanity that needs to be tolerated by other members of society that fail to understand their natural gendered ways of being and sexual orientations and furthermore fail to comprehend the universality of same-sex sexualities and transgenderism in all human societies, regardless of the diverse ways that these phenomena are semiotically, linguistically, and socioculturally constructed, mediated, practiced, and lived? As UC Berkeley political scientist Wendy Brown (2006) reminds us in her critique of the “tolerance” discourse in modern liberal societies – and how it governs and regulates the lives of LGBT people, ethno-racial minorities, Indigenous peoples, immigrants, and other minority groups – Brown reminds us that “tolerance” was not always viewed as the “beacon of multicultural justice and civic peace” (2006:1) that it often uncritically is espoused as today. In the United States during the Civil Rights movement, for example, “racial tolerance was soon exposed as a subtle form of Jim Crow, one that did not resort to routine violence, formal segregation, or other overt tactics of superordination but reproduced white supremacy all the same” (2006:1). After this exposure and realization, many US leftists and liberals “well into the 1970s” came to deride the notion of “racial tolerance” and instead championed “freedom and equality” in their “justice projects on behalf of the excluded, subordinated, or marginalized” (2006:1-2).

Thus, in the Philippine situation, it is necessary to be wary of the naïve and potentially depoliticizing or even politically harmful consequences of any espousal of a “tolerant” situation for non-heterosexuals in the country, and to, rather, appreciate the nuances of oppression and acceptance that can occur, sometimes simultaneously, based on a deeper socio-historical

understanding of gender and sexuality in the archipelago. Indeed, the current sociocultural and political context within which LGBT Filipinos live has been shaped by a centuries-long experience of colonialism, nationalism, modernization, religious transformations, and neoliberal globalization in the Philippine Archipelago.

PART 3:

Philippine Same-Sex Sexualities and Gender Diversity from a Historical Perspective: The Precolonial, Colonial, and Contemporary Eras

In this section, I will provide historical and sociocultural context to Ladlad's historic emergence as the Philippines' and the world's first official LGBT political party by discussing the history and contemporary situation of gender pluralism and same-sex sexualities and practices in the Philippines, from precolonial to Spanish colonial times, through to the US colonial period, and into the era of the Philippine nation-state. Like in many other postcolonial societies, a confluence of several political, religious, and cultural forces and transformations in the Philippines – including Western (Spanish and US) colonialism, Christian fundamentalism, and the expansion of modernist ideas and practices related to morality, selfhood, and science (or, in many cases, pseudoscience) – elicited the development of heteronormative and heterosexist attitudes and practices in the archipelago, as well as rising homophobia. Moreover, the situations of homosexual and transgender peoples in the Philippines have been, needless to say, fundamentally intertwined with Filipino gender systems more generally, the roles and statuses of women, and relations between women and men. In examining the historical and contemporary situation of gender and sexual minorities in the Philippines, I thus also address the sociohistorical situation of Philippine women more generally, including the powerful impact of Hispano-Catholic and US colonial forms of patriarchy on gender relations, the position of women, and the rise of *machismo* and effeminophobia in the archipelago.

3a. Gender and Sexuality in the Precolonial Era

Historical studies on gender and sexuality in the Philippines during the pre-Hispanic and early Spanish colonial period depict relatively egalitarian relations between women and men and a relatively high degree of status and autonomy for indigenous women. According to Carolyn Brewer (1999):

In pre-contact Animist Philippines, there was a bilateral kinship system, women actively participated in the economic realm and maintained control over their earnings, virginity was not valued, “adultery” was not noteworthy, both women and men were “chieftains,” and women predominated in the spiritual domain.

Thus, indigenous women possessed considerable autonomy in economic and business matters, served as political leaders of their societies, and expressed their sexualities relatively freely without having to deal with the stigma and shaming of sexually repressive religious doctrines. The situation of Philippine women in the pre-Hispanic and early Spanish colonial periods corresponds with gender patterns noted elsewhere in the Southeast Asian region during the precolonial period.³

Brewer’s latter point – that “women predominated in the spiritual domain” – is particularly noteworthy. In her book, *Shamanism, Catholicism, and Gender Relations in Colonial Philippines, 1521-1685*, Brewer (2004) – building off of earlier works by Filipina scholars like Sister Mary John Mananzan’s (1991) celebrated essay “The Filipino Woman: Before and After the Spanish Conquest of the Philippines” – examines a prevailing pattern in precolonial Philippine societies in which women (the majority being female, but including

³ According to University of Hawaii historian Barbara Andaya (2006), several factors accounted for precolonial Southeast Asian women’s relatively high and empowered status, including widespread bilateral kinship and inheritance practices (as well as matrilineal practices in some societies), powerful Goddesses in indigenous beliefs and traditions, sexually egalitarian creation myths, widespread recognition of women’s spiritual powers as shamans or spirit mediums, and women’s ownership of property, among other practices and patterns. UC Santa Cruz anthropologist Shelly Errington (1990:1-58, cited in Garcia [1996] 2008:162) has also argued that precolonial archipelagic Southeast Asian cultures (in what is now the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei) constructed gender in a way that downplayed the gender differences between women and men, and instead emphasized a certain complementarity between them.

transgendered women) were the leaders of the religious life of the community, and in which “the feminine” was highly valued in indigenous spiritual cosmologies and shamanistic traditions. Known as *babaylan*⁴, these spiritual leaders occupied an extremely exalted and powerful position in indigenous precolonial societies by virtue of their powers and knowledge in healing, religious ritual and ceremonial facilitation, spirit mediumship, and other shamanistic abilities and practices (Brewer 2004:xvi-xviii). The authority of the *babaylan* often transcended the spiritual domain in that their esteemed status and abilities accorded many of them considerable wealth, social prestige, and political power. The Spanish conquistadores, as it turned out, were forced to contend with the power of these women. Spanish friars, colonial administrators, and military officers repeatedly encountered some of the strongest resistance (both insidiously subtle and openly rebellious) to their colonial rule and religious dominance from the indigenous “priestesses” and their followers (2004:161-88).

In fact, the *babaylan* had little choice but to resist, disrupt, frustrate, and instigate rebellions against the Spanish colonial penetration and domination of their societies. They were fully aware that, as both non-Christians and as women, they had the most to lose if patriarchal Hispano-Catholicism were to supplant the spiritual traditions, gender systems, and attitudes and practices of sexuality in their societies. Hispano-Catholic doctrinal views on gender and sexuality, however, were not only a threat to the status and position of (female) women. As mentioned, though the majority of the indigenous religious leaders were female, there were also transgender *babaylan* known as *asog*. These (male-to-female) transgender shamans assumed the dress, appearance, and behavior of the female *babaylan*, which could include wearing long skirts

⁴ *Babaylan* is a Bisaya (Visayan) word and has become the most popular term referring to the indigenous healers, ritual specialists, shamans, spirit mediums, and other spiritual leaders in communities throughout the archipelago. There are several other terms in the Philippines’ over a hundred different languages that refer to these religious leaders, such as *Mombaki*, *Dawac*, *Balyan* or *Balian*, *Katalonan*, *Ma-Aram*, *Mangngallag*, *Mumbaki*, and *Mambunong* (<http://www.babaylan.net>).

down to their feet, growing their hair long and braiding it, and engaging in indigenous women's occupations like cultivating crops and weaving (2004:129-30). Thus, not only was femininity and femaleness spiritually revered and celebrated (in indigenous spiritual beliefs and oral traditions as well as through the bodies, spiritual powers, and gendered ways of being of the female babaylan), transgenderism and other non-heteronormative gendered behaviors and expressions were socially accepted and even religiously institutionalized and honored (through the figure of the asog).

There is also ample historical evidence for the indigenous acceptance of same-sex sexualities and practices. According to several Spanish colonial documents, "sodomy" (both among men and between men and women) was ubiquitous in the indigenous societies without social disapproval or legal restrictions, and some asog became the "wives" of (masculine) men (Garcia [1996] 2008:168-97; Brewer 2004:21-22, 131). Moreover, several other sexual practices and relationships that were forbidden under fundamentalist and patriarchal interpretations of Catholicism were effectively approved by (or at least unremarkable to) the indigenous societies, such as pre-marital sex, adultery, divorce, concubinage, and polygamy (both polygyny and forms of polyandry) (Brewer 2004:22, 27-8). Significantly, "homosexual", "bisexual", and "heterosexual" sexual orientations were linguistically nonexistent; though same-sex sexual practices and relationships were ubiquitous in the Philippines (as they have been in all human societies), precolonial Filipino societies did not linguistically label people with "sexual" identities based on the gender/sex of whom they preferred sexually and romantically.

More important than sexual behavior and preferences was a person's gendered way of being; indigenous Philippine languages include a multitude of gender markers beyond "woman" and "man". In Tagalog, for example, *babae* means "woman" while *binabae* refers to

transgendered male-to-females, and *lalaki* means “man” while *binalaki* refers to female-to-male transgenders. The aforementioned terms *babaylan* and *asog* are also noteworthy in this regard.

Though *babaylan* is an occupational term referring to the (majority-female, nonetheless) spiritual leaders of indigenous precolonial societies, *asog* refers to the transgendered *babaylan* in both an occupational and a gendered sense. As J. Neil Garcia ([1996] 2008:396) in his book, *Philippine Gay Culture: Binabae to Bakla, Silahis to MSM*,⁵ states:

That the native cultures of the Philippines never really became obsessed with the sexual object choices of people per se, but rather with their functions in the community as gendered persons, can only suggest that a more egalitarian (or at least, more sex-positive) gender system obtained during much earlier – perhaps, much better – times.

Evidence for the social acceptance, spiritual honoring, and religious institutionalization of transgenderism and same-sex sexual practices and relationships has also been documented in many other precolonial and early modern Southeast Asian societies,⁶ not to mention indigenous societies throughout the world (Peletz 2009; Oetomo 2003).

3b. The Spanish Colonial Period: Machismo, Effeminophobia, and Patriarchal Catholicism

Despite Indigenous resistance and rebellion, the Spanish colonial regime came to dominate much of the Philippine Archipelago for over three centuries – with the exception of the Cordilleran peoples in the Cordillera highlands of northern Luzon as well as the Bangsamoro

⁵ In Tagalog, the root word *babae* means “woman”, whereas *binabae* can perhaps be translated as “male woman” or transgendered male-to-females. *Bakla* has popularly referred to male-to-female transgenders as well as effeminate gay men, although there have been more recent efforts to specifically mark gay men as *bakla* while reserving the English loan words “transgender” and “transsexual” for male-to-female Filipina woman. The term *silahis* is often translated as “bisexual”, but it often connotes a masculine-acting man that carries himself as a “normal” heterosexual (he may, for example, have a wife and children) but nonetheless engages in same-sex relationships or activities with other men. “MSM” stands for “men who have sex with men”; this term has been used to describe activities and practices – as opposed to identities – particularly as it relates to research on public sexual health and in dealing with the spread of HIV/AIDS. In his study, J. Neil Garcia uses “gay” as an umbrella term for all of the different categorizations of non-heteronormative people. Since Garcia’s book was first published in 1996, however, the “LGBT” acronym/banner has been more widely used by Filipino activists, scholars, and the media in referring to the spectrum of non-heterosexual genders and sexualities in the Philippines (and elsewhere).

⁶ See Michael G. Peletz (2009), *Gender Pluralism: Southeast Asia Since Early Modern Times*, New York: Routledge.

Muslim sultanates of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago (in what is now the Southern Philippines). In most parts of the northern Philippine island of Luzon as well as throughout the Visayan (or *Bisaya*) Islands (in what is now the Central Philippines), the Spanish established their political, sociocultural, and religious hegemony over the indigenous societies. A major part of the colonization process involved the demonization, subjugation, and/or banishment of the babaylan. The Spanish friars undermined and attacked the babaylan, linguistically demonizing them with words and phrases like “*bruja*” (witch), “*mala mujer*” (evil woman), “*las viejas mentirosas*” (deceitful and lying old women), and “*representar perfectamente el papel de Satanás*” (perfectly representing the role of Satan) (Brewer 2004:94). The sacred ancestral objects that the babaylan used in their spiritual rituals were desecrated and destroyed (2004:110). The Spanish priests also removed young indigenous boys from their families, had them live in convents under the priests’ supervision, indoctrinated them with their patriarchal and fundamentalist beliefs, and then had the boys return to their communities and spy on the “old women” that were frustrating the colonization and conversion process (2004:143-60).

Ultimately, women and transgender people were degraded by Hispano-Catholic patriarchal, effeminophobic, and “macho” ideologies, and women were dethroned from their predominance in the religious domain, forced to make way for a Catholic priesthood reserved exclusively for men. Indigenous female deities were replaced by the “Virgin Mary”, all sexual activity outside of church-sanctioned heterosexual marriages were forbidden, and divorce was outlawed (which is still the case to this day in the Philippines). As the Hispano-Catholic patriarchal gender ideology became increasingly hegemonic in the archipelago, women were confined into a narrow and oppressive linguistic-ideological dichotomy – either *virjen* (virgin) or *puta* (whore) – based on their compliance or noncompliance with the socio-religious prohibition

of all sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage and of all non-reproductive sexual practices (2004:39-62). As Brewer (2004:190) explains:

...rather than elevate women's already high status, the introduction of Hispanic Catholicism to the Philippine Archipelago denigrated women causing them to lose agency over their sexuality, their own bodies and their reproductive processes, and to develop self-identities based on their sexual behavior.

Moreover, the asog (and transgender and effeminate males more generally) were degraded by the Spanish as "prudes", reproductively "deficient", and anatomically "defective" (Brewer 2004:129-31). Finally, the discourse of "sodomy" (*sodomiya*) was introduced into the cultures of the colonized: oral sex and anal intercourse (whether homosexual or heterosexual), same-sex practices and relationships, and basically all types of non-reproductive and non-missionary sexual activities, were stigmatized and declared as both "unnatural" and "the abominable sin against nature" (Brewer 2004:22, 129; Garcia [1996] 2008:17, 168-74).

3c. US Colonial Legacies and the Modern Sexological Regime

The "sodomy" discourse, needless to say, only referred to sexual acts performed by men and women; it did not denote sexual orientations or sexual identities. During the 19th century, new scientific and pseudoscientific knowledge regimes regarding sexuality and gender were developed in Europe and spread to the European colonies. Human sexuality and gender – aspects of humanity that have always been fluid and diverse – fell under new biomedical, psychiatric, and governmental classificatory and disciplinary discourses and technologies. A heterosexist and heteronormative regime was established in which "heterosexuality" became regarded as physico-biologically "normal" while "homosexuality" and "bisexuality" were pathologized and stigmatized. These European-derived biomedical and patho-psychological discourses were transplanted to the Philippine Archipelago toward the end of the Spanish

colonial period in the 19th century, melding with already established Hispano-Catholic patriarchal and machoistic ideologies.⁷

The modern sexological regime particularly took root in the Philippines during the US colonial period. After a brutal war of colonization⁸, US colonial officials initiated a “civilizing” project in the Philippines in which they coopted a collaborating class of mostly *mestizo* elites to both guarantee the success of the politico-military conquest and more effectively rule over the archipelago, established an archipelago-wide secular public school system that designated English as the medium of instruction, built networks of roads and bridges, promoted new standards for public health and hygiene, and introduced new forms of governmental discipline, surveillance, and control on the Filipino population.⁹ Among the many sociocultural and

⁷ The new scientific and pseudoscientific discourses on sexuality (and the pathologization of sexuality) were transmitted to the Philippines not only via Spaniards and other Europeans. The *propagandistas* (or *ilustrados* – the “illustrious” generation of elite Filipino men that lived and studied in European universities in the mid-to-late 19th century and whose ideas gave rise to a bourgeois Filipino nationalism that, in conjunction with millenarian and other insurrectionary peasant traditions, culminated in the ouster of Spanish colonial rule during the 1898 Philippine Revolution) also influenced the rise of the new European-derived sexological consciousness in the Philippine Archipelago. Raquel A. G. Reyes (2008:xxvi-xxix), in *Love, Passion and Patriotism: Sexuality and the Philippine Propaganda Movement, 1882-1892*, discusses how the *propagandistas* were profoundly influenced by European sexological knowledge regimes that essentialized differences between men and women through supposedly biological arguments, including the notion that men’s biological nature predisposed them to developing traits such as courage, virility, and pride, while women were supposedly naturally tender, emotional, docile, and passive.

⁸ The Philippine-American War officially occurred from 1899-1902, though the fighting did not actually cease until 1913. Over 1 million people of the Philippines died. The Igorots in the northern Philippines and the (Moro or Bangsamoro) Muslims of the southern Philippines, both of whom had successfully maintained their political autonomy throughout three centuries of Spanish colonial attempts to subjugate them, were ultimately conquered by the invading US army and forcefully incorporated into the Philippines.

⁹ I refer to two works that focus on the rise of new technologies of governmentality, discipline, and surveillance in the US colonial Philippines. In *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the Philippines*, Warwick Anderson (2006) analyzes how US colonial officials sought to preserve their own health in the face of the difficulties of living in a tropical environment while promoting white male bourgeois standards of cleanliness, sanitation, and personal hygiene across the archipelago as a part of their attempt at “civilizing” the Filipino people, whom they viewed as a “contaminated” race. According to Anderson, this colonial promotion of “biomedical citizenship” in the Philippines ultimately influenced the development of disciplinary practices related to public healthcare and medical practices in the United States itself, which included racialized public health campaigns and disciplinary techniques on urban people of color. Alfred W. McCoy (2009), in *Policing America's Empire: The United States, the Philippines, and the Rise of the Surveillance State*, also examines new technologies of governmentality in the US empire in the Philippines, but his study focuses on new strategies and practices of promoting “security” in the colony – strategies involving surveillance, espionage, new information technologies, and other forms of policing in order to crush indigenous resistance to American rule. Many of the counterinsurgency and spying techniques developed by the US government and military in the Philippines – during both the official US colonial period as well as during the subsequent post-“independence” period in which the US government, military, and intelligence agencies, in conjunction with the oligarchic-dominated Philippine government, engaged in several brutal covert operations against peasants, indigenous peoples, and ethnic separatists – profoundly influenced the behavior and strategies of the US government in containing and combating military and political “threats” not only in other countries but also against ethno-racial minorities and political dissidents in the United States itself.

psychological effects of these new biomedical, psychiatric, and disciplinary technologies was a “‘sexualization’ of local mentality, behavior and personality...in America’s newly acquired colony at the beginning of the twentieth century”, resulting in “a deepening of sexuality’s perverse implantation into the local soil, accompanied by the exorbitation of the ‘homo/hetero’ distinction as the organizing principle in the now heavily freighted sexual lives of Filipinos, especially those in large urban centers where Westernized knowledges hold sway” (Garcia 2004:13).

In psychiatric, anthropological, and other secular colonial discourses, Filipino women and men became classified as either “heterosexual” and therefore “normal”, or as “homosexual” or “bisexual” and thus deviant and pathological, and a pervasive heteronormativity characterized the attitudes and practices of official secular and religious institutions. This pseudoscientific heterosexism, after melding with Christian fundamentalist anti-sodomy beliefs, resulted in the stigmatizing of “homosexuals” in the Philippines not only as sinful but also as pathological. It should also be mentioned that the US colonial regime not only critically promoted the emergence of modern heterosexism in the Philippines but also contributed to and reinforced the patriarchal, puritanical, and ultimately homophobic religious doctrines (originally emanating from Hispano-Catholicism) in the archipelago through the “erotophobic, fire-and-brimstone moralism of US Protestant evangelicals” (Tan 1996:209). These US-originated/inspired ideas were disseminated throughout the Philippines, particularly among official spaces and urbanized regions with the most direct contact with the colonial power sources, but nonetheless reaching beyond middle-to-upper class elites and influencing Filipinos of all socioeconomic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds.

3d. Contemporary Gender/Sexual Categorizations: *Bakla*, *Tomboy*, *Silahis*, and MSM

Yet who were these “homosexuals” that were being singled out by pseudoscientific and puritanical institutions and discourses? As it turned out, Christian fundamentalism and modern heterosexism took root in the Philippines by intersecting with and disrupting indigenous conceptions and understandings of gender and sexuality, though in often erratic, inconsistent, and contradictory ways. One of the ways that the effects of those colonial implantations can be discerned is through an exploration of the popular conceptualizations of the *bakla* identity – as well as, of course, through the experiences and narratives of those who identify, and are identified, as *bakla*. *Bakla* is the most popular contemporary Filipino term denoting a non-heteronormative gender/sexual identity. Though the Tagalog-derived term has often been translated into English as “gay” or “homosexual” (*homoseksuwal*), or as an example of a “third gender” or “third sex” (*ikatlong kasarian*), its meaning is actually more complex than such translations.

As anthropologist Martin Manalansan (2003:25) in his book, *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora*, explains, “while *bakla* conflates the categories of effeminacy, transvestism, and homosexuality and can mean one or all of these in different contexts, the main focus of the term is that of effeminate mannerism, feminine physical characteristics...and cross-dressing.” *Bakla* people have often been socially constructed as being male-bodied though possessing a “female heart” (in Tagalog: *pusong babae*) or a “womanly inner self” or “inner woman” (*babaeng loob*) and searching for a “real man” (*tunay na lalaki*) (2003:25). Thus, the *bakla* identity often refers more to gender and gendered behavior than to sexual orientation and sexual acts. This can be attributed to the fact that the term “*bakla*” historically was indeed exclusively a gender identity similar to *binabae* (male-to-female transgender) that emerged in the Philippines

prior to the implantation of the Western colonialist-derived discourses of “homosexuality”, “bisexuality”, and “heterosexuality” (Garcia [1996] 2008:xxii).

However, once those Western (particularly US-originated) psychiatric and psychological knowledge regimes took root in the Philippines, the bakla underwent a process of “sexualization” – particularly, “homosexualization” ([1996] 2008:71) – in which effeminate or cross-dressing men, male-to-female transgenders, and anyone else identified as “bakla”, became associated, not simply with their gender identity or gendered performance, but also with their (pathologized) “homosexuality” (*homoseksualidad*). This modern homosexualizing of the bakla occurred after the bakla had already suffered three centuries of colonial degradation from Spanish patriarchal and effeminophobic machismo, to the point that the term “bakla”, in addition to its gendered connotations, also became (though not necessarily in all communities or contexts) pejoratively equated with “sissy”, “cowardly”, “confused”, or “less-of-a-man”. In other words, the bakla, already inferiorized by Spanish machismo for their feminine gendered behavior and way of being, was forced to endure further stigmatization for possessing a pathologized “homosexual” orientation.

A similar process occurred for masculine lesbians and female-to-male transgender men. In Tagalog, these people have been referred to as *binalaki*, and in Cebuano as *lakin-on* (Garcia [1996] 2008:103; Hart 1968:223-6). They are currently most popularly referred to with the English loan word *tomboy*. In a study by US anthropologist Donn Hart in the 1960s, the Cebuano *lakin-on* were described as tough and brave, wearing men’s clothing and having short-cropped hair, carrying themselves as men through their demeanor and stiff gait, and smoking and drinking like men, and many engaged in rural Cebuano men’s work like plowing the fields (Hart 1968:223-4). In contemporary times, Filipino *tomboys* have endured a series of negative social

perceptions, such as being violent and emotionally unstable, excessive drinkers, promiscuous players, and addicted to gambling (Umbac 2006); according to de Vela et al. (2011:360), some tomboys unfortunately feel encouraged or expected to take on such negative stereotypically masculine behaviors like excessive drinking and brawling as a way of coping with social discrimination. Many tomboys have experienced job discrimination, whether in not being hired or in being forced to wear “feminine” clothing at work, while other tomboys have successfully found work as security guards and janitors, though being boxed into stereotypical roles in the process (de Vela et al. 2011:367; Pangilinan 2009:221). Many tomboys also experience religious guilt from homophobic Christian doctrines and must contend with pseudoscientific notions that they are abnormal (Umbac 2006). Moreover, in certain communities, there have been horrific reported instances of rampant rape against tomboys by heterosexual men, with rape at times being viewed as a “cure” of lesbianism or as a way of preventing tomboys from expressing their masculine gender identity (Umbac 2006; de Vela et al. 2011:357).

Thus, the convergence between Spanish colonial effeminophobic and misogynistic machismo, fundamentalist Hispano-Catholic and US Protestant evangelical anti-sodomy beliefs, US colonial heterosexism and homophobia, and Philippine indigenous constructions of gender and sexuality all ultimately led to the current situation in which non-heteronormative genders and sexualities are often stigmatized, inferiorized, and/or condemned in different sectors and spaces in Philippine society, though in differing ways and to varying degrees. The brunt of effeminophobic, heterosexist, and homophobic oppression has been borne by those whose gender identities or gendered behaviors and expressions are most evidently non-heteronormative. In other words, many “normally” gendered masculine males and feminine females, despite sexually and romantically preferring people of the same sex and engaging in same-sex

relationships and activities, have not necessarily endured overt discrimination, bigotry, or mockery to the degree that many effeminate men, masculine women, and transgender people have.

Of course, the same can be said for LGBT people in many other countries around the world, but the Philippine situation is more similar to several other Asian and Latin American countries in that "...participation in same-sex acts is not the crucial standard for being labeled homosexual or identifying as gay; rather, gender performance (acting masculine or feminine) and/or one's role in the sex act (e.g., being anal inserter vs. insertee) form the standard" (Manalansan 2003:23). In the Filipino vernacular, being "gay" or "homosexual" became popularly synonymous with being "bakla" (as opposed to identifying people, more or less exclusively, based on their sexual preferences and practices). Similarly, "*tomboy*" has been used to popularly refer to masculine lesbians and (female-to-male) transgender men, and these masculine-oriented *tomboy* Filipinos have dominated popular conceptualizations of the "lesbian" (*lesbiyana*) or the "female homosexual" (*babaeng homoseksuwal*) in Filipino society. *Bakla* and *tomboy* people have been made to endure the brunt of the anti-homosexual bigotry in Philippine society, whether in the macho derision of effeminacy in men/boys and transgendered women/girls as well as masculinity in women/girls and transgendered men/boys, or in the demonization and pathologization of same-sex acts and relationships from both religious and secular-originated doctrines and institutions. As Garcia explains, "Stereotypes of the loud and funny faggot, as well as of the darkly moody and vengeful tomboy are, for a long time now, the only images heterosexuals have had of homosexuals; and more tragically, the only images homosexuals have had of themselves" ([1996] 2008:13).

This is not to say that normatively gendered women and men who romantically/sexually prefer people of the same sex have not faced social discrimination, internalized shame and personal pain, police harassment, physical violence, or other repercussions of social, religious, and political heterosexism and homophobia in Philippine society. Though non-heterosexual Filipinos who can “pass” for heterosexual may be able to, in their daily lives, avoid much of the overtly heterosexist or homophobic bigotry that many non-normatively gendered Filipinos recurrently endure, they must nonetheless come to terms with homophobic Christian (or Islamic) fundamentalist doctrines, popular enduring pseudoscientific discourses that have pathologized homosexuality and bisexuality, and cultural pressures to conform to or emulate certain gendered behaviors based on patriarchal, machoistic, and heteronormative ideals.

Significantly, dominant contemporary Filipino cultural constructions of gender and sexuality have thus far not, in a linguistic or semiotic sense, adequately accounted for normatively gendered homosexual and bisexual women and men. As mentioned, Filipino sociocultural constructions and perceptions of the *lesbiyana* or the female homosexual have tended to be dominated by the image of the masculine-oriented *tomboys*, contributing to the invisibilizing of feminine-oriented/femme lesbians and bisexual women in Filipino history, literature, and in society in general (Pineda 2001:133-8; Pangilinan 2009; de Vela et al. 2011:361, 377). Filipina lesbians must thus contend with a dual marginalization: as women in a patriarchal and machoistic society, and as (invisibilized) lesbians in a heterosexist society (Umbac 2006). A recent multi-country study entitled *Women-Loving-Women in Africa and Asia: TRANS/SIGN Report of Research Findings*, published in 2011 and edited by anthropologist Saskia E. Wieringa (and including a chapter on the Philippines), has used the umbrella term “women-loving women” (WLW) to address “the invisibility of lesbians, FTMs and male-

identified women and the violence they [have] experienced from a young age onwards”

(Wieringa 2011:16) in various Asian and African countries.

With regards to masculine gay and bisexual men, as Manalansan (2003:25-6) states, “While the Filipino public seems to be disinterested in the masculine *bakla*, it is because there is no social discourse by which to discuss these kinds of men. These *baklas* are met either with puzzlement or suspicion.” The slang term *silahis* has been used in Filipino discourse to come to terms with this “puzzling” category of men who have sexual and romantic relationships with other (masculine) men or with effeminate *baklas*, but who otherwise appear as normatively gendered masculine “heterosexual”¹⁰ men (or *tunay na lalaki* – “real men”) in their daily lives, as many of these “*silahis*” men may have a (female) girlfriend or a wife and children (Garcia [1996] 2008:134-37). “*Silahis*” in its slang¹¹ connotation (in Tagalog, it literally means “beam” or “ray” of the sun) has often been translated into English as “bisexual”, but, similar to *bakla*, the term’s reference to sexual practices and preferences cannot be divested from its gendered implications. According to Filipino anthropologist Michael L. Tan, *silahis* have also been referred to as “macho gays” or “*baklang hindi ladlad*” (closeted *baklas*) (1996:214).

¹⁰ The terms “heterosexual” and “straight” have actually not been as commonly used colloquially in Filipino as are the terms “*bakla*”, “*silahis*”, “*tomboy*”, “*gay*”, “*homosexual*”, and even “*bisexual*”. Again, a person’s gendered behavior and performance more often determine a person’s gender/sexual identity. Normatively gendered people are simply referred to as *babae* (woman) or *lalaki* (man), or, when contrasting them to the non-heteronormative and stigmatized gender/sexual identities (e.g. *bakla*, *tomboy*, *gay*, etc.), they are also referred to as *tunay na babae* (real woman) or *tunay na lalaki* (real man). However, these “real men” and “real women” may actually have engaged in same-sex relationships or activities in their lives; there is, therefore, a sense of fluidity among “heterosexual”, “bisexual”, and “*silahis*” identities/labels. As Tan (1996:209-10) explains, “Curiously, indigenous linguistic equivalents for ‘heterosexual’ do not exist in any of the Philippine languages (or, for that matter, any of the Southeast Asian or East Asian languages). Neither has the term ‘heterosexual’ been borrowed into local languages as ‘homosexual’ and ‘bisexual’ have. The term is rarely used colloquially and I have actually had several encounters with people who understand it to be ‘another’ perversion like ‘homosexual’ and ‘bisexual’.”

¹¹ The term *silahis* actually originated around the 1960s and 70s in the Philippines from *swardspeak* (the special language or code used among fellow *bakla*/gay people in the Philippines) (Garica [1996] 2008:134). According to Manalansan (2003:46), “...swardspeak appropriates elements from dominant Filipino, American, and Spanish codes, and rearticulates their symbolic meanings. I argue that Filipino gay men use swardspeak to enact ideas, transact experiences, and perform identities that showcase their abject relationship to the nation. At the same time, the practice of swardspeak highlights Filipino gay men’s complicated struggles in negotiating their sense of belonging, or citizenship, and self-identity.”

With regards to the latter notion of being a *bakla* that is not *ladlad* (not “out” of the closet)¹², there has been resentful suspicion from certain bakla Filipinos that silahis men are actually “closet queen” baklas that are fraudulently attempting to behave masculinely in order to avoid facing the prejudice and stigmatization borne by the openly effeminate baklas (Garcia 1996:134; Tan 1996:215). Though it would be understandable or even expected that, under such a heterosexist and effeminophobic sociocultural regime, some of the men identified as “silahis” would in fact be making a conscious and purposive effort to perform masculinity and insinuate heterosexuality in order to avoid effeminophobic/homophobic prejudice, there nonetheless are men who both prefer other men romantically/sexually and who are more or less naturally or intuitively disposed toward a masculine gendered behavior and way of being. As Garcia reminds us, “...in much of the Third World, machismo intersects with an ironic allowance for homosexuality among the macho males themselves” ([1996] 2008:407).

However, though silahis men may not feel hindered from having romantic/sexual relationships with other men, and though many of them are not necessarily “fraudulently” performing masculinity, there still exists a sense of pressure for many of these men to conceal their (same-sex) relationships from their families, communities, and society in general. Thus, though many silahis can escape much of the recurrent taunting that many visibly effeminate baklas have no choice but to face in their daily lives, many silahis nonetheless experience varying degrees of isolation (especially for those silahis that have not been able to develop a community or peer group of other silahis), personalized shame (for sociocultural and/or religious reasons), fear of being exposed (*nabuking*) for their stigmatized sexual preferences and practices,

¹² The Tagalog word *ladlad*, or its verbalized form *magladlad*, literally translates to “unfurl”, as in *magladlad ng kapa* or “unfurling one’s cape”.

and discrimination from not only “heterosexual” Filipinos but also from bakla and gay men that view them as “frauds” (Tan 1996: 223). The socially imposed isolation and stigmatization that many silahis men experience have also contributed to risky secretive and unprotected sexual practices that are contributing to a rise in HIV infections in the Philippines, along with other high-risk groups such as young adults, sex workers, injecting drug users, and OFWs (Overseas Filipino Workers) (Farr & Wilson 2010:3).

The now globalized “MSM” discourse has been applied to the Philippine context in order to research the populations of “men who have sex with men” (sometimes also referred to as “males who have sex with males”) that may or may not identify with the various gender/sexual identities available in the Filipino vernacular (e.g. bakla, bading, silahis, gay, homoseksual, biseksual, lalaki, tunay na lalaki, heteroseskwal, straight, etc.). MSM is meant to be a discourse of sexual behaviors rather than sexual identities (though the distinction between behavior and identity often becomes blurry) in order to transcend differences in Filipino sociocultural categorizations of gender and sexuality and therefore more effectively provide research and knowledge that can provide emotional, psychological, and medical support to MSMs, particularly in the face of social isolation and stigmatization and the rising threat of HIV/AIDS in the Philippines¹³ (Garcia [1996] 2008:231-36; Tan 1996:223-25). Male sex workers are a particularly significant segment in studies on MSM populations in the Philippines with regards to efforts to stem the growing tide of HIV infections in the country.

¹³ HIV infections have been relatively low in the Philippines compared to other countries in the Asia-Pacific region, but recent studies warn of an HIV/AIDS explosion in the Philippines if the government continues to underfund HIV prevention programs, and if conservative/fundamentalist forces in Filipino society continue to prevent the promulgation of safe-sex education (rather than merely abstinence-only education), thwart government efforts to provide more widespread public access to condoms and other contraceptives, and obstruct government support for women’s reproductive rights including birth control and family planning. Though there were 600 new reported HIV infections in 2001, there were 4,600 new infections in 2011, and without effective anti-HIV/AIDS programs, it is feared that there could be up to 45,000 infections by 2015 (Esplanada 2012).

Nonetheless, the call for the *silahis*, macho gays, other “hidden” MSMs, femme lesbians, and other WLW in the Philippines to “come out” (*mag-ladlad*) persists, not just for the sake of being true to oneself (*magpakatotoo*) and one’s community, but for the greater struggle for gender and sexual equality and liberation. According to Garcia:

...with the MSM continuing to remain invisible, the only ‘real’ or consequential homosexuals are still the gays who have always been out for they cannot be otherwise. The outwardly bakla, hence. I am therefore praying that the MSM begin to show themselves more and more...for this would surely deflect the minoritizing gaze of the pathologizing macho culture away from the inverts who, it incredibly claims, have always been “tolerated,” and instead train the mirror on itself, for the macho culture has to accept that even macho men are homosexuals; and the first shall be the last. This constructionist perspective is, now perhaps more than ever, rather necessary for the “dehumorization” and liberation of Filipino gays to come to any lasting fruition ([1996] 2008:235).

Moreover, the Filipina feminist and lesbian rights advocate Aida F. Santos (2009) states:

...I am looking for more lesbians from factories, fields and offices to come [out] in numbers, to unclothe themselves of fear and lack of self-esteem and become proud of who they are. Lesbian mothers are particularly invisible in the landscape of our organizing efforts. Women in prostitution have been barely touched in terms of their lesbian identity. I am looking for more “straight” sisters to join us as...this is their own struggle. We are women before we are lesbians, and they are women before they are “straights.” Our connectiveness has to be emphasized because the context of our struggles is in the history of our activism as a people. Our rights are embedded in human rights.

PART FOUR:

LGBT in the Philippines: Identity, Solidarity, and Liberation

In the West and elsewhere, the psychiatrically derived terms “homosexual”, “bisexual”, and “heterosexual” have tended to be interpreted in colloquial discourse in a rather clinical or detached sense. A series of terms emerged in popular discourse to more personally or emotively identify people who romantically/sexually prefer people of the same sex and whose genders or gendered ways of being do not conform to patriarchal, machoistic, and heteronormative standards. The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual (or Bi), and Transgender/Transsexual (or Trans) identities were taken on by people stigmatized in the West for their sexual orientations and gender identities, particularly since the 1960s, to build social networks, communities, and a sense of solidarity with each other, eventually leading to the emergence of LGBT political activism and radical sexual liberation movements. Events in the United States like the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion in New York City had global repercussions, inspiring movements for social solidarity, academic scholarship, political advocacy, and liberation around the world that appropriated the English-derived term “gay”, but also eventually encompassing a broad spectrum of gender identities and sexual orientations, including “lesbian”, “bi”, “trans”, “intersex”, and “queer”.¹⁴

These Western-originated terms were appropriated and modified to fit into various local and

¹⁴ This is not to say, however, that resistance against heterosexism (not to mention patriarchy, capitalism, imperialism, racism, and other forms of oppression) had not occurred in the Third World prior to the liberation movements that emerged in the United States, as such resistance movements have been occurring in Asia, Africa, the Pacific Islands, and the Americas since the process of European and Euro-American colonial expansion began. Third World revolutionary movements, rather than merely being recipients of political ideas from the West, have in turn influenced and inspired resistance movements within the metropolises themselves. However, the global influence and appeal of the major social movements that have emerged within the heart of Empire – from racial justice to feminism, environmentalism, and gay liberation in the 1960s and 70s, or Occupy Wall Street since 2011 – cannot be underestimated either.

national contexts alongside a plethora of indigenous sociocultural/semiotic classifications of human genders and sexualities.

4a. Rise of LGBT Identity and Activism in the Philippines: The 1990s

In the Philippines, though “*bakla*”, “*kabaklaan*” (*bakla*-ness), “gay”, and “homosexual” have been the more popular umbrella terms to refer to same-sex sexualities and transgenderism in the country (though, of course, more often referring primarily to effeminate transgendered/intergendered people), since the 1990s, and particularly within the past decade, the “LGBT” acronym/banner has been more widely used and disseminated in the Filipino media, academia, government, civil society, radical social movements, and in popular discourse – both in national politics and in everyday life [Notably, however, though the English terms “lesbian”, “gay”, “bisexual”, and “transgender” continue to be the predominant connotation of the “LGBT” acronym as used in the Philippines, I have also heard members of Ladlad use the phrase “*lesbiyana, bakla, biseksuwal, at transgender*” (lesbian, *bakla*, bisexual, and transgender) when referring to, in the Filipino language, the “LGBT” population of the Philippines.]. This has occurred part and parcel with the continuing and increasing sexualization of Filipinos in academic, governmental, public health, religious, and other official discourses and spaces; this sexualization process is no longer only deriving from pseudoscientific-heterosexist and fundamentalist-homophobic sources, but also now from scholars and activists associated with the LGBT movement itself. Indeed, “in fighting homophobia, one also enables it by lending it discursivity. And yet, it is only by this procedure that the sameness/difference binary, as regards matters of gender and sexuality, can become critically exhausted and undone” (Garcia [1996] 2008:233).

The 1990s was a momentous decade for the advancement of Filipino LGBT identity, community formation, and political advocacy. In September 1992, UP Babaylan¹⁵ was established at the Diliman campus of the University of the Philippines (UP Diliman, the country's premier state university), becoming the Philippines' first LGBT students' organization; the group has maintained a strong presence in the university since its founding, with some of its members elected into the UP Diliman Student Council.¹⁶ In 1993, a group that became known as The Lesbian Collective (TLC) gained national attention on March 8th when the group marched alongside several other women's groups in celebration of International Women's Day, reading a public statement debunking negative stereotypes and perceptions of Filipino lesbians (de Vela et al. 2011:353; Pineda 2001:143-4; Santos 2009).¹⁷ TLC, though no longer in existence today, was highly significant in that it pioneered lesbian (and other LGBT) activism in the Philippines, compelled the Philippine feminist/women's movement to value lesbian issues, and inspired the creation of numerous lesbian activist and advocacy networks and organizations in both Metropolitan Manila and across the country, including the Womyn Supporting Womyn Center (WSWC), Can't Live in the Closet (CLIC), Lesbian Advocates of the Philippines (LeAP!), and Lesbians for National Democracy (LesBond) (de Vela et al. 2011:353-4; Pineda 2001:143-4).

¹⁵ According to its website, UP Babaylan "aims to forge unity among gay and lesbian students and faculty. We believe that unity within the community is crucial if we are to be heard on issues affecting us. Having been marginalized for so long, we recognize the need to consolidate ourselves into a vocal and potent force for the protection and advancement of gay and lesbian rights" (<http://upbabaylan.blogspot.com/2006/05/about-up-babaylan.html>, accessed February 7, 2012). The student group appropriated the legacy of the powerful *babaylan* in Philippine history, particularly with regards to the (MTF) transgender or gender-crossing male *babaylan* known as *asog*.

¹⁶ Among UP Babaylan's renowned alumni is Percival Cendana. Cendana, a former president of UP Babaylan, became elected as the first openly gay chairperson of the UP student council in 1997. After graduating from UP, Cendana became involved in civil society and party-list politics. He has worked for the Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC), and he became the National Chairperson of Akbayan! in 2009. Since February 2011, he has served as Commissioner of the Philippine government's National Youth Commission (<http://nyc.gov.ph/about-national-youth-commission/national-youth-commission-officials/atty-percival-cendana>, accessed February 7, 2012).

¹⁷ This was a breakthrough not only in that TLC was the first lesbian activist group to emerge in the Philippines, but also because lesbians had been struggling for years to gain ground in the Filipina feminist/women's movement, particularly since the 1970s and 80s, where they had formed several informal lesbian clusters or groupings that discussed lesbian issues, including homophobia/lesbophobia within the women's movement itself (Pineda 2001:143-4).

The First National Lesbian Rights Conference held in 1996 was also a breakthrough in advancing Filipino lesbian visibility and activism (Pineda 2001:149).

Filipino gay activism particularly took off in 1994. In that year, the Philippines' first annual Pride March (which was also the first Gay Pride March in Asia) occurred on June 26 in Quezon City (in Metropolitan Manila) to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the Stonewall Rebellion in New York City; it was organized by the leftist ProGay Philippines (Progressive Organization of Gays in the Philippines)¹⁸ and the LGBT-affirming Metropolitan Community Church of the Philippines (MCCP)¹⁹ (Batocabe 2011:24). 1994 was also a significant year for the advancement of Filipino gay literature: the country's first gay literature class was taught by J. Neil Garcia at UP Diliman, and the first (of 3, so far) volumes of *Ladlad: An Anthology of Philippine Gay Writing* was published (Baytan 2008:184). The *Ladlad* anthologies (the 2nd volume was published in 1996, and the 3rd in 2007), co-edited by J. Neil Garcia and Danton Remoto, are collections of poetry, fictional short stories, plays, critical essays, and other literary works written in both Filipino and English by Filipino gay men in the Philippines and in the diaspora. All three volumes achieved great commercial success and have contributed to the growth and expansion of Filipino LGBT identity and politics, including eventually partly inspiring the creation of the Ladlad political party, founded in 2003 and accredited as an official party-list in 2010. The two co-editors of the *Ladlad* anthologies – Remoto and Garcia – have

¹⁸ “We advocate the full recognition of economic, social and political rights of all sexual minorities to freedom from all forms of sexual discrimination in [the] family, the community, the government, church and mass media.” (http://members.tripod.com/~progay_philippines/intro.html, accessed February 10, 2012).

¹⁹ The Metropolitan Community Church of the Philippines (MCCP) was founded in Manila in 1991 and became the first church in Asia to affirm LGBT equality. It is a member congregation of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC), an international Protestant church founded by Rev. Troy Perry in Los Angeles, California in 1968, now with 222 branches in 37 countries. The Metropolitan Community Church has been an important force in the United States and worldwide in promoting an interpretation of Christianity (a Queer theology) that affirms LGBT equality and human rights, including marriage equality (<http://mccmb.webs.com/aboutus.htm>, accessed February 10, 2012). The official website of the UFMCC is <http://mccchurch.org/>, accessed February 10, 2012).

been major figures in, and inspirers of, the Filipino LGBT movement: Remoto (a poet, essayist, creative writer, and professor of English at Ateneo de Manila University) co-founded the Ladlad party in 2003, and J. Neil Garcia (author of the landmark *Philippine Gay Culture* [1996]) is a prolific writer and cultural theorist, with several poetry collections, works of creative non-fiction, and critical essays published, and a professor of English, creative writing, and comparative literature at UP Diliman.

4b. LAGABLAB, Task Force Pride, and Early 21st Century Developments

In 1999, several of the various LGBT organizations and advocacy groups in the Philippines formed two umbrella coalitions that have become major forces in advancing LGBT power in Philippine politics and society – namely, LAGABLAB and Task Force Pride (TFP). Since its founding, the Lesbian and Gay Legislative Advocacy Network (LAGABLAB)²⁰ has been engaged in extensive research and advocacy work in promoting LGBT equality and human rights in the policy and legislative sphere, particularly with regards to the effort to pass a bill that would criminalize discriminatory and abusive practices and policies against people based on their gender identity or sexual orientation [Ladlad party-list has since taken up the cause of pushing for the passage of the Anti-Discrimination Bill]. LAGABLAB, moreover, has been documenting cases of abuse and discrimination against LGBT Filipinos around the country, and it has also been lobbying local governments to pass ordinances protecting LGBT people from discriminatory and abusive practices. The efforts to combat discrimination against and lobby for

²⁰ In Filipino, *lagablab* means “blaze” or “burst of flame”. The Lesbian and Gay Legislative Advocacy Network is “a broad, non-profit, non-partisan network of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) organizations and individuals working towards achieving a society free from all forms of discrimination, particularly those based on gender and sexual orientation.” Some of the member organizations of LAGABLAB include the Lesbian Advocates of the Philippines (LeAP!), UP Babaylan, the Metropolitan Community Church of the Philippines (MCCP), the Womyn Supporting Womyn Center (WSWC), Indigo Philippines, The Library Foundation (TLF), and the Order of St. Aelred (O.S.Ae.) (<http://lagablab.wordpress.com>, accessed February 12, 2012).

the legal protections of LGBT people in the Philippines have been particularly important in light of the ominous rise of documented anti-LGBT hate crimes in the country since the 1990s to the present, including stabbings, beatings, shootings, sexual violence, homicides, and other forms of extreme violence based on prejudice, bias, and hate against people based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity (SOGI), as documented by a group called the Philippine LGBT Hate Crime Watch (Pascual 2011).

Task Force Pride (TFP), on the other hand, has been the official organizer, since 1999, of the widely publicized annual Pride March in Metro Manila during the month of December (Batocabe 2011:26).²¹ Also a network comprised of several LGBT organizations (some of which overlap with those in LAGABLAB, as well as those in Ladlad party-list),²² TFP has had a prominent and powerful role in promoting LGBT identity and advocacy in Philippine society in that it gets to choose the theme, and steer the general direction, of the Pride Month activities that are to take place – e.g., whether the Pride activities will be strongly overtly political or solely celebratory and commercialized (or a balance between the two). Some marchers at Metro Manila Pride, for example, have advocated for the passage of the Anti-Discrimination Bill in Congress, while others have advocated for the struggle to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS in the country. More generally, Metro Manila Pride, as a mass celebration of the diversity of human sexual orientations and gender expressions, has been effective in demonstrating LGBT social and

²¹ Though originally held in the month of June, since 2003, Metro Manila's Pride March has been held in December when other important occasions related to LGBT issues and human rights take place, such as National Lesbian Day in the Philippines as well as the internationally commemorated World AIDS Day and Human Rights Day. Though originally held in Quezon City, the Pride March now takes place in Malate, a district of Manila known for its abundance of gay-owned and gay-themed restaurants, bars, entertainment venues, and other businesses and establishments.

²² LGBT and ally organizations affiliated with Task Force Pride (TFP) include Akbayan! Citizens' Action Party (AKBAYAN!), Amnesty International Philippines (AIPh), Health Action Information Network (HAIN), Indigo Philippines, Lesbian Advocates of the Philippines (LeAP!), ManilaOut Foundation (ManilaOut), Metropolitan Community Church of the Philippines (MCCP), the Order of St. Aelred (O.S.Ae.), Remedios AIDS Foundation (RAF), Society of Transsexual Women of the Philippines (STRAP), Society of United Lesbians (Soul), The Library Foundation (TLF), UP Babaylan, and the Womyn Supporting Womyn Center (WSWC).

political power in society by taking over a prominent public space en masse while garnering widespread publicity, by symbolically rejecting heterosexist expectations to remain closeted by marching openly and unabashedly, and by cultivating and enhancing a sense of solidarity and collective pride among LGBT Filipinos and their allies.

Thus, Filipino LGBT activism and advocacy, practically non-existent prior to the 1990s, entered the 21st century increasingly organized, prevalent, and powerful. LGBT social and political organizations have sprouted up not only in Metro Manila but across the country as well, from Baguio and Naga to Cebu and Davao, while increasingly vocal and powerful LGBT and ally organizations and individuals have been challenging heterosexism and homophobia coming from powerful places in the government, religious institutions, academia, and in Philippine society more generally. More Filipino celebrities have “come out” (*mag-ladlad*) as LGBT, including Vice Ganda, Aiza, and the internationally recognized singer Charice. The issue of same-sex marriage, moreover, has gained ground in the Philippines, not only from media reports of the progress of marriage equality in countries like South Africa, Argentina, Spain, the Netherlands, and certain states in the United States of America, but also from same-sex weddings that have taken place in the Philippines itself (though unrecognized thus far by the Philippine government). This includes the February 2005 marriage between two gay cadres in the New People’s Army (NPA, or *Bagong Hukbong Bayan*), the armed wing of the Maoist-leaning Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP, or *Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas*) (Alburo 2011), as well as the marriages of lesbian and gay couples at the Metropolitan Community Church of Baguio City in June 2011 (Caluza 2011); both of these events received substantial press coverage in the national Philippine media.

PART FIVE:

Party-List Politics, LGBT Advocacy, and the Emergence of Ladlad

I now analyze the historical emergence of the Ladlad political party as a unique product of specific intersecting forces and trends in Philippine (and global) society and political culture. Ladlad truly represents the convergence between LGBT activism and party-list politics in the Philippines, both of which have been rooted in vast networks of local, national, and transnational civil-society organizations and people's organizations across the Philippines and beyond; globally circulating modernist and universalist discourses relating to human rights, democratic values, equality, and freedom; global sexological discourses; queer theological interventions; and local Filipino communitarian cultural practices, values, and organizing strategies.

5a. The Philippine Party-List System

On February 22-25, 1986, millions of Filipinos took to the streets of Manila and other Philippine cities to take down the dictatorship that had ruled them for the past two decades. The massive nonviolent protests that flooded Epifanio de los Santos (EDSA) Avenue, the main thoroughfare of Metropolitan Manila, forced President Ferdinand Marcos, First Lady Imelda Marcos, and their children to flee the Philippines and seek refuge in Hawai'i. This "People Power" Revolution (or "EDSA Revolution") stunned the world and became a model for subsequent people power revolutions in countries under both US-backed and Soviet-backed dictatorships. Moreover, the newly re-democratized political landscape gave the progressive and democratic forces in Philippine society a valuable opportunity to exert their influence on the

political structure of the post-EDSA order, including through the newly ratified Constitution of the Philippines (*Saligang Batas ng Pilipinas*) of 1987 (Manegold 1987).

One of the requirements of this more democratic constitution was the establishment of a “party-list system” in which 20% of the total number of representatives (*kinatawan*) in the House of Representatives (*Kapulungan ng mga Kinatawan*) be elected from registered “party-list” political parties – aside from the 80% that would be directly elected from their respective geographic districts.²³ Subsequent decisions by the Philippine Supreme Court (*Kataastaasang Hukuman*) specified that the sole political parties qualified to compete within the party-list system must be those representing “marginalized” and “underrepresented” sectors of Philippine society (Panganiban 2010, Gutierrez 2010:621). This effectively disqualified the 8 major political parties (dominated by the country’s corporate and landlord interests and oligarchic clans) from competing within the party-list system [though the threat of “dummy” or “satellite” parties under the control of the elite parties continues to loom (Jimenez-David 2010; Pasaylo 2011)]. The Philippine party-list system, as a fusion between proportional representation and sectoral/marginalized representation, is a truly unique innovation in the world among national party-list systems (Wurful 1997:29).

Within this context, the progressive Left has taken up the challenge of reforming the Philippines’ elite-dominated political system by putting forth party-list parties based on principles of social and economic justice. In the congressional elections (held in May) of 1998, 2001, 2004, 2007, 2010, and 2013 (the next will be held in 2016, as Philippine congressional

²³ The Philippine legislature (*Kongreso*) is bicameral, with a lower house (*Kapulungan ng mga Kinatawan* or House of Representatives) and an upper house (*Senado* or Senate); this system was inherited from the US colonial period. [Correspondingly, the executive branch is headed by the *Pangulo* or President, and the judicial branch is headed by the *Kataastaasang Hukuman* or Supreme Court.] The insertion of a party-list system into 20% of the seats in the lower house can thus be seen as a shift away from the US-styled system of government toward a more parliamentary system.

elections take place every three years), leftist parties emerged as important forces in the House of Representatives by means of the party-list system, including the socialist AKBAYAN! Citizens' Action Party²⁴, one of the few parties to win seats in each party-list election since 1998. Moreover, the powerful leftist sociopolitical coalition known as BAYAN (*Bagong Alyansang Makabayan* or New Patriotic Alliance)²⁵, which has had links to the National Democratic Front (NDF)²⁶, currently has several parties in the House elected through the party-list system,

²⁴ The Tagalog/Filipino term *akbayan* means “to put one’s arm around another person’s shoulder.” AKBAYAN! Citizens’ Action Party espouses “participatory democracy” and “participatory socialism”. The party is critical of “the old statist models, whether of the representative democracy under the capitalist order or the then existing socialism which collapsed.” Furthermore: “We must pursue and complete the struggle for democracy. This includes the consummation of people’s sovereignty and its defense against all forms of imperialism, the completion of land reform, the full inclusion of the marginalized classes and women in the political democracy, and the realization of the right to self-determination of the Moro people, as well as of the indigenous peoples, including the people of the Cordillera and the lumads... Our guiding developmental framework is a mixed economy of market, state and social sectors where an activist state and the social sector engage the markets to develop the productive forces, protects the labor and agrarian sectors, creatively expands the social sectors and fights for fair trade in the global markets” (<http://www.akbayan.org.ph/who-we-are/>, accessed on August 11, 2013).

²⁵ The Tagalog/Filipino term *bayan* can be variously translated as “hometown”, “country”, “nation”, or “people”. According to BAYAN’s website: “Bayan is a multisectoral formation struggling for national and social liberation against imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat capitalism. It envisions a just society, free from foreign domination” (<http://www.bayan.ph/site/about/>, accessed on August 11, 2013.)

²⁶ The National Democratic Front (NDF) [in Filipino: the *Pambansang Demokratikong Prente ng Pilipinas* (PDPP)] is a coalition of sociopolitical organizations in the Philippines that serve as the diplomatic-legal wing of the Maoist-leaning Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). According to its website, the NDF “seeks to develop and coordinate all progressive classes, sectors and forces in the Filipino people’s struggle to end the political rule of US imperialism and its local allies in the Philippines, and attain genuine national liberation and democracy” (<http://www.ndfp.net/>, accessed on August 11, 2013). The armed wing of the CPP is the New People’s Army (NPA) [in Filipino: *Bagong Hukbong Bayan*], which has been waging an armed rebellion against the Philippine government since the late 1960s.

including BAYAN MUNA (People First)²⁷, GABRIELA Women’s Party²⁸, KABATAAN (Youth),²⁹ ANAKPAWIS (Laborers)³⁰, and the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT)³¹.

5b. An Opening is Spotted: Calls for an LGBT Party and the Formation of Ladlad

In the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, the Philippine party-list system was being implemented at around the same time that LGBT identity and activism were momentarily rising in the Philippines. It was perhaps inevitable that the Philippine party-list system, which has been legally required to specifically represent “marginalized” and “underrepresented” sectors in society, would have to contend with the situation of LGBT Filipinos, and, indeed, that calls for the formation of a specifically LGBT political party would occur. Since the first party-list elections took place in 1998 and continuing to this day, legislators from the Akbayan Citizens’ Action Party – one of the first and most enduring parties elected through the party-list system – have advocated for LGBT legal equality in Philippine society, specifically through the promotion

²⁷ “We envision a country free from the shackles of colonialism and underdevelopment. We believe that if the national interest warrants it, government should be able to resist the dictates of foreign governments, multilateral trade and funding agencies as well as multinational banks and corporations. We are opposed to the twin strategies of military aggression and free market globalization being pursued by the highly industrialized global powers.” (<http://www.bayanmuna.net/about-bayan-muna/>, accessed on August 11, 2013).

²⁸ GABRIELA Women’s Party is named after Gabriela Silang, leader of a major rebellion in the 18th century against Spanish colonialism in the Ilocos region of northern Luzon. GABRIELA is a coalition of several leftist women’s organizations, with GABRIELA Women’s Party as the electoral wing of the coalition. The party-list advocates for women’s issues, including women’s right to reproductive health services and to be free from sexist and patriarchal discrimination and violence (<http://www.gabrielawomensparty.net/about-us/principles>, accessed on August 11, 2013).

²⁹ “Kabataan party-list remains at the forefront of youth and students’ campaigns against unabated tuition and miscellaneous fee increases, for higher state subsidy for education, adequate jobs for new graduates, the defense and recognition of human rights and civil liberties which include consumer rights and the right to health, and the protection and conservation of national patrimony” (<http://kabataanpartylist.com/about/>, accessed on August 11, 2013).

³⁰ In Tagalog/Filipino, *anak-pawis* means “laborer” but literally translates to “child of sweat”. ANAKPAWIS party-list represents workers, peasants, fisherfolk, and the urban poor, and it has links with the militant trade unionist movement *Kilusang Mayo Uno* (KMP or May First Movement) (<http://www.anakpawis.net/>, accessed on August 11, 2013).

³¹ “Faced with worsening pay and working conditions, the decline in the status of their profession, and the general deterioration of the educational system, teachers themselves responded by organizing themselves to collectively struggle for fundamental reforms. Such organizing efforts led to the founding of the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) in 1982. Currently, ACT is the largest organization of progressive teachers and employees in the education sector... The establishment of ACT Teacher’s Party-list is the culmination of the collective endeavors of teachers who realized the need to achieve more democratic reforms for the education sector through direct participation in the legislative process.” (<http://www.act-teachers.com/about-act-teachers/>, accessed on August 11, 2013).

of a bill criminalizing discrimination against LGBT people (Albata 2010). The Anti-Discrimination Bill, initially drafted in 2000 in consultation with the Lesbian and Gay Legislative Advocacy Network (LAGABLAB), was filed by Akbayan Representative Etta Rosales and Senator Miriam Santiago [Since then, however, several versions of the Anti-Discrimination Bill have been filed in the Congress and Senate, but none have been passed into law due to staunch opposition from conservative and fundamentalist forces in society, including the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) and their conservative allies among the major political parties in the Philippine legislature. The most recent version of the Anti-Discrimination Bill was filed in July 2013 by Akbayan Rep. Kaka Bag-ao (Cruz 2013)]. Akbayan was also the first Philippine political party to include LGBT equal rights in its party platform (Albata 2010).

Nonetheless, upon noting the election of party-list parties representing peasants, workers, women, cultural minorities, migrant workers, and other marginalized sectors in Filipino society into the Philippine legislature through the party-list system, and though appreciative of the key efforts of allies in the Akbayan party, some LGBT activists began calling for direct representation in the Philippine Congress from their own ranks. A clear opening was discerned for the possibility of getting a specifically LGBT political party elected into Congress through the party-list system. Danton Remoto, an English and Creative Writing professor and co-editor of the previously mentioned *Ladlad* literary anthologies, was one of the earliest figures making murmurs for an LGBT party (Personal Interview with Remoto at Ateneo de Manila University, August 2010). Remoto and four of his colleagues formed a group in September 2003 meant to represent the entire spectrum of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Filipinos with the intent of getting it accredited as a party-list party; they named it *Ang Ladlad* (eventually

modified to simply *Ladlad*), which is a Tagalog/Filipino term that has been translated as “Coming Out”, but more literally means “to unfurl” (such as to “unfurl” a cape). *Ladlad* was thus indexically associated not only with the *Ladlad* literary anthologies which have played a key role in popularizing gay identity and building gay solidarities in the Philippines but also with the global (Western-originated) “Coming Out” discourse, and more generally, with LGBT social and political movements worldwide.³²

By 2007, the group was ready to file for accreditation as a party-list party through the Philippine government’s Commission on Elections (Comelec), the governmental organization responsible for overseeing and regulating Philippine elections. The Comelec, however, denied *Ladlad*’s ability to become a party-list group in 2007 for supposedly (and dubiously) lacking a national constituency, and then again in 2009 for espousing “immorality” based on the conservative religious beliefs of some in the Catholic majority and large Muslim and Protestant minorities of the Philippines.

³² There were early hurdles, however, in the creation and direction of the *Ladlad* political party. Competing ideological visions for the structure and overall character of the political party led to disagreements between, and the ultimate splitting up of, the original founding members. While Remoto’s four colleagues advocated for a more rigidly bureaucratic, Marxist-oriented, top-down structure for their anticipated political party, Remoto, who has nonetheless been in support of the causes of social and economic justice in the Philippines, advocated for a more liberal and open structure, platform, and overall style and approach for *Ladlad* (Batocabe 2011:47). Eventually, his four fellow founding colleagues resigned from the group, and Remoto continued building *Ladlad* with new members.

PART SIX:

The Ladlad Odyssey: Becoming a Political Party

In this section, I examine Ladlad’s dramatic public battle and eventual triumph against legalized homophobia at the highest levels of the division of the Philippine government meant to ensure the fair and democratic functioning of the country’s electoral system. I will specifically analyze the various secular, fundamentalist, and “contextualist” approaches to sexuality, religion, and politics that played out in the drama over Ladlad’s journey toward party-list accreditation. With Ladlad triumphant in its struggle to attain state recognition, the political party began to focus its energies on campaigning to obtain congressional seats for its openly LGBT legislators.

6a. The Struggle for Party-List Accreditation: Ladlad’s Crusade for Justice

In the Comelec’s November 11, 2009 ruling that denied Ladlad party-list status, the Comelec stated that Ladlad’s petition was “dismissible on moral grounds”, and that by combating discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in Filipino society, Ladlad “tolerates immorality which offends religious beliefs”; verses from the Bible and the Qur’an were cited to justify their ruling (“Comelec’s Resolution” 2009). The Comelec’s resolution furthermore stated, “Lehman Strauss, a famous bible teacher and writer in the U.S.A said in one article that ‘older practicing homosexuals are a threat to the youth’. As an agency of the government, ours too is the State’s avowed duty under Section 13, Article II of the Constitution to protect our youth from moral and spiritual degradation.” Finally, the Comelec referred to Article 201 of the Philippine government’s Revised Penal Code, “which forbids the glorification of criminals in movies, violence in shows, obscene publications, and lustful or

pornographic exhibitions” (de Quiros 2010). Though there had been suspicion from certain LGBT and other Filipino activist circles that the Comelec’s decision was influenced by political motives – specifically, that the then presidential administration of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo instructed her allies in the Comelec to disqualify Ladlad from party-list accreditation due to the group’s strong vocal criticisms of the alleged severe corruption, abuse of power, electoral cheating, violent repression of dissidents, and increasing authoritarianism of the Arroyo government (Mangubat 2010) – the Comelec nonetheless used religio-moral arguments to disqualify Ladlad, and it has been those arguments that both Ladlad and Filipino society were compelled to contend with and debate.³³

In January 2010, however, the Philippine Supreme Court (*Kataastaasang Hukuman*) issued a “temporary restraining order” against the Comlec’s decision, regarding it as unconstitutional and discriminatory, and on April 8, 2010, the Supreme Court officially overturned the Comelec’s decision, thereby officially recognizing Ladlad as a party-list group that could compete for seats in the House of Representatives in the May 2010 elections (Punay 2010). In those elections, Ladlad had barely a month to campaign and did not succeed in gaining congressional seats, but they nonetheless garnered a substantial 130,000 votes [they would have needed 150,000 votes to win at least one seat] (Leach 2012).

6b. Clash of Competing Moralities: Liberal-Secular, Literalist-Fundamentalist,

Contextualist

³³ It should be mentioned that the Comelec’s ruling was not unanimous. The Commission on Elections is divided into two “divisions”: the First Division (3 members) and the Second Division (3 members). The First Division voted in favor of Ladlad’s party-list accreditation, while the Second Division voted to disqualify Ladlad. The Comelec’s Chairperson Jose Melo broke the tie by siding with the Comelec’s Second Division.

Of particular significance in the political drama between Ladlad, the ComElec, the Supreme Court, and Philippine society more generally is the way that religious and secularist arguments were used on both sides of the debate. The ComElec referred to verses from the Bible and the Qur'an, arguing that same-sex relationships are sinful, and that Ladlad therefore posed a threat to the conservative morality of some in the Christian majority and large Muslim minority of the Philippines. The conservative and powerful Catholic Bishop's Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), for their part, supported the ComElec's disqualification of Ladlad. On the other hand, Conrado de Quiros (2010), a columnist in the nationally circulating *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, considered the ComElec's decision to be an "astonishing judgment, lumping gayness with pornography and criminality, which reflected more on the judge than on the judged". Ladlad, other LGBT activist organizations, and human-rights organizations (including the Philippine government's Commission on Human Rights, the International Commission of Jurists, and Forum Asia) articulated vociferous condemnations of the ComElec's decision. In his internet blog, Danton Remoto (2009), the co-founder of Ladlad, condemned the "Neanderthals" in the ComElec who "disenfranchised a class of citizens on the basis of a set of prejudices". He considered the ComElec's disqualification of Ladlad as "the very proof that gays and lesbians are so marginalized they need to be represented in Congress." He furthermore stated that LGBT Filipinos are "discriminated against on the basis of their sexual preferences. They are powerless against the dominant culture that classifies them as aberrations of nature. They are victims of beliefs that treat them as moral misfits."

In their petition filed in December 2009 to the Supreme Court calling for the overturning of the ComElec's decision, Remoto and volunteer-lawyers for Ladlad decried that the Philippines had found itself "back in the Middle Ages!" (Remoto 2010). The petition cited the

sections in the Philippine Constitution that guarantee freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and the separation of church and state, thus rendering the ComElec's decision to be unconstitutional and in violation of international human rights law. They also quoted a statement that had been recently issued by the Vatican in front of the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 2009, which stated that the Vatican "opposes all forms of violence and unjust discrimination against homosexual persons, including penal legislation which undermines the inherent dignity of the human person... The murder and abuse of homosexual persons are to be confronted on all levels, especially when such violence is perpetrated by the State." Finally, the petition also mentioned that it had already been over 30 years since homosexuality had been removed from lists of medical disorders by international psychological and psychiatric associations and publications.

Thus, according to Ladlad, the ComElec had erred in its citation of the biblical scholar Lehman Strauss whose views were already "obsolete. Strauss was a scholar whose heyday was in the 1950s. He lived at the start of the past century and his pronouncements could not have been backed up by scientific evidence" (Remoto 2010). Ultimately, it was argued that the conservative personal religious views of people in the Comelec should not obstruct their constitutional duty to protect the rights of minorities. By disqualifying Ladlad, the Comelec was violating the civil and human rights of LGBT Filipinos, failing to give equal protection under the law to a minority group, and contravening international legal agreements signed by the Philippine government that prohibit discrimination against people based on sexual orientation. These principles were re-affirmed by the Supreme Court in their 2010 ruling that struck down the Comelec's resolution. The human rights, defined in secular terms, of LGBT Filipinos were thus protected by the Philippines' highest court. The Philippine Supreme Court's decision was

highly significant, and can perhaps be seen as the triumph of secular morality over the religious morality of fundamentalist Christianity.

However, comments made by Remoto in a January 2010 *Manila Times* article entitled “Danton Remoto: Rainbow Warrior” complicate the picture somewhat: “With all due respect, I’m a practicing Catholic... When I went to the US, I took up Islamic Mysticism which is the literature of the Sufi and I studied Islam. They took the passages from those books out of context” (Cantera 2010). Though Remoto and his organization extensively – and primarily – used secular-based arguments, including the separation of church and state and the need to uphold the rule of law, to argue against the ComElec’s ruling, he also identifies as a Catholic and believes that the arguments made by the ComElec were based on incorrect, non-contextualist interpretations of the Bible and the Qur’an. Remoto also refutes the conventional assumption about the place of same-sex sexuality within the Islamic religion by asserting that homosexuality is acceptable within Islam, based on his study of Islam and Islamic mysticism (or Sufism).³⁴

These arguments fall in line with those of an ally of Ladlad – the Metropolitan Community Church of the Philippines, founded in 1991 in Manila and the first church in Asia to affirm LGBT equality (“About Us”, MCCMB.webs.com/aboutus.htm); the Baguio City branch of the church also gained national prominence when it became the first Philippine church to conduct same-sex weddings on January 25, 2011 (Caluza 2011). The church is a member congregation of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC), an international Protestant church founded in Los Angeles, California in 1968, now with 300

³⁴ This coincides with pro-LGBT theological perspectives among progressive Muslim theologians, scholars, and reformers. In Indonesia, for example, the Muslim feminist and internationally respected expert on *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) Dr. Siti Musdah Mulia, voiced her support for LGBT equality within an Islamic framework at a conference in Jakarta in March 2008: “People are equal in the eyes of God regardless of their gender, ethnicity, wealth, social status or sexual orientation. People are valued based on their piety. There is no difference between lesbians and nonlesbians... The essence of the religion [Islam] is to humanize humans, respect and dignify them.” After the conference, the *Jakarta Post* published an article with the headline “Islam ‘recognizes homosexuality’”, disseminated worldwide through newspapers and the internet (Khalik 2008).

branches in 22 countries and over 43,000 members worldwide, with a special focus on nourishing the Christian faith among LGBT people and their families (“History of MCC” 2004). According to arguments disseminated by the Metropolitan Community Church’s website such as Reverend Elder Don Eastman’s (1990) article “Homosexuality: NOT a Sin, NOT a Sickness”, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah must be understood within the prevailing patriarchal cultural view on sexuality in the Mediterranean world at the time, which viewed all sexual acts in terms of domination and submission. Sodom and Gomorrah, in this view, is understood as the condemnation of an attempted gang rape of two male angels, as opposed to a general condemnation of homosexual sex (Eastman 1990). According to this Contextualist perspective, the Bible must be read within its cultural and historical context, rather than through selecting specific passages and interpreting them in a literalist, non-contextualized manner.

6c. Ladlad on the Campaign Trail: An Analysis of Rhetoric, Ideology, and Strategy

In any case, Ladlad’s petition to the Supreme Court to overturn the ComElec’s decision was based primarily on secularist legalism and secular morality, and that reasoning ultimately prevailed in the Supreme Court’s ruling. Nonetheless, to win over Filipino society more generally, Ladlad has relied on more than secularist interpretations of Philippine jurisprudence. Once the Supreme Court cleared the way for Ladlad to be allowed to compete for seats in Congress through the party-list system, Ladlad’s leaders and rank-and-file members focused their attention on building and developing a national campaign to gain broad societal support for their goal to win a seat in Congress. They had barely enough time (about a month) to campaign for the May 2010 elections since the Supreme Court had only officially overturned the ComElec’s discriminatory disqualification of Ladlad on April 8 of that year, but subsequently, in

the build-up (during the next three years) to the May 2013 elections, Ladlad's national membership grew to about 60,000, and they vigorously campaigned around the country.

On February 18, 2012, Ladlad held a national convention to elect the five people that would be officially placed on Ladlad's "party list", or its list of nominees that, if the party obtained enough votes, would get a seat in Congress ("Official Election Results" 2012). The five congressional nominees on Ladlad's party list for the May 2013 elections included: (1) first nominee Bemz Benedito, (2) second nominee Danton Remoto, (3) third nominee Germaine Leonin (a lesbian woman, a lawyer, and the president and founder of Rainbow Rights Project), (4) fourth nominee Raymond Alikpala (a gay man, a lawyer, and the author of *Of God and Men: A Life in the Closet* [published in 2011, though originally published in 2009 with the title, *God Loves Bakla: My Life in the Closet*]), and (5) fifth nominee Wilfredo "Pidot" Villocino (a gay man and an employee at the Integrated Gender and Development Division of the city government of Davao City in the island of Mindanao). The party's five nominees gave interviews with the national media on television, newspapers, and radio; formed public alliances with prominent LGBT Filipino figures, including the nationally recognized openly gay talk-show host Boy Abunda (the Philippines' "King of Talk"); toured around the country, visiting its various LGBT communities; regularly posted updates on their official blog, Facebook page, and Twitter account; and generally raised awareness and built support for their platform for an Anti-Discrimination Bill, an Anti-Vagrancy Law, micro-financing for impoverished and differently-abled LGBT Filipinos, and centers for elderly LGBTs and homeless LGBT youth (Pascual 2012).

In their campaign to win congressional seats in the May 2013 elections, Ladlad's leaders engaged in several discursive strategies based on a combination of legal-secularist, religious,

nationalist, gendered, and sexological ideologies. Perhaps first and foremost, Ladlad (and LGBT Filipinos more generally) have appropriated the “gay” and “lesbian” discourse as well as the LGBT acronym with the purpose of building solidarity and political power based on common sexual and gender identities that, though Western-originated, have circulated globally. LGBT Filipinos thus derive cultural and political power from a modern, globally circulating gender/sexological discourse that has been fundamentally rooted within a secular-moral framework based on universal human rights, equal citizenship, and the compartmentalizing of human sexuality and gender into relatively neat scientific classifications.

Ladlad, however, does not only use the English-derived LGBT discourse in its public statements and general campaigning. Ladlad’s members also, when speaking in Filipino, the national language of the Philippines originally based on Tagalog, use the phrase “*lesbiyana, bakla, bisekswal, at transgender*” (as opposed to “lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender”). They also, at times, use the terms “*transpinay*” or “*transpinoy*” (an amalgamation between “trans” and the Filipino slang terms “Pinay” for Filipina women and “Pinoy” for Filipino men) to refer to transgender Filipino women or transgender Filipino men, respectively. Interestingly, the term “*bakla*”, which has been the most popular term in the Philippines (whether in Filipino or in English) to refer to any non-heteronormative gender/sexual identity, has increasingly been equated with “gay man”, though *bakla* had originally conflated (and most often continues to conflate) homosexuality, effeminate behavior, drag, and transgenderism (Manalansan 2003:25) to the point that effeminate males, cross-dressing males, and transgender women all could be labeled “*bakla*” (or “gay”).

Ladlad and other Filipino LGBT organizations have made it a point to distinguish between *bakla* men and transgender women, effectively equating “*bakla*” with “gay” and

ensuring that transgender Filipino men and women gain recognition for their own transgender identities, rather than being subsumed under the “*bakla*”, “gay”, “lesbian”, or “*lesbiyana*” identities. Ladlad and the Filipino LGBT movement are thus actively linguistically manipulating the Philippine gender/sex ideology by not only connecting the Philippines with, and thus deriving power from, global LGBT movements through the use of English-derived sexological and gender terminologies; they are also perpetuating indigenous Filipino classifications of gender diversity while, in certain instances, reformulating these indigenous terminologies to resemble (though not necessarily equate with) the Western-derived “LGBT” classification scheme. Ladlad and the Filipino LGBT movement are simultaneously global and national.

With regards to the national question, Ladlad has engaged with Filipino nationalism in a variety of ways. On the one hand, by gaining recognition as a political party in the Philippine electoral system and by furthermore seeking an official place in the Philippine Congress, Ladlad has clearly aligned itself with the state-led nationalist ideology of the Philippine government. Though the party has established branches in local regions throughout the country and seeks to appeal to sensitivities in those local areas, it has consistently represented itself as the first and only “Filipino” LGBT political party looking out for the welfare of LGBT “Filipinos” (as opposed to LGBT Tagalogs, LGBT Ilocanos, LGBT Bikolanos, LGBT Ifugaos, LGBT Tausugs, and so forth) (Pascual 2012), thus reaffirming the nationalist Filipino identity for the highly diverse LGBT community in the Philippines, which includes numerous ethnolinguistic, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds, in addition to the incredible diversity of gender identities and expressions and sexual orientations that are already incorporated into the “LGBT” grouping. Though an enormous difference exists between the life experiences of LGBTs of all different socioeconomic and religious backgrounds in the Cordillera, Mindanao, Bikol, Cebu, and

Metropolitan Manila, all of these diverse ethnic, linguistic, gendered, sexual, cultural, class, and religious experiences are collectively regarded by Ladlad and the national Filipino LGBT movement as examples of being an “LGBT Filipino”.

Moreover, Ladlad’s leadership and most publicly prominent figures speak in both Filipino and English. Though over 100 different indigenous languages have been spoken in the Philippines, and despite protests from different regional linguistic groupings, Tagalog was declared the national language in the 1930s by Manuel Quezon, a Tagalog mestizo, who served as president during the US Commonwealth period. “Tagalog” was officially changed to “Pilipino” in the 1970s and finally to “Filipino” in 1987. The US colonial legacy in the national education system, moreover, along with the continued economic and geopolitical dominance of the United States both in Philippine affairs and in numerous other regions globally, has ensured the enduring prominence and prestige of the English language in Philippine education, government, the business sector, and in Filipino society at large. Ladlad’s members’ linguistic practices, which include speaking and releasing statements in Filipino, in English, or in “Taglish” code-switching varieties, both reflect and re-inscribe this colonial and nationalist linguistic-educational legacy.

On the other hand, Ladlad and other Filipino LGBT advocates have also challenged the dominant strain of Filipino nationalism by advancing critical, alternative discourses and visions for the nationalist project. The campaign platform of Ladlad includes championing the passage of an Anti-Discrimination Bill that would criminalize discrimination against Filipinos for their sexual orientation and gender identity in the workplace, schools, and other establishments; passing an Anti-Vagrancy Law that would prevent policemen from extorting gay men; establishing micro-finance projects for impoverished and differently-abled LGBT Filipinos; and

establishing centers for both elderly LGBTs and LGBT homeless youth that also provide psychological and medical counseling, reproductive health information, and legal advice (Pascual 2012).³⁵ All of these measures are positioning LGBT Filipinos as deserving of respect for their human rights and need for legal protection from rampant forms of legal and social discrimination in Filipino society. Thus far, the “Filipino nation” has “tolerated” the existence of gender and sexual minorities in the country, but in a way that subordinates them under a heterosexist, patriarchal, and effeminophobic/machoistic regime and expects them to accept their subordinated, ridiculed, pathologized, and inferiorized status in stereotypical and socially stigmatized roles, such as (in the case of many *bakla* men and transgender women) beauty parlor workers, comedians, and other sources of entertainment/ridicule for the rest of society. Ladlad rejects this inferiorized status in the Filipino nation, and instead demands that the Filipino nation come to terms with the reality of the inherent diversity of gender identities and sexual orientations in Filipino society (and in all human societies). As Bembol “Bemz” Benedito, a transgender woman, a sociologist, and Ladlad’s charismatic first nominee for Congress for the May 2013 elections, responded to a young gay man in a rural area who resignedly stated that LGBT Filipinos should accept their subordinated status: “No! This is not our place to be discriminated against. We are productive citizens. We can help this country. We can help our families. So we should be treated the same as a straight Filipino. That’s why we need a voice in Congress” (Leach 2012). In order to combat and transform the ways that LGBT Filipinos are

³⁵ At this time, marriage equality has not been on the agenda, though statements by first-nominee Bemz Benedito and other Ladlad members have indicated that they may pursue this in the future (Leach 2012). The globally reverberating legalizations of same-sex marriage in countries like the Netherlands, South Africa, Spain, and Argentina, in several US states, and in other municipalities and regions like Mexico City; the statement by US President Barack Obama in favor of marriage equality and the subsequent controversy over Manny Pacquiao’s anti-marriage equality response; and the opposition to the Anti-Discrimination Bill by conservative/fundamentalist Catholic groups such as the powerful Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) out of fear that it would be a stepping stone toward same-sex marriage – all of these instances (and others) have compelled Ladlad to affirmatively address the marriage equality issue by voicing support for the right of same-sex couples to marry though not yet going so far as to officially place the issue on their party’s platform.

ascribed with a socially subordinated position, LGBT Filipinos, according to Benedito and Ladlad, must fight back by both demanding equal rights and treatment while also reminding society of their own contributions as “productive citizens” of the nation.

J. Neil C. Garcia (2004b:xxv-xxvi), co-editor of the *Ladlad* literary anthologies, has also reflected on the place of LGBT Filipinos in the Filipino nation in his Introduction to the 3rd volume of the anthology series:

...the way the Filipino “nation” and its necessarily conflicted present and past have been conceptualized and promulgated by official nationalist discourses has, thus far, not offered Filipino gays and lesbians a cognitive and affectional home in which to belong... I believe that *Ladlad*, and the many other works coming out of an increasingly vibrant and efflorescent Filipino gay culture, do not mean to contest the nationalist project per se. Rather, they only wish to “educate” and enrich it, by supplementing its vision with other discrepant realities, which shall henceforth hopefully be allowed to circulate in the symbolically privileged “national” space. Because *Ladlad* is a collective effort by and for Filipinos, already it can be said to affirm and to celebrate its own versions of the Filipino nation and the Filipino “soul.”

This sentiment seems to express a desire to be aligned with a Filipino-styled Herderian “romantic” nationalism (Bauman & Briggs 2003:195), but in a way that incorporates a group that has been excluded from an equal, respected position in the nation. Thus, Ladlad and others in the Filipino LGBT movement, while acknowledging and re-inscribing Filipino nationalist ideology and Philippine state power, are also challenging the heteronormative and homophobic assumptions within the dominant nationalist ideology and thus modifying or redefining the Filipino nation to accommodate and value its LGBT subjects as equal to heterosexuals, as productive citizens in their own right, and as important members of their families and local communities.

This redefining of the Filipino nation also heavily involves a redefining of Philippine religious traditions in the heavily Catholic country. As mentioned, in Ladlad’s battle against the ComElec for accreditation as a party-list group, the group primarily relied on secularist arguments in its petition to the Supreme Court, but in other statements and contexts, Ladlad’s

members have emphasized their own religious identities, practices, and beliefs. Rather than renouncing Catholicism and religion altogether, Danton Remoto identifies as a Catholic and furthermore charges the ComElec with misinterpreting the holy texts of Christianity and Islam. Bemz Benedito has also argued that while the personal religious beliefs of the ComElec members should not have played any role in Laddad's accreditation as a party-list party, she nonetheless identifies as a "devout Catholic" with an LGBT-affirming vision for what a Catholic community should be (Leach 2012). In an interview with CNN's Elizabeth Yuan (2010), Benedito stated, "My faith is always direct to God, and I believe He's also created us... It's not up to these priests [to say] what is moral and what is not."

This vision was reiterated by Benedito after then-Pope Benedict XVI reaffirmed the Vatican's opposition to same-sex marriage in a January 2012 pronouncement, saying that marriage equality would undermine the family and threaten the future of humanity; Benedito, in a statement on behalf of Laddad, declared, "LOVE is universal regardless of your sexual orientation and gender identity" ("Same Sex Marriage is About Love and God Is Love" 2012). She furthermore stated, "The Pope achieves nothing with his words of divisiveness. What we need are religious leaders who exemplify having an open mind and open heart." The phrase she uses at the end of her statement, "open mind and open heart", is also the English translation of Laddad's motto, *Bukas Isip, Bukas Puso* ("Open Mind, Open Heart"). Moreover, in response to Filipino boxing star Manny Pacquiao's announced opposition to same-sex marriage after US President Barack Obama came out in favor of marriage equality in May 2012, Benedito stated, "*Ang Biblia ay isang aklat tungkol sa pagsasaboy ng pagmamahal at pag-ibig sa sanlibutan at hindi libro na naglalaman ng pangungutya at pagkamuhi sa kapwa*" (The Bible is a book about

the spread of love and caring in the world, not about derision and hatred toward our fellow human beings.) (“Ladlad Party List Sinagot si Pacquiao” 2012).

In these ways, Benedito, Remoto, and other prominent figures in Ladlad signaled both their respect for the religious sensibilities of the Filipino majority and their own personal connections to Catholicism. They furthermore present their Catholicism as more enlightened and forward-oriented than that of the “Neanderthals” in the Philippine ComElec, the misinformed Manny Pacquiao, and the “divisive” Pope who fails to be among the “religious leaders who exemplify having an open mind and open heart.” Moreover, by reinterpreting the Bible, the authority of puritanical Christian interpretations are being challenged by Christians that understand their religion as a faith that provides spiritual solace, justice, and dignity for all human beings, including LGBT people. Remoto has, furthermore, appealed to more traditional, indigenous sources of authority in advocating for LGBT rights. Remoto (2009) states, “In times past and in different climes, homosexuals were treated as heretics and were burned at the stake. But also in times past and on these very islands, some ‘*babaylans*,’ the priests of our pre-Spanish religions, came from the ranks of homosexuals. Who is to say which is right or wrong between the two practices?” Remoto is appealing to a precolonial practice in which the religious leaders or “priestesses” (*babaylan*) of many communities across the archipelago were women (majority female, but also including transgender women, many of who had husbands who were [masculine, male] men) (Brewer 2004:22, 129; Garcia [1996] 2008:17, 168-74). Ladlad is thus acknowledging and accepting, though also reinterpreting, the prevalent presence of Catholicism in the country, while simultaneously reminding Filipinos of earlier times in the precolonial era when there was a greater acceptance for, and in some cases even spiritual honoring of, transgenderism and same-sex sexualities.

Through all of these rhetorical and political strategies, the Ladlad political party is aware of how the Filipino nation seeks legitimacy from multiple sources of authority – including modern secular forms, the esteem of the international community, world religions, and indigenous (precolonial) cultural heritage and memories – and is strategically appropriating and/or reformulating each of these ideological forms in order to advance its project of equal rights and equal citizenship for all LGBT Filipinos. Ladlad has appealed to powerful global ideologies of human rights, civil rights, secular morality, and universalist ideals of freedom, equality, dignity, and liberation. The party has also, nonetheless, maintained a pro-religious stance that – while emphasizing the need to separate church and state in order to fend off the attempts by fundamentalists and homophobes to delegitimize their efforts to carve an LGBT space in the Philippine legislature – acknowledges the authority of Catholicism (and other religions, including Islam, Protestantism, enduring “Animist” traditions, Buddhism, and others) in the lives of most Filipinos, and concurrently advances a refined vision for Filipino religious communities that are LGBT-affirming through queer theological (re)interpretations. All the while, Ladlad has positioned itself as thoroughly and fundamentally Filipino, reminding society that LGBT Filipinos are important members of Filipino families, productive citizens in Filipino society, and perhaps even modern descendants of the precolonial Filipino spiritual heritage, most iconically exemplified by the figure of the *babaylan*.

In this sense, by electing Ladlad into Congress, the Filipino people would be demonstrating the forward-oriented and enlightened character of the Filipino nation, aligning the Philippines with a global human rights regime that has increasingly recognized the fundamental need for equal rights and legal protections for LGBT people vulnerable to discrimination and persecution, particularly in light of the global spread of marriage equality, US Secretary of State

Hillary Clinton’s historic December 2011 speech in Geneva in favor of LGBT human rights, Pakistan’s 2012 recognition for its transgender citizens, India’s striking down in 2009 of its anti-sodomy law inherited from the British colonial era, and other pro-LGBT measures taken in the international sphere. The Filipino nation would not, however, be rejecting God, religion, or spirituality by electing Lladad into Congress, as some of Lladad’s most prominent members are devout Catholics, though their interpretation of their religion is different from the interpretations of literalist-fundamentalist religious forces in Filipino society. Lladad’s alternative vision is of national religious communities that are not discriminatory and harmful to any minority group, but rather possess an “open mind” and an “open heart” and accept and nourish all people regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

6d. A Project of Queer Liberalism?

At this point, I take pause to reflect on the implications of the entire project of Lladad to seek recognition and support from, and to itself penetrate, the Philippine state in order to improve the wellbeing of LGBT Filipinos. In his analysis of contemporary LGBT politics in the United States, David L. Eng (2010:xi) argues that the term “queer”

has become increasingly unmoored from its theoretical potentials and possibilities. Instead, it has come to demarcate more narrowly pragmatic gay and lesbian identity and identity politics, the economic interests of neoliberalism and whiteness, and liberal political norms of inclusion – including access to marriage, custody, inheritance, and service in the military.

Eng refers to “this remarkable consolidation” as “queer liberalism” (2010:xi). With anti-sodomy laws struck down by the United States Supreme Court in 2003, with both Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell (DADT) and the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) struck down as unconstitutional, and as bans on same-sex marriage continue to fall like dominoes across the United States, it is perhaps only a

matter of time until gays and lesbians attain full (formal) legal equality in the country, including with regards to the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) and other initiatives in the legal sphere. With these advances in the struggle for gay and lesbian legal equality, critical queer perspectives have rightfully called attention to the enduring structural oppressions experienced by queer people of color, trans people, and impoverished LGBTs that have often been sidelined by more mainstream gay and lesbian rights organizations in the United States. Critical queer critiques have, moreover, questioned the entire project of seeking legitimacy and recognition from mainstream, neoliberal, and state institutions and the abandonment of more radical perspectives regarding kinship and family.

In 2004, with marriage equality legalized in Massachusetts, and with the city of San Francisco defying a California state ban on same-sex marriage by issuing thousands of marriage licenses to gay and lesbian couples, in a column for *The Nation*, Lisa Duggan (2004) asked:

How about abolishing state endorsement of the sanctified religious wedding or ending the use of the term “marriage” altogether (as lesbian and gay progressives and queer leftists have advocated for decades)? In a bid for equality, some gay groups are producing rhetoric that insults and marginalizes unmarried people, while promoting marriage in much the same terms as the welfare reformers use to stigmatize single-parent households, divorce and “out of wedlock” births. If pursued in this way, the drive for gay-marriage equality can undermine rather than support the broader movement for social justice and democratic diversity.

When considering the critical queer perspectives of US-based theorists like Eng and Duggan (and several others), it could be argued that Ladlad’s struggle for formal recognition by and inclusion in the Philippine state via the party-list system as well as the rhetoric that it has used in its campaigns is a project of queer liberalism that could have potentially harmful consequences for those who do not (and cannot) conform to the practices of “homonormativity” which proffer a depoliticized, privatized, and demobilized LGBT constituency (Duggan 2003:179). Eng’s (2010:3) disconcertion with the “merging of an increasingly visible and mass-

mediated queer consumer lifestyle with recent juridical protections for gay and lesbian rights to privacy and intimacy” further highlights the dangers of aligning queer and LGBT politics with liberal institutions and practices in the current era of neoliberal globalization. If (and when) LGBT organizations engage with, seek political recognition from, or successfully penetrate and become a part of the liberal state, is it inevitable that radical reformulations of kinship and the family will be silenced or undermined by those organizations? Is it acceptable for some LGBTs to be working on progressive political causes in the legislative and judicial spheres while simultaneously engaging in the on-the-ground cultural work necessary to promote justice and equality in the general society? Moreover, to what extent are US-based queer critiques, while fully relevant to the US and other Global North contexts, truly applicable to the situation of postcolonial and Global South contexts like the Philippines?

When considering both the policy prescriptions and the party-list nominees of Ladlad, it could be argued that there is already a certain level of gender, economic, and religious diversity in the party’s makeup and platform that would make it more encompassing than several mainstream gay organizations in the United States. Moreover, when Ladlad’s leaders urge Filipino society to remember that LGBT Filipinos are important members of Filipino families and communities, it could be argued that, while “normative” ideas of kinship and family are being promulgated that could bolster ultimately harmful and exclusionary practices of kinship, at the same time, “queer” figures have been important and integral members of Filipino families and community groups for centuries. Many “traditional” Filipino extended families, which have undergone centuries of influences from the Spanish and US colonial periods which implanted heterosexism, effeminophobia, and homophobia into many local communities in the archipelago, have nonetheless retained several queer-affirming elements, including the inclusion of many

openly transgender members of the family (though taking into account all of the caveats mentioned earlier for transgender Filipinos). Finally, in certain ways, the entire party-list system of the Philippines is a rather “queer” institution. Rather than precisely replicating the vast majority of parliamentary and party-list systems worldwide that allow any political party to compete for seats in parliament, the Philippine party-list system, at this point, only allows “marginalized” and “underrepresented” sectors to compete for seats in its own uniquely Filipinized version of Congress. Given this set of political circumstances, it was perhaps inevitable that LGBT Filipinos would seize the opportunity to attempt to carve a space for themselves in the Philippine legislature.

PART SEVEN:

Conclusion

In the Philippine congressional elections held on May 13, 2013, over 130 “party-list” political parties competed for seats in the Philippine House of Representatives (*Kapulungan ng mga Kinatawan*) through the party-list system. Unfortunately, Ladlad was not among the 53 parties that obtained at least one seat in Congress; the party garnered 100,666 votes, which came to 0.35% of the total votes cast (over 28 million) in the party-list election, below the 2% threshold that would guarantee at least one seat, and also not enough to be included among the few parties that, although they did not obtain at least 2% of the total votes cast, received one seat each because they obtained the highest amount of votes among those that did not win at least 2% of the votes (Patria 2013; “Philippine House of Representatives elections, 2013” 2013). Ladlad would have needed a bit more than 230,000 votes in order to have obtained at least one congressional seat.

Regardless of the disappointing result, the aspiration for an LGBT political party in the Philippine Congress continues to endure among many LGBT Filipinos and their heterosexual allies. In August 2013, three months after the election, former Senator Ernesto F. Herrera, who is currently president of the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP), wrote a column in *The Manila Times* entitled, “The case for Ang Ladlad” (Herrera 2013). In the column, Herrera addresses the enduring pervasiveness of discrimination and stigmatization against LGBT people in Filipino society and how anti-LGBT hate crimes have been alarmingly on the rise, and he laments how Ladlad did not make it into Congress in the May 2013 elections: “There is clearly a need for a Party-list group to be a force of change in Congress for the LGBT community, one

that would be effective in curbing discrimination and gaining acceptance for it.” Herrera nonetheless continues to remain hopeful for the election of an LGBT party into the Philippine Congress: “...all is not lost for Ang Ladlad. They can spend the next three years expanding public support, chipping away at the anti-gay bias of the straight establishment, and building its national membership. There will be another time, another election to try again. Perhaps victory would not be so elusive next time.”

Despite the unsatisfactory outcome of the May 2013 election, Ladlad’s journey has already expanded the hopes, aspirations, and imaginations of not only LGBT Filipinos and their Filipino heterosexual allies, but of LGBT advocates worldwide. Ladlad’s status as the world’s first officially recognized LGBT political party has received global media attention, with CNN referring to Ladlad as “the only gay political party in the world” (Yuan 2010). In its nationwide campaign, Ladlad was able to promote the human rights of a historically marginalized, disparaged, and discriminated social group, while also inspiring LGBT and human rights movements around the world. That Ladlad already generated ample publicity for its cause both nationally and globally, that it has inspired many LGBT people in the Philippines that continue to experience personal shame, isolation, self-hatred, or violence, and that it has come close to gaining a spot in the Philippine Congress specifically for LGBT Filipinos, is a testament to the innovative and extensive theorizing and strategizing by the party’s leaders and rank-and-file members, other LGBT Filipino intellectuals and activists, and the party’s allies and supporters. LGBT activism, moreover, continues to grow and flourish in the Philippines in myriad other ways. Ladlad’s accomplishments and its very emergence are also a testament to the progressive legacies of the Philippines’ 1986 People Power Revolution and the new constitution that it gave rise to in 1987, which in turn gave rise to the Philippines’ innovative and continually evolving

party-list system. Important milestones have already been achieved, despite the outcome of the May 2013 elections, and regardless of what the future may hold for Ladlad in the May 2016 congressional elections or for the prospects of the emergence of perhaps another LGBT party in future party-list elections in the Philippines.

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