Performativity and the Coming Out Discourse in PETA Gay Plays from 1967 to 1998

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Abstract

This paper examines the gay plays staged by the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA) from 1967 to 1998 through the postmodern lens of gender performativity of Judith Butler. The paper argues that the instability of gender complicates the ongoing discourse of subject formation which could open up spaces for the possibility of alternative identity and community formations for queer subjects which in this paper is provisionally labeled as "transempire." In these selected plays, including the iconic "Hanggang Dito Na Lamang At Maraming Salamat" by Orlando Nadres, the coming out narratives demonstrate that transempire consciousness does not only serve to complicate perception of sexual difference and subvert assumptions about gender identity which is similar to what Butler calls "indeterminacy of gender" or even Beauvoir's notion of the "unknowability of womanhood," but in significant ways, enacts the transempire experience in all its ceaseless contradictions.

Keywords

transempire, performativity, performance, gender, drama, Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA)

Introduction

One might as well begin with an imagined gallery of genders and stream of sexualities: Masculine. Feminine. Cisgender. Cissexual. Gay. Lesbian. Bisexual. Bigender. Transgender. Transsexual. Transman. Transwoman. Heterosexual. Homosexual. Queer. Demigirl. Girlfag, Guydyke. Non-binary. Genderless. All Genders. Genderqueer. Gender Variant. Gender Fluid. Gender Nonconforming. Gender Questioning. Agender. Aromantic. Asexual. Pansexual. Two-Spirit. Polygender. Intersex. Androgyne. Womyn. Neutrois. Other.

The twin notion of gender and sexuality has always been fraught with problems for a number of reasons. On the one hand, it is problematic because there is an almost natural tendency to confuse one with the other as a fundamental index of identity. It is not uncommon today to single out one's gender when one is referring to a person's sexuality or gender orientation. For example, if this or that popular actor is rumored to be gay, his sexuality or sexual orientation (meaning the sex of people he is attracted to) is typically questioned. Conversely, when his role as a devoted father and a great family provider is at issue, his masculinity is taken for granted.

But aside from this, confusion also arises when one locates the concept of sex and how it is situated in the above discussion. Is sex subsumed under the idea of gender or is it incorporated into the idea of sexuality? The answer is definitely no. Sex as referring to the anatomic biological trait (being male or female) and reproductive capacity (as having a male or female genitals) is neither a function of gender nor is it inherent in expressing one's sexuality. In short, sex, gender, and sexuality are three distinct but nonetheless closely interconnected categories.

Conceptually, there are two major strands that govern the basic understanding of these categories: Classical Essentialism and Social Constructivism. According to the former, the self is characterized by an unchanging, timeless, and universal inner core or foundation that governs one's biological body (sex), one's social identity (gender) and one's sexual object choice and desire (sexuality). The Social Constructivists reject this universalist notion. They believe that reality, including one's perception or experience of sexu-

ality and gender, are discursively produced, while emphasizing the importance of language as a tool for interpreting one's lived realities. As socially constructed categories, gender and sexuality (along with other related categories such as race and class) are also viewed as social systems and systems of oppression. As such, both are presumed to determine patterns of social relationships among people. These relationships are further characterized as complex (intricate and interconnected), pervasive (covers all social domains such as families, communities, religion, education, and media, among others), variable (historically contingent and always changing across time periods), and ultimately hierarchical and oppositional (privileging males over females and normalizing heterosexuality over homosexuality) (Beasley, *Gender & Sexuality*; Weber, *Understanding*).

In more ways than one, people who fall outside the heterosexual paradigm and who are forced by circumstance to identify as sexual minorities—lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgenders, and queers—must constantly deal with society and its range of negative attitudes and feelings (owing to strong and deep-seated social, cultural, and religious bias) toward them. Thousands of young people who identify as part of the sexual minorities become targets of bullying, discriminations or even violent criminal behavior not only by homophobic individuals or groups but also even by misguided state agents. When members of the New York City police raided the Stonewall Inn gay club in Greenwich Village in June 1969, it immediately became a flashpoint and inaugurated a radical form of activism that came to be known as the gay rights movement. Remembered and memorialized today by 'gender warriors' as the Stonewall Uprising, that watershed moment which began in a spirit of both rage and parody charged the gay struggle for equality and visibility with the ultimate force of a revolution.

This paper imagines the notion of the transempire as evoked and manifested in the gay plays of PETA from 1967 to 1998. These plays are "Hanggang Dito na Lamang at Maraming Salamat" by Orlando Nadres, "Kung Paano Ko Pinatay Si Diana Ross" by Rody Vera, and "Human Voice" by Jean Cocteau as adapted for the PETA stage by Jorge Ledesma. The paper argues that the PETA gay plays serve to demonstrate the notion of transempire both as an

Fig. 1. Multi-awarded film director Lino Brocka plays Fidel with Manny Castañeda as Julie in PETA's original production of "Hanggang Dito Na Lamang at Maraming Salamat" at the Rajah Sulayman Theater in Intramuros in 1975. The play is considered by many as a watershed moment in Philippine theater history. PETA Library & Archives.

instance of performance and performativity. Transempire,[1] as it was originally deployed by noted Filipino anthropologist Michael Tan in his regular newspaper column, *Pinoy Kasi* dated October 22, 2014 at the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (PDI), refers to the Philippines as a sovereign country which

remains dependent on the US, its former colonial master, for its security and other geopolitical concerns. This was in the context of the tragic murder of Filipino transgender, Jennifer Laude, by US Serviceman Joseph Scott Pemberton in Olongapo City. Thus, transempire is originally understood as Filipino nationhood struggling to break free from its colonial past.

However, this paper opts to abandon the postcolonial antecedent of transempire and instead aligns its new deployment to the postmodern notion of gender as a performative effect of reiterative acts that constitutes the subject as a subject (Butler, *Bodies That Matter*). This theoretical grounding is based on the revolutionary ideas of philosopher Judith Butler who powerfully challenges essentialist assumptions made about sex and gender (where both is understood to consist of identifiable, inherent, and trans-historical qualities). She contends that gender, like sexuality, is not an essential truth derived from the body's materiality but rather a regulatory fiction. Through the principle of reiteration which takes place within a highly rigid regulatory frame, gendered bodies are produced, not only as representations but as materialized and sensuously experienced entities. Repetition generates habitual forms that are recognized within the social world; and they subject persons to ideals but in a manner that leaves them relentlessly deficient in both mind and body. Compulsively enacting the forms that would demonstrate conformity to gender ideals, most train their bodies to become sexually legible. For some, however, a consciousness of the gap between ideal gender and materially actual difference can become the basis for resistance to the sex/gender system (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 19).

With this Butlerian theoretical concept, this paper hopes to highlight certain "moments" in the PETA gay plays where transgender identity can become a signifier of individual choice, social determination, and the transempire consciousness.

The Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA) is regarded by many as one of the country's foremost theater organizations. Founded on April 7, 1967 by Cecille Guidote-Alvarez, PETA is driven by its vision to be an active agent of social change and cultural transformation. Using its own singular brand of dramaturgy, it sets out to develop what it calls a people's

theater for empowerment that will contribute toward building a free and sovereign society as well as a genuine people's culture (Samson, et al., *A Continuing Narrative*; Fernandez, *Palabas*). Because of its strong engagement with the masses and their narratives of oppression, PETA has developed a formidable reputation as a left-wing performing group totally committed to the task of conceptualizing, producing, and staging original protest and political drama written in Filipino during the tumultuous Martial Law period.

Some of the most notable and critically-acclaimed productions in this genre and period are *Halimaw* by Isagani Cruz (1971), *Ai'dao* by Malou Jacob (1972), *Nukleyar I* and II by Al Santos (1982 and 1985, respectively), *Oratoryo ng Bayan (Makabayang Deklarasyon ng Makataong Karapatan*) by Alan Glinoga and Rody Vera (1983), *Buwan at Baril* by Chris Millado (1985), *Panata sa Kalayaan* by Alan Glinoga, Al Santos, Rody Vera, Chris Millado and Cast (1986), *Macli-ing Dulag* by Malou Jacob (1988), and *Minsa'y Isang Gamu-Gamu* by Rody Vera based on a filmscript by Marina Feleo-Gonzales (1991) where Nora Aunor, in her first theater role, was made to deliver the play's most explosive closing lines: "Lansagin ang Base Militar!" (Pambid, "Paano Nga Ba" 255).[2]

Aside from political and protest theater, PETA has also produced a varied repertoire of plays dealing with and inspired by history, literature, indigenous culture, folklore and ritual as well as translations and adaptations of classical dramatic texts such as *Macbeth* translated by Rody Vera (1984), *Antigone* adapted by Al Santos, Alan Glinoga, and Nick Cleto Jr. (1975), as well as local productions of Brechtian theater: *Ang Butihing Tao ng Setzuan* (1971) translated by Paul Dumol and Marcelino Cavestany Jr. from *The Good Woman of Setzuan*; *Ang Hatol ng Guhit na Bilog* (1977) translated by Franklin Osorio and Lito Tiongson from *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*; *Ang Buhay ni Galileo (*1981) translated by Alan Glinoga; *Ang Operang Tatlong Pera* (1998) translated by Rody Vera from *The Three Penny Opera; 1896: The Musical* (1996) *by Charley Dela Paz (libretto)* and *Lucien Letaba (music);* and *Radiya Mangandiri: Isang Pilipinong Ramayana* (1993) by Rody Vera based on the classic Indian epic of *Ramayana* by Valmiki. Also, through PETA's partnership with various international theater companies, it has also collaborated on a number of

highly successful co-productions such as *Romeo at Julieta: Isang Komedi* (2008) by Rody Vera and Yamamoto Kiyokazu with the Black Tent Theater of Japan, and *Ang Mahiwagang Kampanya ni Sebiong Engkanto* (1992) with the San Francisco Mime Troupe (Pambid, "Paano Nga Ba" 195-255).

In between these notable productions are the moneymaking ventures of PETA (so-called because they never fail to bring in the audience and, as a consequence, generate revenue for the company) that tackle equally relevant social issues such as gender and gay-oriented plays. This particular project is interested in three gay productions staged by PETA from 1967 to 1998, the period that covers the latter's early beginnings, the Martial Law period, and the post-EDSA years. Orlando Nadres' "Hanggang Dito na Lamang At Maraming Salamat" (1974) occupies a privileged position in Philippine theater history as the first ever play produced and staged in the country that tackles the issue of homosexuality (Fernandez, *Palabas* 237). Since its initial run in December 1974 at the Rajah Sulayman Theater in Intramuros with the late National Artist for Film Lino Brocka as Fidel, Manny Castaneda as Julie, and Bembol Roco as Efren, the play has been performed countless times by both amateur and professional as well as university-based theater groups. And it is precisely because of its numerous incarnations and stagings—not to mention, the highly collaborative nature of theatrical performance—that the play has undergone so many emendations not necessarily by its original playwright but by subsequent directors who have taken the liberty to update not only the text and its language for a modern audience, but also some key aspects of Fidel's characterization.

For example, in his book, *Philippine Gay Culture: Binabae to Bakla, Silahis to MSM*, J. Neil Garcia analyzed a version of the play that was intended for a commercial run by the Integrated Performing Arts Guild (IPAG), a local theater group based in Iligan City. In that particular version of the play, as discussed by Garcia himself in the book, lines and passages that purportedly show Fidel and Julie, at some point in the narrative, as having solicited the sexual services of young boys including this particular dialogue apparently delivered by Julie: "Sixteen years old lang 'yon. At huwag mong tawaran, ga laki. Eh di kinabukasan ay namulaklak kang parang isang gumamela dahil

nadiligan ka," represent radical revisions to the text that may or may not be considered as authorized (Nadres qtd. in Garcia, *Philippine Gay Culture* 280).

However, this paper has used a copy of the original manuscript of its playwright, Orlando Nadres, which he completed on November 27, 1974. The said copy was obtained with permission from the archives of the PETA library specifically for purposes of this academic endeavor.

"Hanggang Dito Na Lamang At Maraming Salamat"

When PETA successfully restaged Orlando Nadres's phenomenal 1974 play, "Hanggang Dito Na Lamang At Maraming Salamat," in May 1997 at the Rajah Sulayman Theater in Intramuros, the late award-winning playwright and PETA artist, Rene Villanueva, wryly remarked, "What else is there to say about coming out?" The context of the question at that time was that the current Nadres play was already the third production of PETA after "Kung Paano Ko Pinatay Si Diana Ross" in 1992 and "Ralph at Claudia" in 1996 which dealt with issues of coming out and gay sexuality. It appears then that PETA, despite its well-known propensity for polemical and politicized positions on a wide-range of issues, remained belatedly bogged down and overly concerned with "coming out" as a dramatic motif while the rest of the world was already wrestling with more pressing issues like HIV/AIDS, gay rights activism, gender equality, and other LGBT concerns.

Arguably, the proliferation and rise in popularity of gay-themed productions at around this time not only in PETA but also in other theater groups can be characterized as part and parcel of the so-called post-EDSA phenomenon. That is, with the late strongman Ferdinand Marcos—along with his family and cronies—effectively driven out of the country, artists and activists alike have been left with a little less reason to rage, rave, and rant against the erstwhile dictator. In PETA, for example, the usual angry rhetoric against the Marcos regime was tempered as the company redirected its singular aesthetics and creative energy to the politics of an entirely different demographic.

This demographic includes the likes of Fidel Palma, the dignified and discreet middle-aged male homosexual, and Julie, the stereotype manicurista

Fig. 2. Noted filmmaker Joel Lamangan reprises the role of Fidel with Kryss Adalia as Julie in the post-EDSA restaging of Orlando Nadres' iconic gay play in 1995. After two decades since its first production, the play still resonates strongly with Filipino audiences. PETA Library & Archives.

in drag. Both inhabit a world as depicted in "Hanggang Dito Na Lamang At Maraming Salamat"; it is a world awash in patriarchal values and norms of what it means to be a real man as idealized by the character of Efren Reynoso, Fidel's beloved, whom the play describes as "devastatingly handsome, sexy, very virile looking," and *prone to homophobia* (emphasis added). As the play opens, spectators are immediately inducted into the seemingly happy lives and sometimes not-so-happy loves of both Fidel and Julie. Fidel is a closet gay who owns and manages a small pawnshop in his unspecified hometown outside of Manila. For the past several years, he has been supporting the college education and other needs of the handsome teenager, Efren Reynoso, as though the latter is his own flesh and blood. Although not related to him in any way, Fidel is nonetheless only too willing to squander his own money on Efren simply because he is secretly in love with the young man. No one

knows about this except his friend, Julie, the flamboyant beautician who regularly goes to Fidel's house to give him a manicure and pedicure. In one such instance, Julie, out of genuine concern, tries to convince Fidel to reveal his true feelings for Efren because as the former puts it, "...Sa buhay ng mga katulad natin, wala nang pinakamasaklap kundi ang tumanda nang hindi man lang nagkakaroon ng kahit isang lalaking mamahalin" (7). Julie also tries to divert Fidel's attention by inviting him to an event where they would dress up and party and playfully compete for the Miss Sward Philippines 1974 title. But Fidel would hear none of it. That is, until Efren's homecoming where he announces that he is about to marry his college classmate and sweetheart. As expected, Fidel is devastated by the sudden news and the ensuing events inevitably lead to his reluctant coming out to a bewildered Efren who cannot seem to reconcile the fact that his Tiyo Fidel and Julie are the same. In the final scene where Efren returns for the last time to bid farewell, Fidel blurts out his feelings and desire for the first time. In the end, when everything has been said and done, Efren is only able to muster a detached and emotion-less goodbye: "Aalis na ho ako. Maraming salamat po" (35). Clearly, among the three characters, it is Fidel who struggles with an identity crisis as he oscillates problematically from being a closeted gay ["…Siyanga pala, Julie… huwag mo akong tatawaging Ate (3) to trying or appearing to be manly:

Julie: Eto naman si Maria Clara!

Fidel: (Seriously a bit offended, very manly.) Please…

Julie: Naku, Mr. Palma, mahirap maglalaki-lalakihan!

Fidel: Talagang ganito ako! (17)

The first staging of this classic Nadres play in 1974 is usually invoked as having inaugurated a tradition of gay writing in Philippine theater (Garcia, *Philippine Gay Culture* 277). Literary critics like Fernandez and Garcia have long acknowledged the valuable contributions of Nadres as a trailblazing champion of Filipino gay writing; however, when it comes to his classic play, "Hanggang Dito Na Lamang At Maraming Salamat," critics and playgoers

alike have traditionally watched and subsequently understood it as a typical 'coming out' narrative that ends with Fidel letting out a primal scream, "BAKLAAA!"

While this kind of interpretation is thoroughly valid and compelling, this particular project attempts to offer an alternative reading of the play. Butler once pointed out that coming out of the closet may mean stepping into another closet: "before, you did not know whether I 'am,' but now you do not know what that means" ("Imitation and Gender" 307). When considered in relation to the character of Efren with whom Fidel is in love and to whom his coming out is reluctantly addressed by force of circumstance, breaking into Efren's consciousness as "bakla" is not the same as finding out how Efren shall perceive him (his "Tiyo Fidel") from hereon.

Therefore, this project takes another view of analyzing and understanding not only this Nadres text but the other plays under discussion by employing the critical lens of gender performativity as a point of reference: first in exposing the performative aspect of identity and demonstrating the impossibility of any subject ever fully inhabiting hegemonic gender ideals, and second, tracing the emergence of agency as it originates from a subject's ability not only to negotiate between and among divergent, incompatible, and contestatory norms, but more importantly, to twist norms and identify in subversive and unpredictable ways, and finally in imagining the transempire as a transgressive postmodern form of gendered self-representation of queer subjects.

As mentioned earlier, the world as inhabited by Fidel, Julie, and Efren in "Hanggang Dito Na Lamang At Maraming Salamat" is defined by a matrix of intelligibility characterized by the heteronormative regulatory ideal as the dominant category of identification. Linked to this regulatory category are specific sets of practices, attributes, rules, traits, and qualities comprising the masculinist norms. In the context of this play, these norms constitute its dominant social order. As subjects, Fidel, Julie and Efren are interpellated into the dominant social order as gendered subjects meaning as either a man or a woman and thus initially would feel compelled to identify as either one or the other. In the case of Fidel and Julie, the former has identified

himself as a man while Julie, the flamboyant gay beautician, has recognized two idealized genders under the hierarchical regimes of the heterosexual or heterosexist matrix, but Julie has chosen to be interpellated as "different" rather than as man or woman: "…ang kanyang kaisa-isang anak na…hindi lalaki, e, hindi rin babae" (41). Although this interpellation of "otherness" has deep ideological implications, it is something that Julie has already accepted and made peace with: "Ang alam ko, ipinanganak ako ng nanay ko na ganito ako, pwes…ganito ako" (24). In yet another encounter with Fidel, Julie comes forth more forcefully: "Look, darling…hindi na tayo mababago! Pabilisin mo man ang ikot ng mundo, wis na tayo hope na maging tunay na lalaki…Nang patayin ni Kain si Abel, ganito na tayo. Nakarating na sa buwan ang tao, ganito pa rin tayo…matagal nang binuro sa asin ng Diyos ang Sodom at Gomora, Fidel…ipinanganak kang ganito, mababuhay kang ganito—at made-dedbol kang…alanganin, s'yoke, M.S., sward, sister, nene, binabae…Binabae! BINABAEEEEEE!" (42).

However, it is a completely different story with the play's protagonist, Fidel. When he enacts his own mode of coming out, he does so by savagely sounding out his self-judgement. Such utter display of self-loathing is, according to David Van Leer, a cliché of homosexuals as divided selves. It represents accurately the psychological distress of some gay people for whom, coming out is a way to escape the anger (and often homophobia) that would otherwise result from repression (*The Queening of America* 124). Toward the climax of the play, the moment of recognition and disbelief on the part of Efren has become a double negation for Fidel as he finally invokes and reiterates sexual norms that connect homosexuality with dehumanization, immorality, and disgusting animal behavior:

> Efren: (Meaning "you're a queer?") Kayo?
>
> Fidel: Ako. At si Julie. Oo, Efren! Oo! Kami nga…Mga nakakahiyang animal…Mga lintek at putang-inang baboy…kami ni Julie ay mga nakakapandiring hayup… lintang buwisit…walanghiyang s'yokeng… binabae…Kami'y mga…nakakasuka! Nakakasuka… (28)

It is a double negation for Fidel because finally he breaks the dual misidentification and "gender passing"[3] that he has always subscribed to in the beginning. That is, with Julie "…ako ay hindi ikaw, at ikaw ay hindi ako; (7) "Sinabi nang…magkaiba tayo, Julie!" (29) But when the latter calls him out and warns him on the perils of his pretensions: "Naku, Mr. Palma, mahirap maglalaki-lalahikan!" (17), he justifies his choice of gender passing: "Hindi ko naman itinatanggi kung ano ako, a! Itinatago ko lang dahil…kailangan itago" (18). So in the presence of Efren (which in this instance could also stand in for the outside world), Fidel enacts the ideals of heteronormativity and reiterates a certain masculinist discourse as the respectable Tiyo Fidel, the small-town businessman who is kind enough to underwrite the college education of an impoverished but physically attractive young man.

When the rupture in Fidel's masculinist discourse occurs, his shallow gender differentiation dissolves into a traumatic objectification with deep ideological implications that can be compared to the famous, "*Look, a Negro!*" by Frantz Fanon in his postcolonial treatise and retelling of personal traumatic objectification in *Black Skin, White Masks.* It is deeply ideological because both instances of interpellation into the dominant social order: Efren's *Kayo?* (as in *You're queer?)* and Fanon's, "*Look, a Negro!*" are made from positions of privilege which is that of the heteronormative ideal in the case of the former, and the White Colonial Master in the latter.

According to Fanon, "Look, a Negro!" is akin to saying, "Look, a monster!" In the white world, the man of color encounters difficulties in the development and display of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. The external stimulus of a child who says, "Look a Negro!" has compelled a physical reaction for the objectified person. One becomes disoriented, and one has to evaluate one's own bodily schema within social spaces. Most importantly, one sees his or her own body as an object, free-floating in space, a separation between self and world. This hyper-awareness of one's body produces traumatic effects even as it reiterates the norm by which one's bodily schema is reckoned by the other.

Fanon's "Negro equals monster" finds its own metonymic equivalent in Fidel's "bakla equals mga lintek at putang-inang baboy." The fact that Efren

cannot even bring himself to say the word, "bakla," as in "Bakla kayo, Tiyo Fidel?" results in the former's own hyper-awareness of his own sexuality which Fidel initially tries so hard to deny: "Wala yon sa…sa relasyon namin. Wala akong hinihintay na ganon kay Efren! Ang turing niya sa akin ay isang magulang, at siya naman ay para ko nang anak" (20). But in his last encounter with Efren before the young man leaves to marry his college sweetheart in Manila, Fidel finally finds himself professing his love and acknowledging his own sexuality: "Mahal kita…At kaiba ang pagmamahal na yon. At ako lamang ang nakakaalam kung ano ang tawag sa pagmamahal na 'yon" (34). These lines are among the most heartfelt in the play and represent a key moment in Fidel's coming out as they also heavily convey his long-repressed sexual desire. Additionally and in some interesting way, they also sound like the Filipino equivalent of the poetic line, "I am the love that dare not speak its name," by Lord Alfred Douglas from his poem, "Two Loves," which was also immortalized in Oscar Wilde's "De Profundis" (Miller, *Out of the Past* 44-45). Traditionally invoked to denote homosexual self-identification, Douglas's "I am the love that dare not speak its name," and by extension, Fidel's "Ako lamang ang nakakaalam kung ano ang tawag sa pagmamahal na 'yon," aptly illuminate how Fidel is led to his own self-knowledge and desire. Eventually this self-knowledge and awareness of his own sexual desire drives him initially to moments of despair and later on to violent behavior, first toward Julie, and later on, against the world as he finally enacts his own mode of performativity and shouts into the night, "BAKLAAAAA!" (35)

But aside from demonstrating how gender norms operate as a regulatory category of identity through which a subject is constituted and initiated into the dominant social order, on another level, the play also exposes conflictual gender ideals. The ambitiousness and homophobia of macho masculinity, and to a lesser degree, the maternality and self-sacrificing aspect of femininity circulate simultaneously alongside non-normative gender identities such as bakla as feminine/vulgar/loud versus bakla as masculine/modest/respectable. For Garcia who also analyzed the same Nadres's play for his pioneering work on local gay culture, such distinct identity bifurcation conforms to what he calls the overt/covert dichotomy of homosex-

uality which is quite common in the Philippine context. Before the term LGBTQ became popular and politically-correct, Filipino gays have always been divided into two general types: the overt gay (like Julie) and the covert type (like Fidel).

However, the difference between overt and covert gays goes beyond mere physical appearance and gestural manifestation as it also underscores serious sociological implications or questions of class (another regulatory category of identity), privilege, and even power relations. It has always been a familiar and common misconception to characterize overt gays as belonging to the lower class owing to their occupational choices as beauticians and *manicurista* (like Julie) or what is derogatively referred to as *parloristas* in the vernacular. On the other hand, covert gays are viewed as having assumed a certain degree of class privilege because most of them are college graduates, and therefore, work as professionals and entrepreneurs (like Fidel). Thankfully, in "Hanggang Dito Na Lamang At Maraming Salamat," Nadres renders his two main characters as essentially on equal footing in this regard as both Julie ["…Mukha nga akong hindi kagalang-galang, pero tapos ito ng AB"] (23); ["Pagkatapos kong mag-college…walk away ang beauty ko"] (30); and Fidel ["Sa high school, hindi na nila ako tinutukso, kahit puro babae ang barkada ko, dahil matalino daw ako…lagi akong honor student…kahit na sa college"] (33) are college educated who manage to earn enough for them to live comfortable lives. Thus, between class and gender as regulatory categories of identity and where the former is viewed as a site of privilege, it is the latter that is brought into focus in this analysis because both Julie and Fidel have failed to assume privilege in relation to gender because of their prior interpellation as neither man nor woman, particularly in the case of Julie. As far as Fidel is concerned, his coming out brings to the fore two crucial aspects of his gender identification. On the one hand, his coming out ultimately highlights his inability to conform with the regulatory injunctions linked to masculinity with which he was initially compelled to identify, at least on the surface, while reluctantly invoking the non-hegemonic norms that he has always refused to recognize as represented by the character of Julie. But on the other hand, it also conforms to what Manalansan calls as

the "defining characteristic of gay identity: the focus on sexual object choice as the primary and singular defining factor" which for Fidel has always been his beloved Efren (*Global Divas* 23).

But even those subjects who can assume privilege due to their position within the power hierarchy are not exempt from the rigors of performative reiteration. In the character of Efren, for instance, Nadres tries to represent the lone male persona in the play as the embodiment of a true and ideal male: young, devastatingly handsome, sexy, very virile looking, but also severely homophobic. If this is the hegemonic masculinity circulating in the Nadres universe, this particular ideal norm of masculinity is also an ideal impossible to embody for those subject to it. To remain viable and non-marginal within this universe, Efren must also constantly cite and mime the very norms making his masculinity intelligible in the first place. But sadly, it is an ideal that he cannot completely inhabit:

Fidel: May…may karanasan ka na ba sa…sa mga tulad ni Julie?

Efren: Natatandaan n'yo ba 'yong nabanggit ko noon sa inyo sa isang sulat ko?

Fidel: Alin?

Efren: 'Yong sinabi ko sa inyong anak ng kasera ko sa Maynila?

Fidel: A, oo…

Efren: Minsan ho, nakainom ako…ang animal…at ginapang ako!

Fidel: Anong ginawa mo?

Efren: Ano pa hong magagawa ko? Lasing na lasing ako! Ayokong magkaroon ng eskandalo sa boarding house. Ang walanghiyang binabae! Nagmakaawa…may paiyak-iyak pa.

Fidel: (Saying a plain statement) Pinagbigyan mo siya.

Efren: Ganoon pala ang ginagawa nila sa mga lalaki! Pwe! Kapag naalaala ko 'yon, lumuluwa ang aking bituka sa kasusuka! (26)

Here, it must be said that masculinity's dependency on reiteration clearly disputes and undermines its claim to naturalness and validates the notion that a coherent, stable inner identity is, at best, largely illusory. Efren's failure to live up to attributes associated with the dominant norms of masculinity in this instance and the pronounced 'discontinuities' in his gender performance somehow demonstrates the impossibility of any subject ever fully inhabiting hegemonic gender ideals because the possibility of a slip-up, inappropriate gesture, or worse, an unconscious queer impulse within a space of sexual instability is always present. Despite his strong dislike for and even stronger disavowal of Julie and his kind, Efren (whether sober or otherwise) arguably has become an easy masculine prey to a homosexual predator. In this queer moment, Efren has reluctantly played into the space of sexual instability and erotic marginality that is already made queer by the presence of his landlady's gay son. This clearly demonstrates the unstable nature of gender norms and its troubled relations to hegemonic notions of masculinity.

The throng of incompatible and divergent norms that simultaneously clash and circulate in society opens up potential spaces for subjects to 'perform differently.' The play thus points to the way that agency ironically materializes in the interstices of competing and clashing norms—some dominant, others not—where the conflictual nature of norms opens up spaces of negotiation. It is in the interstitial, one might say, where a character like Julie is able to conjure up transempire engenderings through his disidentification with regulatory ideals in the Butlerian sense. Although regulatory ideals like heteronormativity wield the power to form and regulate the subject, they are not fully internalized because there is always the possibility that the subject will 'twist' norms and identify itself in potentially subversive ways. Between Fidel and Julie, it is the latter who chooses to disidentify with regulatory gender ideals and to give up privilege by disrupting the gender hierarchy as a form of resistance while proceeding to enact his mode of performativity in ways that ultimately subvert gender norms. After his violent encounter with Fidel and finding himself at the receiving end of Fidel's homicidal rage, Julie manages to regain his composure while holding on to his sash. Still panting and trembling, he stands and staggers toward the door, Julie is undeniably

still a horrible sight, but he emerges with his hard-won dignity intact. In other words, confrontations or interactions between subjects who identify with different gender ideals can potentially lay bare the disjunctions and contradictions within social fields of force and their nexus of power relations. Fidel's conception of the ideal male, for instance, is not equivalent or reducible to Julie's; the former seems to prefer the quintessential masculine: young, virile, innocent, devastatingly handsome, and ambitious as epitomized by Efren, while the latter with her disenchanted experiences with men would prefer someone who is more worldly and willing to accept money in exchange for sexual favors. Plus, both Julie and Fidel are also haunted by the images of their fathers who are unfaithful, emotionally absent, and prone to violence. Thus, the matrix of intelligibility is not a "realm of uniform normativity," but rather is traversed by a "multiplicity of heterogeneous power relations" and competing normative injunctions (McNay, *Gender and Agency* 45). A masculinity comprised of attributes such as youth, virility, good looks, and ambition therefore competes with its other forms as described by Julie: "…Maniwala ka sa akin, Ate! Makakatagpo ka rin! Maraming naghilata riyan na…Malaki na ang pang-unawa, Malaki pa rin ang kanilang…armas!" (32). This is, in effect, a clash of ideals, a confrontation that undermines the dominant norm's claim to uniformity, and therefore, naturalness.

Another very significant way in which Julie can be said to disidentify with regulatory norms and strongly inflect her own mode of non-normative gender performativity is her use of *swardspeak* which adds an interesting 'local color' element to the depiction of the non-Western gay individuals like her compared to a typical homosexual from the West whose spoken language is fundamentally indistinguishable from his heterosexual counterpart. Also known as gay lingo, *swardspeak* is a neologism that first appeared in the 1970s. According to the article, "In Focus: The Filipino Gayspeak (Filipino Gay Lingo)" which was published on the website of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), the term *swardspeak* is attributed by acclaimed film director Jose Javier Reyes to newspaper columnist and movie critic Nestor Torre. Reyes wrote a book on the subject titled, *Swardspeak: A Preliminary Study* (Alba, "In Focus"). While some scholars like Ronald Baytan

have already mistakenly pronounced it as "dead" and have reckoned that the term is anachronistic because of its non-usage among Filipino gays today (Alba, "In Focus"), still others like Manalansan continue to find academic value in its deployment not as a linguistic relic but as an enduring symbol of and vehicle for Filipino gay identity.

In fact, in *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora*, Manalansan devotes an entire chapter to *swardspeak* and queer discourse. Etymologically, the word *swardspeak comes* from the nominal term *sward* which is the local Cebuano expression for homosexuals (46). He explains that "*swardspeak* is not a mere bundle of words but actually...appropriates elements from dominant Filipino, American, and Spanish codes, and rearticulates their symbolic meanings" (46). He further argues that in the context of Filipino gay men in the US who embody the Filipino diasporic struggle, *swardspeak* allows them "to enact ideas, transact experiences, and perform identities that showcase their abject relationship to the nation" (46). The last phrase "abject relationship to the nation" is very telling and significant when viewed in the context of this paper because it can very well be applied to the character of Julie. As far as Julie is concerned, her use of *swardspeak* is part of her recognizable discourse in disrupting the heteronormative ideal and subverting the dominant hegemonic norms of society. It is not enough that Julie enacts her disidentifaction from the Butlerian matrix of intelligibility by invoking and reiterating non-normative and contestatory norms through her outward appearance: wild hairdo in red, grotesque make-up, and out-of-this-world attire, but she also does so through her choice of language: "Sige ka, pag na-invierna ako rito, walkout bigla ang beauty ko!" (Nadres, *Hanggang Dito Na Lamang* 3). "Hindi ka na nasanay sa akin…para namang di mo alam na para sa akin…ma-lalaki, ma-babae, whether young and aging, marikit man o okray-okray ang beauty…" (4); "…Ni minsan ay hindi ko sila minolest'ya kahit isang sentimo sa idinadatong ko sa aking mga nahahalang lalaki sa buhay! Nunca!" (5); and "Hindi ka ba nalulungkot sa buhay mo? Ulila ka, wis na parents, wis ka pa rin min?" (6).

More than the humor as brought about by her colorful and comic manipulation of language through invention, inversion, and appropriation,

it is Julie's 'abject relationship' not to the nation but to the heteronormative ideal that empowers her to circumscribe her own modality of gender performance. Her complete disidentification not only with masculinity by the heteronormative ideal as a whole, constitutes her mode of resistance to the hegemonic injunction to identify either as male or female. By doing so, and by choosing to give up privilege, Julie (and perhaps, even Fidel) may eventually triumph as they finally conceive themselves as autonomous self-determining agents who subscribe to the moral imperative of embracing their own transempire consciousness.

"Kung Paano Ko Pinatay Si Diana Ross"

The second play to be discussed is titled "Kung Paano Ko Pinatay Si Diana Ross" by Rody Vera. Andy Valero, the main protagonist of Vera's celebrated 1991 play, could very well claim "gender passin" as his middle name. The play depicts Andy as a fractal character, a persona with a bifurcated consciousness. The dramatic action takes the audience to a 30-year trajectory in his life: from an eight-year-old boy who could not seem to decide whether to wield a toy gun or play with a doll, to a teenaged seminarian confronting the homosexual encounters of his friends and fellow seminarians, and from his encounter with a prostitute during his stag party to his early years as a young professional trying to survive the corporate rat race, or as a conflicted gay man with serious marital issues after a heteronormalizing marriage to a woman. Along the way, he struggles to deny his homosexuality by heeding the dictates of society.

From his youth up to his marriage to Susan, Andy has allowed himself to be interpellated into the hegemonic social order as a masculine and middle-class subject, recognizable as such to the existing matrix of intelligibility (the Butlerian field of practices constituted by norms). But this matrix of intelligibility as conceived by Butler is not a realm of uniform normativity as already demonstrated earlier, but rather is traversed by a "multiplicity of heterogeneous power relations" and competing normative injunctions (McNay, *Gender and Agency* 45). As shown in the previous discussion, within any given hegemonic order, more than one set of gender norms circulate alongside

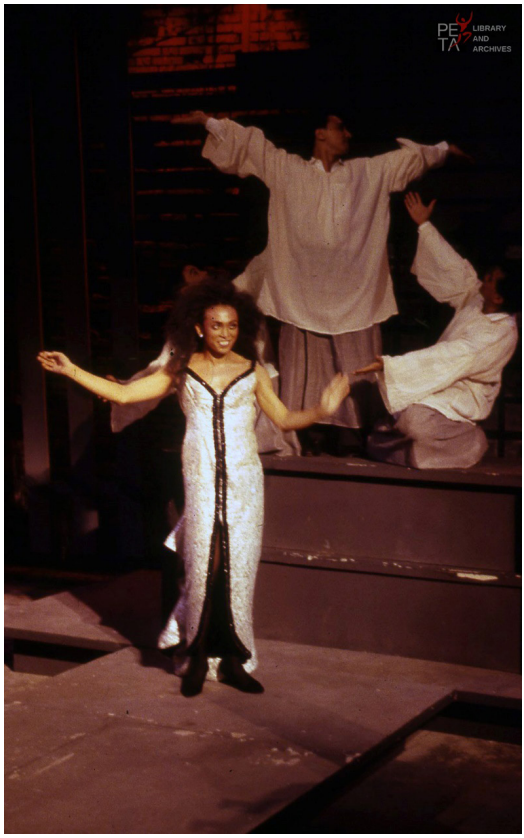

Fig. 3. Rody Vera's Palanca-award-winning play, "Kung Paano Ko Pinatay Si Diana Ross," sizzles on stage with Linus Sto. Tomas as Andy, Melvin Lee as Diana Ross, and the PETA Kalinangan Ensemble. PETA Library & Archives.

different, competing, and even contestatory categories of identification that complicate these sets of norms (Rottenberg, *Performing Americanness* 15).

The other aspect in Andy's dual consciousness—his masculine side which is also the object and the material effect of his gender passing and his homosexual side—is represented by the character of Diana Ross, the externalization of Andy's so-called gender core, who weaves in and out of the narrative initially as a playmate and later on as an embodied conscience.

Diana is particularly ubiquitous during crucial moments when Andy's problematic claim to masculinity is exposed or threatened. Compared to Fidel and Efren, it is Andy who brings to the fore and, at the same time, exposes how the social practice of attempting to embody gender norms operates by repetitive citation, and the ineluctable gap that emerges as subjects try to approximate these ideals. For instance, when he was an eight-year-old boy:

Diana: Ako si Diana.

Andy: Ako naman si Andy. Niloko mo'ng kalaro ko. Ang akala niya totoong napatay ka. (Pasigaw sa KALARO sa labas ng tanghalan). Natakot ka ano? Belaat! (Mapapalingon kay DIANA.) Laro tayo. (Pagbabarilbarilin si DIANA habang tumatawa.)

Diana: Sandali, sandali. Hindi kasi ako violent person, e.

Andy: E, anong lalaruin natin? (Makakaisip.) Alam ko na. (Huhugutin ang isang manyika sa likod ng telebisyon.) (Vera, *Kung Paano Ko Pinatay Si Diana Ross* 13).

Also in the seminary when his classmate and co-seminarian, Leo, is expelled after being caught kissing an older seminarian:

Andy: Masaya dito.

Diana: Masaya? Ayaw kang papanoorin ng sine kapag hindi Walt Disney o Ten Commandments. Bawal kayong magkasama ni Leo dahil kung anu-ano raw temptation ang dumarating sa inyo kapag nagsasama kayo. Dinidiscourage ka sa pagsali sa annual play dahil walang ibang makukuhang aarte bilang Our Lady of Manaoag kundi ikaw. Bawal magbahay-bahayan, bawal magpatintero. Soccer ang kailangan, football, e, alam naman nilang takot ka sa anumang lumilipad na bola. At ngayon...eto si Kuya Pascal mo, si Leo.

Andy: Tama na. Tumahimik ka na.

Diana: E, hanggang kailan ba tayo dito?

Andy: Hanggang gusto ko.

Diana: Pero ayaw mo nga rito.

Andy: (Magagalit kay DIANA, sisigaw.) *Gusto ko rito! Gusto ko rito*! (26-27)

And in his encounter with a prostitute during his stag party just a week before his scheduled wedding to Susan:

Diana: (Tutulungan si ANDY na hubarin ang kanyang t-shirt.) *Talaga ba'ng gusto mong gawin ito?*

Andy: (Mapapatigil) *Bakit naman hindi? Maganda siya!*

Diana: *Talaga? Nagagandahan ka?*

Andy: *Bakit mo ba pinahihirapan ang buhay ko?*

Diana: *Ano?*

Andy: *Tuwing may pagkakataong tulad nito na darating sa buhay ko saka ka naman sumisipot. Naalala mo noong kaming dalawa lang ni Susan sa bahay noon?*

Diana: *Dinig na dinig ko'ng tawag mo. Hinihingi mo'ng tulong ko. Hindi ka mapakali sa nerbyos. Ngayong eto ako...* (44-45).

In *Passing and the Fictions of Identity,* Ginsberg contends that "passing is about identities: their creation or imposition, their adoption or rejection, their accompanying rewards or penalties. Passing is also about the boundaries established between identity categories and about the individual and cultural anxieties induced by boundary crossing" (75). Through the characterization and depiction of Andy Valero, the play shows that the notion of an essential self is again largely problematic, if not totally illusory. Andy builds his identity not on some sense of an essential self but rather on a self that is composed of and created by a series of guises and masks, performances and roles. Progressively, Andy enacts his masculinist discourse through compelled association with objects (a toy gun) and actions (pretending to enjoy the seminary in his youth, the company of a prostitute, and even the sacrament of marriage) that are traditionally part of the heteronormative injunctions. For Andy, it is not enough that he looks or "passes" for a masculine-gendered subject. For the performance of masculinity to be complete,

Fig. 4. Closeted gay man Andy (played by Linus Sto. Tomas) confronts his alter ego, Diana Ross (played by Melvin Lee) in this play that powerfully explores notions of gender and identity. PETA Library & Archives.

he must also embrace its gestures, aspirations, tastes, and its overall recognizable discourse. In the process, Andy situates his own homosexuality (and to some extent, his own internalized homophobia) within a wider dynamic of social relationships.

Unfortunately for Andy, his specific modality of gender performativity is bound to run into disjunctions and discontinuities. As already shown in the earlier analysis of the Nadres' text, even subjects already considered "normal-

ized and norm-identified" like Efren are predisposed to fall into gender disruptive behavior; how much more for subjects who are merely gender passing like Andy who feels compelled to embrace it as a viable survival strategy? How long can he remain within the heterosexual matrix? When his wife, Susan, finally learns about the "special bond" between her husband and Mike, Andy, like Fidel, is forced to enact his own mode of coming out. But unlike Fidel's, Andy's road to coming out almost exacts a painful price: his life. At the hospital after Andy's failed suicide, the anxious ex-wife leaves to begin her own healing as Mike begins to take his place as Andy's lover who will help him embrace the marginal and non-normative attributes and norms associated with homosexuality as a different configuration of gender identity.

Mike: Umalis na si Susan. (Iaabot ang susing ibinigay ni SUSAN)…Huwag kang masyadong magalaw. May sugat pa ang ulo mo.

Andy: Si Chuckie bakla.

Mike: Masakit bang tanggapin iyon?

Andy: Walang bakla dapat sa Ayala. Walang baklang dapat mabuhay sa Ayala.

Mike: Si Butch bakla din. At saka si Ronald. Bakla rin sila…At saka si Ariel, si Raul, si Lito sa first floor. Lahat sila, bakla rin. Sa fifth floor sinu-sino ba'ng bakla? A, yung dalawang matandang clerk sa Investigation Unit…Sa tenth floor? Sino ang mga bakla sa tenth floor? Si Ed, si Gino, si Manny Ornero, si Manny Tenco, si Manny Golez, at si Manny Tan. Lahat na yata ng pumasok na Manny sa EDP, bakla.

Andy: Stop

Mike: Sa 14th floor…Sinu-sinong bakla sa 14th floor?

Andy: Stop

Mike: Walang katapusan ang listahan, Andy. Kahit ang mga hindi mo gaanong kilala, kahit ang mga akala mo'y kilalang-kilalal mo na, lahat sila, nagtatago. Dahil sa Ayala, kung bakla ka, may hangganan ka! Kahit hindi sa Ayala. Kahit saan ka magpunta! Kung nasa kalsada ka

naman, di ka nalalayo sa panunukso o pambubugbog. Kahit hindi sa Ayala. Kahit saan ka magpunta. Bumili ka ng hotdog sa Jollibee. O magbayad ka ng pamasahe sa jeep. O kahit mag-isa kang nagdadasal sa loob ng simbahan ng Quiapo. Kahit pulubi kang walang kinabukasan. Basta bakla ka, may hangganan ka. (Pipikit si ANDY.)

Mike: At anong gagawin mo, kung gayon? Habambuhay kang tutulay sa makikitid nilang utak? Bababaan mo'ng boses mo? Ititikom ang palad mo? Titigasan ang tindig mo? Yuyuko, iiwas, tatahimik, iiyak? At pag natabi ka sa isa pa, pagtatawanan mo siya para siya ang mapansin at hindi ikaw? Ano'ng kabuluhan noon? Andy, para kang pusang tumatakbo habang kagat-kagat ang sariling buntot… (88-90).

Andy's gender passing, his subsequent coming out, and the basic duality of his consciousness reveal a dynamic tension between presence and absence as well as visibility and invisibility. For instance, the recurring presence of Diana Ross in the narrative is actually a manifestation of the inherent absence of Andy and his denial of his true self. And the longer he remains absent, the deeper Andy sinks into invisibility. Thus, the play conceptualizes homosexual invisibility as a "closet" and "sexuality" as something that must be revealed. What makes it worse in this particular depiction is that the hapless wife Susan's own ignorance of her husband's homosexuality, in effect, has also become her own "closet." Thus, when Andy finally decides to enact his mode of coming out with a gun to his head, unfortunately, it is intended not as a way of stepping out of the closet and into the light, but out of the closet and into oblivion. Susan, Andy's wife, also enacts her own coming out from her "closet" of ignorance to that of misery.

Also, coming out for Andy entails not just accepting his true gender core and living out in the open his sexual identity, but also learning how to occupy traditional heterosexual spaces like Ayala Avenue and the ruthless masculinist corporate world that it represents as potential erotic space where non-normative desires can thrive and prosper: "Si Chuckie, bakla… kaya hindi siya ma-promote-promote. Kasi si Chuckie bakla. Sa Ayala, kapag bakla ka, may hangganan, Mike (89). As a concrete terrain powerfully inscribed with patriarchal symbols of socio-economic and political power,

prestige, and success, Ayala Avenue is here represented as part of the masculinist discourse of ambition and competitiveness.

What is significant to emphasize at this point is that the two plays: "Hanggang Dito Na Lamang At Maraming Salamat" and "Kung Paano Ko Pinatay Si Diana Ross" highlight dramatic themes that portray the notion of coming out also as a performative effect of power (that is, the Foucauldian conception of power that works to reinforce hegemonic order and uphold existing hierarchical power relations like heteronormativity). Reiteration produces the illusion of an identifiable and stable referent for regulatory ideals, making norms seem natural and normal. But as Butler points out, if the dominant social order is dependent on reiteration for its very existence, it is also open to varying degrees of processual modifications. The irreconcilable space between normative roles and actual social practices creates a continuous dissonance, disjuncture, and discontinuities within any hegemonic order (*Gender Trouble* 145). Thus, when characters like Fidel and Andy, or even Julie fall through the cracks of the heterosexual matrix, an entire paroxysm of emotions ensues that can either be transformative or destructive.

"Human Voice"

"Human Voice" ("La Voix Humaine") is a monologue written by French dramatist Jean Cocteau in 1928. It was first staged in Paris two years later. Its lone character is a middle-aged woman who speaks on the phone with her former lover of the last five years, apparently for the last time as he is about to get married the next day to another woman. As she tries to reach out to him through his voice, the woman struggles not only against the frequent breaks and cut-offs in their telephone conversation, but she also struggles to control her mounting desperation. The slow realization of a love affair that can no longer be finally drives the woman to her mental breakdown. In this 1997 PETA adaptation[4] which was translated, directed, and acted in by Jorge V. Ledesma, the unnamed woman character in the text was replaced by a transgender persona who takes the dramatic action one step further. That is, toward the end of the play she appears to commit suicide by looping the

telephone cord around her neck as if to wrap herself with the fading sound of her soon-to-be-married ex-lover's voice. Then, she enacts her final moment with the words: I Love You, after which the receiver falls to the ground.

Unlike the first two coming out plays, this dramatic text features an unnamed character with a liminal identity who happens to be radically different from the two protagonists of "Hanggang Dito Na Lamang At Maraming Salamat" and "Kung Paano Ko Pinatay Si Diana Ross," respectively. For one, she is no longer hopelessly conflicted about her sexuality and gender identity like Fidel. Nor is she engaged in gender passing as a survival strategy much like Andy. Instead, she "passes over" into the feminine side of the heteronormative ideal as a cross-dressing and gender-bending persona who openly challenges the stability of gender identities while demonstrating how it is a constantly evolving construct. As the audience listens to the one-sided and unreliable part of the spoken conversation which is mostly in English but with snippets of dialogue in French and Filipino, the audience also tries to imagine the unvoiced and unseen male lover on the other end of the phone line. It is easy to conclude that the character onstage is a woman with no hint of self-consciousness as to her true gender and sexuality: "I lied in describing the dress that I was wearing, also when I said I had dined at Martha's…I've had no dinner, I'm not wearing my red dress. I have my coat over my chemise, because as I was waiting for you to call, staring at the phone, sitting down, jumping up, pacing up and down, I was going mad!" (Cocteau, "Human Voice" 4).

But sound and visual do not actually match in this instance as visually, one realizes that the character's liminal identity and legibility onstage is actually a hyperbolic inversion of the principles of gender normativity as reproduced through irony, mimicry, and parody. In short, this particular adaptation of Jean Cocteau's text is stepping into the realm of camp as it reimagines the character as queer without having to localize the setting and its culturally specific references: "Well then, you should knock on the wall and stop your neighbors from playing their gramophone at this hour…" (Ledesma, "Human Voice" 5); Listen, darling, since you will be in Marseilles day after tomorrow, may I ask…or I would really like…I would like it if you didn't stay in the hotel

where we always stayed together" (7). All these French allusions and references only tend to highlight its element of camp especially from the perspective of a Filipino gay audience. After all, camp is always understood in the context of appropriating the hyperbole of musicals and popular movies as well as other visual extravagances like overstated décor and fashion, and especially cross-dressing (Sontag, "Notes on Camp" 278). It is this last characteristic that renders this queer adaptation of "Human Voice" as useful to this "transempire" project. Taken together, the three plays: "Hanggang Dito Na Lamang At Maraming Salamat," "Kung Paano Ko Pinatay Si Diana Ross," and "Human Voice" demonstrate a nuanced progression of consciousness, that is, from coming out to cross-dressing.

True to the Butlerian postmodern impulse, cross-dressing in this adaptation conforms to the notion of gender as "a corporeal style, an act, as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where 'performative' suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning…gender performance always and precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (*Performative Acts* 519-531). In the true spirit of camp involving the appropriation of popular culture, the original woman character in the play is transformed as an overdramatic drag queen who calls attention to the role playing associated with the female gender by overemphasizing it to a degree that it becomes sublimely ridiculous. All in all, the disruption of the semiotics of dress, gender, and identity in drama can somehow lead to a provisional understanding of the transempire consciousness.

Coming Out, Same-Sex Desire, and Performativity

PETA's substantial experience, not to mention its institutional expertise, in the actual practice of an agitational aesthetics and rhetorics clearly informs the notions of coming out and same-sex erotic desire depicted in the plays of Orlando Nadres' "Hanggang Dito Na Lamang At Maraming Salamat" and Rody Vera's "Kung Paano Ko Pinatay Si Diana Ross" as culturally specific and historically situated ways of performing the personal as political. This

is very important to emphasize at the very outset as the notion of 'coming out' itself is regarded by many—both Filipino homosexuals and heterosexuals alike—as something that is tangential to the Filipino gay experience. Or to be more straight-forward about it, "the practice of 'coming out' is a particularly American idea and behavior where it operates as a kind of discursive norm" (Manalansan, *Global Divas* 27).

Here in the Philippines, it can be argued that more than half of those who identify as gays or bakla have already exhibited effeminate behavior even at a very young age which makes "coming out" completely unnecessary. Of course, many of them like the character of Julie in "Hanggang Dito na Lamang At Maraming Salamat" go through very traumatic experiences as they grow up and suffer at the hands of parents (mostly their violent-prone fathers) and even some close male relatives who think that gay behavior can be "shaken out" of the person's body through physical and psychological violence (Manalansan, *Global Divas* 58). But as Cannell rightly observes, Filipino gays (not only in Bicol) are quite adept at self-transformation. They can easily turn their sad stories into funny but insightful tales. One only needs to recall the funny story of a teenaged gay whose face was repeatedly dunked in cold water by his father as he demanded to know if he were gay, and each time the teenaged gay would say yes. But after a terribly long time holding his breath under water, when the father demanded for the last time if he were gay, the hapless teenager frantically gasped for air and grunted instead, "sirena po." This, in a sense, constitutes the typical norm of coming out for most effeminate Filipino gays: painful but never agonizing.

Unlike other gays like Fidel and Andy who have previously been interpellated and initiated into the dominant social order and have subsequently identified as masculine, invoking non-normative gender and sexual norms as adults can be truly traumatic. And it is this kind of "heteronarratives" that PETA finds compelling. After all, as an established institutional apparatus, theater in general, and PETA in particular, has always been a critical voice and presence in society. Its engagement with major socio-political issues since the Martial law period has provided the company with a distinct perspective in exploring issues that affect the lives of specific sectors and demographic

constituencies. Through its unique mode of theatrical presentation, PETA has somehow facilitated in meaningful and memorable ways the exploration of gay motifs and the crossing of queer discourses into the popular imagination as well as constituted an expanding space and an ongoing practice where the intersectionality of coming out, same-sex desire, and performativity can be part of an ongoing discourse. According to Manalansan, coming out is translated in *swardspeak* as "pagladlad ng kapa" and the translation in itself reveals the performative element of the bakla (Manalansan, *Global Divas* 28). Performativity, it is important to underscore, is not conceived here as the subject's freedom to choose or "play at" a variety of identities, but rather as both constitutive of identity and a constraining manifestation of dominant norms.

According to the Butlerian model, gender performativity is constituted by two kinds of performatives that are inextricably connected and interdependent. On the one hand, the iteration of gender norms operates like a performative speech-act where the discursive repetition of norms serves to constitute or produce that which it enunciates. The repetition of gender norms necessarily precedes the emergence of the subject and initiates the subject into the dominant social order. That is, in any given society, a subject's gender identity only becomes recognizable and coherent to her/himself and to other members of society through specific gender norms. On the other hand, gender performativity refers to social comportment. The iteration of norms actually compels bodies to act, gesture, and behave in certain ways that constantly attempt to embody the fantasy of a coherent and natural gender core. To remain viable within a given society, the subject must cite and mime the very norms that created his/her sociocultural intelligibility in the first place (Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 3).

As depicted in the plays under discussion, coming out and same-sex desire are best understood as specific modes of gender performativity. For instance, in "Hanggang Dito Na Lamang At Maraming Salamat," Fidel's coming out to Efren is concatenated with his admission of his queer desire: "Mahal kita…At ako lamang ang nakaaalam kung ano ang tawag sa pagmamahal na 'yon." For Fidel who reluctantly comes out to a long-cher-

ished but unsuspecting beloved, coming out is a necessary evil that must be endured if he is to reclaim his true identity and give voice to his inner feelings and queer desire. Whether it means "coming out" to one's family, friends, or to that person who holds the key to one's happiness, "coming out" almost always involves the rending of the self that could potentially leave a deep psychological wound. But if one does survive his "coming out, it also becomes the *sine qua non* of self-respect. To come out and say, "I am gay" represents a formidable kind of empowerment. And even if Butler contends that 'coming out' of the closet also entails stepping into another closet, this other closet is also where one acknowledges one's non-normative desire. In a sense, "coming out" involves not just the intelligibility of one's identity but also the visibility of one's desire. For Andy, rendering his queer desire visible in the public spheres of Ayala Avenue which in the popular imagination conforms to the traditionally male-dominated, and therefore, heterosexually-defined spaces of the corporate world may be deemed as a strategic move in creating the space for discourses of desire. To bring desires out in the open is to force heterosexuals to perceive that there are elements of heterosexuality in the construction of homosexuality and that homosexuality also plays a significant part in the construction of heterosexuality. In another sense, this is also similar to what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls as homosocial or the potential for eroticism in male-male bonds, a potential that includes not only homosexual desire, but also feelings of fraternity, male bonding, and yes, even homophobia (Van Leer, *The Queening of America* 99).

Despite the potential conflicts that are bound to emerge when unveiling and linking the intelligibility of one's identity to the visibility of one's desire—that is, who we are is defined by whom we love—the three plays under consideration somehow foreground the element of gender crossing in the flow of non-normative desire. The three plays somehow demonstrate the exclusive/inclusive tension in the cultural dynamics. That is, in traditional heteronormative society, persons who are labeled as homosexuals or suspected as such are excluded and marginalized. Moreover, due to a homophobic imagination, people are eager to purify and regulate any ambiguity in erotic desires. Thus it is possible to hear assertions like "Jose

Rizal could never have been homosexual." On the other hand, because of the efflorescence of the queer movement and queer studies, there emerges a counter-discursive impetus to queer every desirable figure. The wish to expand queer territory leads to grapevine information such as "This or that actor is a closet gay." So, judging from this, it is easy to see a transition from the exclusion and phobia of "nobody is" to the inclusion and celebration of "everybody is" (Chang, "Taiwan Queer" 292).

Whether or not the Efrens in our midst are queer-identified or not is, of course, not the deciding point in the tug of war between exclusiveness and inclusiveness. In the first place, it is hard to guess at a certain person's real sexuality: by necessity we now know from psychoanalytical wisdom, sexual behaviors, desires, and identities do and may not always cohere, despite the compulsions and power of socio-sexual regulations. Furthermore, there are no rules in the flow of desires. But the queering of straight individuals takes place in the process of desire projection. It also demonstrates the inherent instability of the Oedepalized heterosexual structure. According to the tradition of Freudian psychoanalytic theory, the transition from the pre-Oedipal stage to the Oedipal stage is accomplished through the split of identification and desire, with the child identifying with the parent of the same sex and desiring the parent of the opposite sex. Through identifying with the same sex and desiring the different sex, one enters into the Oedipalized heterosexual matrix. However, the polarity of being and having tends to be obscured in the process of queering and desire projection (Chang, "Taiwan Queer" 292).

Or put another way, homosexual attraction can be further explicated through the elaboration on the model of "vampiric identification." Vampirism is "identification pulled inside out—where the subject, in the act of interiorizing the other, simultaneously reproduces itself externally to the other." In the confluence of blood, desire and identification become indistinguishable. Indeed, the uncanny twilight zone of life/death, male/female, consciousness/unconscious in the legend of the vampire leads to the verging terrain of identification/desire and subjectivity/objectivity. The eroticism of vampirism is drawn upon to represent the vertigo of identification/desire in

idol worship: to be consumed by one's idol/lover is to consume/consummate the desire for the idol/lover. In vampiric identification, identification and desire need not go in counterdirectional trajectories. The best way to love a vampire is to become a vampire (Chang, "Taiwan Queer" 293).[5]

Vampiric or not, sexual attraction in general can be typically illustrated in several ways. First is sexual attraction according to sex: heterosexuality (attraction between two different sexes) and homosexuality (attraction between the same sex). The second is attraction according to cross-gender identities. This can be further classified according to the following combinations and based on the earlier primary pairings: 1) different-gender heterosexuality; 2) same-gender heterosexuality; 3) same-gender homosexuality; and 4) different-gender homosexuality. The first adheres to the heteronormative ideal of a normal and natural sexuality involving a man and a woman. The second still conforms to the heteronormative model, for instance, a lesbian butch and a straight guy. The third involves either two gay men or two bisexuals. And the last constitutes the only possible form of homosexuality in the dominant heterosexist imagination because it seems to preserve, on the surface, a heterosexual structure in same-sex desire; for example, between butch and femme or an effeminate man with a masculine gay (Chang, "Taiwan Queer" 293).

In the context of the three plays under discussion, Fidel and Efren as well as Andy and Mike would fall under same-gender homosexuality. On the other hand, Julie and his male partner as well as the transgender character and her male lover in "Human Voice" would be considered under different-gender homosexuality. In a Third-World realm, the likes of Fidel and Andy seem to embody the vagueness of a phantasm when considered against the stark facticity of 'coming out' as something essentially alien or relatively absent from the local practices. But they continue to resonate among Filipino gays because around here, the real spectacle in "coming out" is not the cataclysmic reversals of Andys nor the primal screams of Fidels but in witnessing the Efrens and how they enact the inherent ruptures and instabilities in their performative reiteration of hegemonic masculinity. It is through these inherent ruptures and instabilities that are presented as indicative of disrup-

tive behavior that same-sex desire can be said to pass through and establish a fugitive site for an erotic interplay.

Among Filipino gays, whether one is a Fidel (covert) or Julie (overt), the primary rhetoric of "coming out" is not the Western idea of gay self-affirmation but the self-articulation of same-sex desire where the very act of speaking already constitutes its meaning. In this manner, articulating one's same sex desire works like a performative—a statement that does not merely convey desire but, in more ways than one, enacts it.

Notes

1. Michael Tan's deployment of "transempire" is predated by the publication in 1979 of *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* by feminist ethicist Janice Raymond who attacks the practice of transsexuality and considers it as a "form of false consciousness." She argues that transsexuals failed to properly analyze the social sources of gender oppression and instead succumbed to outmoded masculine or feminine stereotypes. Her usage of the term "empire" refers to the institutional nature of the entire medical practice in the US of male-to-female surgery and the professional complexes and coalitions that create it in the name of therapy for persons diagnosed with Gender Identity Dysphorial. In response to Raymond, Sandy Stone comes out with "The 'Empire' Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto" in 1991 which is largely credited today for laying the groundwork of transgender studies. As a male-to-female transsexual herself, Stone urged other transsexuals to critically refigure their received notions of an authentic self by abandoning the practice of passing as nontranssexual or as real men or women. In the face of Raymond's anti-transsexual moralism, she suggested the "foregrounding of the practices of inscription and reading which are part of this deliberate invocation of dissonance" by constituting transsexuality as a genre or a set of embodied texts whose potential for productive disruption of structured sexualities and spectra of desire has yet to be explored. She ends her "posttranssexual manifesto" by calling on her "brothers and sisters" to begin laying the groundwork for the next transformation. With regard to this paper, it aligns itself with the polemics of Stone as it resonates with the notion of the "transempire."
2. Textual sources in this paper shall be supplemented by the researcher's own recollection of his experience as an active PETA member from 1991 to 2008.
3. Gender Passing is the concealment or misrepresentation of one's gender. Passing refers to a process whereby a person of one race, gender, sexuality, or sexual orientation adopts the guise of another. For example, transsexual woman who pretends to be a biological woman is said to be gender passing. A closet homosexual who claims to be straight is also said to be gender passing. Passing was originally applied to instances of class passing which is common in the United States and is linked to the notion of upward mobility and the American Dream.
4. This particular production was a special project in partnership with Alliance Francaise de Manille which provided writer, actor, director, and producer Jorge Ledesma with a production grant.

5. Also, sometime in 1994, PETA mounted a staged reading of new plays by young playwrights. One of the plays included was titled, *Last Full Show* by Chris Martinez. The play explores the seedy world of Filipino gays who look for casual sex inside movie houses. The two characters in the play were depicted as "vampiric" in their projection of queer desire as they huddle in the dark.

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