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From *Taroosh* to Tom Jones: Mediating Local and Global
Discourse through 'Gay Lingo'

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Abstract

This essay explores how members of the LGBTQ+ rights organisation, UP *Babaylan*, discursively navigate queer identifications and concepts of belonging, based on fieldwork conducted in Quezon City, Philippines. I argue that elements of ‘gay lingo’, one of many Filipino LGBTQ+ argots, establish interlocutors as members of both LGBTQ+ communities and ‘post-colonial’ Philippines at large, amidst prevailing cultural logics that situate them as external Others. Appropriating and subverting hegemonic structures of language, they utilise local linguistic patterns and reference global queer connectivity in their endeavour to embed themselves within both spheres, illustrating that global concepts are inevitably syncretised through local contexts.

Keywords: LGBTQ+, The Philippines, globalisation, language

Camilo happens to live down the street from where I am staying, and we share a *traysikel*¹ to the Quezon City campus for my first visit to the University of the Philippines (UP). We unearth a shared passion in LGBTQ+² activism and musical theatre on the ride over, although I am quickly established as a novice in both fields by comparison. Camilo prefers speaking in English because it is his first language, and laughs as he tells me that his friends consequently tease him for being a *coño*.³ He also muses that this was probably the reason he had a hard time

¹ Passenger vehicle, essentially a motorised rickshaw

² Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer/Questioning etc

³ Slang that here refers to someone rich and from the country’s capital city, Manila

learning *Babaylan's* 'gay lingo' and jokingly warns me that I won't be able to understand anyone in the organisation. I meet some other students after arriving on campus, and all of us end up cramming into a *dyipne*⁴ to grab a few beers nearby. Mrs. Tan, a decorated drag queen and model, as well as an active member of Babaylan, conspiratorially asks me if I'm religious at all before showing me a video on their phone where they have donned a nun's habit (and not much else) while performing at a night club. They describe themselves to me as "queer, but likes boys" and after I introduce myself as an anthropology student, playfully quizzes me on my knowledge of gender theory - I try to do Judith Butler proud, but I am unsure whether I pass muster.

As the day wears on and Camillo's warning has been long forgotten, a fear starts to set in that I have overestimated how much Filipino I can remember in the ten years since I was last in the Philippines. As the members fill me in on some ongoing drama within the organisation, the conversation is peppered with words like *chopopo* and *taroosh* that I have never heard before; while we discuss where to buy dinner, Welsh singer Tom Jones is mentioned seemingly at random. Someone eventually comments on how lost I look but the group quickly puts me at ease, everyone chiming in to describe the complexities of *Babaylan's* 'gay lingo' and mention examples that they are personally fond of. The discussion moves along and I am intermittently offered translations of certain terms to commit to memory, but I find myself recalling Camillo's comment for the rest of my time in Quezon City.

'Gay lingo' (also known as 'swardspeak' and 'bekimon'⁵) is an umbrella term used by the student members of prominent Filipino LGBTQ+ rights organisation, UP *Babaylan*, for the

⁴ Public transport vehicles originally made from World War II US military jeeps

⁵ *Sward* and *beki* are Filipino colloquialisms referring to gay men

dynamic argots of Filipino LGBTQ+ communities. These argots incorporate several languages such as English and Spanish, and employ intricate, seemingly random wordplay. A key aspect of queer sociality, ‘gay lingo’ confers belonging upon its users as part of queer Filipino collectives such as *Babaylan* and likewise signals their socio-linguistic connections to LGBTQ+ communities on a global scale, the latter being a significant topic of scholarly analysis (Leap & Boellstorff, 2004; Manalansan, 2003; Pascual, 2016).

However, Tom Boellstorff (2005) critiques the main trope of literature exploring queer subjectivities through the lens of globalisation, referring to ‘gay and lesbian movements, structured by similitude... assumed to be globalising and positively affected by globalisation’ (*ibid*: 27). Coined the ‘Gay Planet’, the trope assumes that LGBTQ+ identifications are static and equivalent in cross-cultural analysis. Drawing on Boellstorff, I posit that lived realities are not so easily defined. J. Neil and C. Garcia’s call for a ‘nativist’ perspective is also applicable here, in that subjectivities of LGBTQ+ people in the Global South must first and foremost be situated in their specific cultural and historical contexts as well as engaged in global evaluations (2013). This is especially true in the context of post-colonial Philippines, where LGBTQ+ people must mediate daily between both historic and contemporary concepts of ‘foreign’ and ‘indigenous’, and I argue that ‘gay lingo’ is specific to Filipino linguistic patterns as well as referencing global queer connectivity. By using these argots, *Babaylan* members identify themselves as belonging not only to LGBTQ+ communities but also to the Philippines; by acknowledging the historical and contemporary realities of Filipino queer identification through language, they dispute prevailing colonial logics of a biological gender binary that categorise them as an external Other in the very place they call home.

“FORGING BONDS, CHANGING LIVES”⁶

Upon starting my fieldwork, I was struck by UP *Babaylan*'s reputation as the oldest and largest LGBTQ+ student organisation in Asia, with close links to many other advocacy groups across the Philippines (Santos, 2018). Primarily known for its equality activism, I was told by interlocutors that the student organisation has two main purposes. Firstly, it functions as a human rights advocacy group, campaigning for equal 'SOGIE' (an abbreviation of 'sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression') rights across the Philippines. Although prolifically political, *Babaylan* was most often described by members as outstanding in its role of fostering a sense of LGBTQ+ validation and even family. Accordingly, its second purpose is being a support group for those who regularly face social, political, and/or economic discrimination because of their gender and/or sexuality identifications.

While *Babaylan* members hail from all over the Philippines, and UP Diliman is a coeducational public institution, it is worth highlighting that everyone I interviewed was either a university student or graduate. They were all fluent in English (the significance of which I will later discuss), with access to several resources of gender, queer, and political theory. Considering this positionality, I was able to establish connections being of similar age, occupation, being able to speak Filipino, and identifying as part of the LGBTQ+ community myself. With that said, I have lived abroad for most of my life and was unfamiliar with the nuances of local queer culture and discourse in Quezon City, as my initial encounter with *taroosh* and Tom Jones illustrates. I am also afforded certain structural privileges due to being mixed race and white-passing, and cannot claim to fully empathise with my interlocutors' experiences. Alongside my personal limitations, I recognise that I can only speak to the experiences and 'gay lingo' of a specific subset of the Filipino LGBTQ+ community here. Quezon City makes for a very

⁶ *Babaylan*'s motto

particular fieldsite, an urban hub that was once the capital city of the Philippines. It still holds the titles of having the largest population and geographic area in Metropolitan Manila,⁷ which in turn is the seat of Filipino government. Although *Babaylan* members came from an assortment of socio-economic backgrounds, they develop very different worldviews to LGBTQ+ people living in rural provinces for instance, being university educated and currently situated within an urban locale (Benedicto, 2014). As well as being enthusiastic social activists that choose to place themselves in the public eye (for example, through widely advertised LGBTQ+ Pride events held on campus), members also have relatively heightened mobility and access to LGBTQ+ and/or politically charged spaces, discourses, and cultures. Although this ultimately lies beyond the scope of my essay, I acknowledge these details in a bid to avoid a common critique of literature concerning queer communities; that analyses of ‘middle-class’ or urban experiences are often applied across other groups where intersections of socio-economic status and geographic location are markedly different (Sinfield, 2000). The advantages of living in urban locales only go so far however, considering the ingrained nature of sexuality and gender inequality that interlocutors articulated over the course of my fieldwork.

‘CONTRACTING COLONIALISM’:⁸ ORAL ORIGINS OF BIOLOGICAL BINARY

Many members consistently acknowledged that the contemporary national identification of ‘Filipino’ could not be detached from colonial encroachments of the past. This complex history binds present-day Philippines both linguistically and ideologically to the Spanish project of Roman Catholic conversion from 1565 to 1898 (Rafael, 1988), and the successive period of American imperialism from 1898 to 1946 (Thompson, 2003). As I exemplify throughout this

⁷ The ‘National Capital Region of the Philippines’, one of three definitive metropolitan areas across the archipelago

⁸ Referencing Vicente Rafael’s 1988 book of the same name

essay, these were neither passive nor uniformly successful processes, but the invalidation of LGBTQ+ identifications in contemporary Filipino culture and politics is frequently attributed to colonially implemented hierarchies in both scholarly and mainstream discourse (Garcia, 2013; Rafael, 1988). These remnants are often set in opposition to the perception of pre-contact ethnic groups as egalitarian and fluid in their conceptions of gender and sexuality, heteronormative or otherwise (Brewer, 1999).⁹

In contrast, the rigid biological binary of heterosexual ‘man’ and ‘woman’ was subscribed to by patriarchal Spanish ideologies and employed throughout the Philippines during the colonial project (Brewer, 1999)¹⁰. In the records of missionaries, shamans were particularly emphasised as non-conformers to such binaries (*ibid*). Once elevated figures in local social hierarchies, shamans were considered the key intermediaries of spiritual welfare in animist pre-contact cultures, known as *babaylan* in the indigenous language of the Visayan area (UP *Babaylan*’s namesake). Although predominantly designated as ‘women’, they were also noted to be ‘men’ who cross-dressed, whose sexuality was unclear, and/or exhibited behaviours that were delegated to be ‘feminine’ by Spanish gender norms, blurring the delineation of superior ‘male’ and subordinate ‘female’ (*ibid*). These disparities would serve as the basis on which Spanish missionaries went on to quite literally demonise such figures in the new cultural and religious order being established, branded ‘abominable sin[s] against nature’ by transgressing the supposedly inherent demarcations of gendered behaviour (Brewer, 1999: 19). Thus, shamans’ eminent status dwindled as various ethnic groups across the archipelago gradually converted

⁹ I do acknowledge however that the framing of pre-colonial societies as inherently ‘good’ and accepting of all gender and sexuality identifications against the colonial advent as inherently ‘bad’ and exclusionary is a romanticised and generalising notion in itself

¹⁰ I myself must rely on similar terms in English that are ultimately confined by Euro-American norms, based upon definitions of biologically sexed bodies that are historically and culturally contingent (Butler, 1990)

to Catholicism and began to view sexuality and gender non-conformers in a similarly ‘unnatural’ light.

The Filipino national language itself now is a result of the archipelago’s complex history, being a standardised, ‘universalist’ fusion of Spanish, English, and pre-colonial Philippine languages (Gonzalez, 1998: 488). Offering an example with the Visayan curse word *yawa*, one member I interviewed further illustrated how Spanish religious discourses continue to undermine non-conformers such as the eminent *babaylan* through language. The etymology of *yawa* is strongly attributed to a Visayan goddess named *Malitong Yawa*, a powerful *babaylan* in an indigenous folk epic that exemplifies the egalitarian gender norms of pre-colonial ethnic groups (Zafra, 2016). Such a narrative did not align with the ideologies of Spanish colonisers, who went on to appropriate local oral traditions in translation as a method to establish Christian ideals and patriarchal power structures (Rafael, 1988). Friars purportedly began using *yawa* in derogatory contexts to mean ‘devil’ and, given their frequent interactions with indigenous peoples in their local languages, this distorted meaning eventually transformed the word into a curse in casual use, even by the interlocutor who relayed this story to me (Zafra, 2016).

Despite the impact of Catholicism, the Spanish language itself was only spoken by around 3% of the Filipino population upon invasion by the United States’ military forces (Thompson, 2003: 16). American imperialism perpetuated much of the same gender binarism already established. Their military presence had previously ‘liberated’ other colonies over the course of the Spanish-American War, and was similarly justified by the United States’ government as a bid for Philippine freedom from their oppression under the Spanish (*ibid*: 14). Given that the bulk of the population was formally ‘uneducated’ and divided by their use of numerous languages, free schools were subsequently established across the archipelago. The exclusive

use of English in these institutions sought to usher in the era of a more ‘progressive’ Philippines, a ‘tool to enrich, ennoble, and empower Filipinos from every walk of life’ (Thompson, 2003: 22), while indigenous languages and social structures were reduced as obstacles to modernity (Osborne, 2017: 121). Euro-American biomedicine, rooted in the same ideologies of binary gender and sexuality implemented by the Spanish over three centuries beforehand, was also institutionalised and naturalised through the education system, aiming to further ‘modernise’ the country (Garcia, 2013: 53). The Philippines was eventually granted formal independence from American sovereignty in 1946, but the legacy of its imperialism has secured fluent English as a form of social capital across the archipelago, alongside its institution as the country’s second national language (Gonzalez, 1998: 496; Osborne, 2017: 119). If we recall the label of *coño* in response to Camillo’s linguistic proficiency and the perceived elitism this garnered, it appears such attitudes still linger in collective memory.

CONTEMPORARY ‘SIDE-EFFECTS’

Both individuals and institutions within contemporary urban Philippines largely acknowledge only cisgender and heterosexual identifications in the wake of this tumultuous past, and non-conformity is often branded an illness or sin by mainstream dialogues and religious doctrine (Garcia, 2013: 60). I do acknowledge here that individual agency should be considered when discussing hegemonic structures and imbalances of power (Rafael, 1988), and my interlocutors themselves evidence that such interactions are varied and complex. However, it is difficult to deny the influence of colonial perspectives that now emanate through Filipino society at large. These entrenched ideologies are also woven through contemporary political agendas, providing the current administration with ammunition to render non-heteronormative genders and sexualities abhorrent or simply invisible in the eyes of the state. Although President Rodrigo Duterte’s public stance on same-sex marriage has oscillated on multiple occasions, his recent

statement at an event held in Myanmar references and criticises concepts of gender fluidity (CNN Philippines Staff, 2017):

“Wala nang gender because you can be a he or she... yun ang kultura nila. ‘Di kayo lang, hindi ‘yan pwede sa amin. Katoliko kami at there is the Civil Code, which says that you can only marry a woman for me... for a woman to marry a man. [sic]”

“There is no more gender because you can be a he or a she... that’s what their culture is. Well that’s only them, we can’t have that here. We are Catholics and there is the Civil Code, which says that you can only marry a woman for me... for a woman to marry a man. [sic]”

Alongside these statements that delegate non-heteronormative genders and unions to ‘their’ (i.e. ‘Western’) culture, recent surveys taken to gauge Filipino attitudes towards the civil unions of same-sex couples reveal that 61% of the respondents oppose any law that would allow them, based predominantly on religious grounds (Brewer, 1999; Deslate, 2017; *Social Weather Stations*, 2018). If we take political denunciation into account alongside the deeply ingrained nature of Catholicism within contemporary Filipino culture, the status that non-heteronormative genders and sexualities currently hold is one of ‘abnormal’ character or total obscurity. Whatever they may be, such identifications seem to have no place in the mainstream ideology of what is ‘Filipino’, rendering them a politicised Other against institutionalised heterosexuality (Heckert, 2004: 105). The parameters of group belonging are not simply about abstract concepts, but very tangibly dictate who may or may not speak or act; who is considered part of society and who is not (Weston, 1995: 104). These socio-historically complex

discourses, as well as the negotiations of power and legitimacy that they showcase, set the context in which LGBTQ+ communities navigate the Filipino language in the present day.

‘GAY LINGO’ ON THE ‘GAY PLANET’

As well as signalling belonging to specific social groups (Pascual, 2016), the selection and employment of specific words and phrases creates a new vocabulary for marginalised genders and sexualities with which they can define themselves, instead of being defined by outsiders (Kulick, 2000; Leap & Boellstorff, 2004). Similar techniques are utilised within ‘Polari’, the ‘anti-language’ of gay men in twentieth century London (Baker, 2003). ‘Polari’ allowed its speakers to envision and enact a clandestine group identity, tracing the evolving status of LGBT people in England at the time of its conception; the ‘anti-language’ was constructed partially from slang and cants of other ostracised communities such as criminals and sailors, concealing gay subculture from outsiders during a period in which homosexual activity was criminalised (*ibid*). I argue that *Babaylan*’s ‘gay lingo’ creates a similar sense of LGBTQ+ belonging and performativity in a likewise discriminative environment but highlights non-heteronormative identifications rather than concealing them, using globalised language to mediate local concepts.

The incorporation of English words into ‘gay lingo’ and gender and/or sexuality identification was a recurring element amongst *Babaylan* members, deliberately illuminating and validating the LGBTQ+ subjectivities that heteronormative Filipino culture tends to obfuscate. This borrows from everyday Filipino speech that incorporates select English words and phrases when addressing ‘concepts of high sociocultural value’, a phenomenon known as ‘Taglish’ that I later explore in more depth (Osborne, 2017: 118; Thompson, 2003). A frequent example amongst my interlocutors was the deliberate use of word ‘gay’ in English instead of its rough

equivalent in Filipino *bakla*, as I discuss in more detail below. While Filipino as a language is arguably more inclusive of sexuality and gender diversity, for instance all pronouns being gender neutral, rigid social attitudes and binaries make it difficult for members to articulate and thus validate their identifications when navigating Filipino society at large. A key example and commonly used term amongst *Babaylan* members is the abbreviation ‘SOGIE’, mentioned earlier. It has increasingly been used within United Nations documents and by non-government organisations in lieu of the powerhouse ‘LGBT’ and its various QIA+¹¹ additions, acronyms considered by interlocutors to be unwieldly at best and exclusive of lesser known or more marginalised identifications at worst (Deslate, 2017). ‘SOGIE’ is thus the term preferred by current members in more formal or politically charged contexts, although variants of LGBTQ+ are employed out of habit or for simplicities’ sake in everyday discourse, still being the most widely recognised acronyms. Initially unaware of these nuances, I asked Camillo to describe his identification within the LGBTQ+ community during an interview, and his response summarised their significance:

“I use ‘gay’ [for sexual orientation] of course, because learning ‘SOGIE’ and everything, I’m still a ‘cisgender’¹² male [rather] than just ‘gay’. My gender expression is ‘queer’ because, I don’t know, I’ve never really been either one, very masculine or very feminine... that’s the only thing that I can’t quite pinpoint. I can box myself as ‘gay’, but my gender expression, I can’t really box it in to any of them so I just put it as ‘queer’. I don’t really use *bakla* because... there are different tones when it comes to [*bakla*] in the Philippines. Some people like it better also, it more encapsulates gender

¹¹ ‘Intersex’, ‘Asexual’ etc

¹² Identifying as the gender you were assigned at birth

expression and everything based on how we use it here. But I don't know, because [Filipino] culture kind of clumped everyone in *bakla*.”

Other members of the organisation also followed this pattern, using the ‘SOGIE’ acronym to articulate their identifications. As well as acknowledging LGBTQ+ diversity, the use of English in gender and sexuality identification illustrates how these words can act as substitutes for concepts made subversive in Filipino. Although *bakla* was often used amongst members as an umbrella term for any non-heterosexual/cisgender identification, Camillo pointed out the problematic connotations that the word was still imbued with. Having been reclaimed from its mainstream use as an insult directed towards ‘feminine’ men, *bakla* had a similar trajectory to the English word ‘gay’, both implemented as casual umbrella terms within LGBTQ+ social circles. However, these words still have derogatory implications when used by heterosexual people and are considered to lack inclusivity by some members of the LGBTQ+ community itself, given their common reference to cisgender homosexual men specifically (Kulick, 2000: 243, Manalansan, 2003: 23).

The English word ‘queer’ has a comparable history as a slur and was a term I heard in multiple contexts during conversations with *Babaylan* members. Employed here by Camillo and earlier by Mrs. Tan, it is often used to describe an identification that defies the restrictions of hegemonic masculine/feminine and heterosexual/homosexual binaries (Garcia, 2013). Coming into vogue in the early 1990s, the ‘queer’ identifier was invoked in the Global North with the intention of elucidating issues of exclusivity, brought to light by intersectional perspectives on sexuality and gender theory, practices, and identifications (Butler, 1990; Kulick, 2000). Its use by *Babaylan* members echoes this, especially with consideration to how the complexity of ‘SOGIE’ identification is often obfuscated and misunderstood in the contemporary Filipino

context (Garcia, 2013). While the deliberate choice of these ‘Western’ terms draws upon specifically situated vocabulary, the personalised meanings they come to be infused with in diaspora indicate that such identifications do not always exist as static entities (Butler, 1990). They are used to suit the individual and their own gender performance and/or identification, revealing the dynamism of gender outside of the hegemonic binary.

Like many other globalised concepts of queer theory, these linguistic forms are widely employed and compared cross-culturally, with translation being as much about cultural negotiation as it can be about ideological dominance (Rafael, 1988). The meaning and motivation behind the implementation of such forms differ greatly, but global comparisons in the analysis of ‘gay lingo’ can only go so far in the Filipino context, as I will now expand upon (Manalansan, 2003: 47). Recalling Garcia’s (2013) call for a ‘nativist’ perspective, I now turn to referents of ‘gay lingo’ that are linked to Filipino linguistic elements specifically, engaging with concepts of national belonging as well as that of queer ‘modernity’ at large (Manalansan, 2003).

LOCAL LEXICONS

Terms of identification may be comparable in translation, but their specific ideological origins are also vital to consider, such as the parallels drawn earlier between *bakla* and ‘gay’. Similar discursive gaps in studies of sexuality have not gone unnoticed in contemporary anthropology, and the advent of scholarly literature originating from authors in the Global South has begun to fill the fissures of previous analyses (Garcia, 2013; Manalansan, 2006). The ‘gay’ identifier in English has certainly evolved from its original reference to cisgender men sexually attracted only to other cisgender men, but *bakla* has always had more ambiguous meanings in the Filipino language (Manalansan, 2003: 25). The term refers to *physical* transgression of binary

gender norms, and discursively tends to treat practices of cross-dressing, ‘effeminate’ behaviour, and same sex intercourse as synonymous. It is commonly understood to mean a ‘female heart’ (i.e. ‘female wants and needs’) driving a biologically male body, regardless of individual gender and/or sexuality identification (*ibid*). The additional layers of colonial ideologies already discussed lend the term a unique and complex place in the Filipino context, and it is against the specific backdrop of the Philippines that I now consider features of *Babaylan*’s ‘gay lingo’, irrespective of the language being utilised. I argue that their ‘gay lingo’ reworks familiar linguistic structures alongside colonial concepts of gender demarcation, relating to rather than rejecting inclusion into a Filipino national identification. By appropriating familiar linguistic patterns as tools of Filipino LGBTQ+ discourses, members subvert hegemonic structures of language rather than passively participating in or discarding them altogether, aiming to validate the vernaculars of marginalised genders and sexualities that popular discourse commonly discount (Osborne, 2017; Pascual, 2016; Rafael, 1988).

While the various ‘gay lingos’ of LGBTQ+ subcategories each have their own distinctive features, common patterns include the repetition of syllables and the addition of new suffixes to existing Filipino words, for example the transformations of *gwapo*¹³ to *chopopo* or *taray*¹⁴ to *taroosh* in the organisation’s lexicon that initially perplexed me.¹⁵ The adorning of words in this manner is not unique to this argot however, and is also a distinctive feature of *jejemon*, a Filipino vernacular of instant messaging popular amongst young adults (Schacter & Balaguer, 2017: 280). Originating as a style that truncated words to save money on mobile texts, the term has evolved to conversely refer to the deliberate lengthening and embellishing of words as a method of expressing certain emotions and concepts. Despite having become somewhat of a

¹³ Meaning ‘handsome’

¹⁴ Meaning ‘bratty’, ‘bitchy’

¹⁵ Both root words being of Spanish and Tagalog ethno-linguistic group origins respectively

pop culture phenomenon across the Philippines in recent years, it is still broadly perceived to signify belonging to subcultures of lower socio-economic classes (*ibid*), much like the use of ‘gay lingo’ confers belonging to the LGBTQ+ community (Manalansan, 2003: 48; Pascual, 2016). Intentional linguistic complexity is therefore not confined to use in Filipino LGBTQ+ argots. Across the archipelago, such language work is commonplace amongst socially and/or economically marginalised groups as a form of self-determination and expression, even breaking into the mainstream in some instances as evidenced by *jejemon* (Pascual, 2016; Schacter & Balaguer, 2017). This is also the case with some jargon of Filipino ‘gay lingo’, such as the word *jowa*¹⁶ which I even heard in casual use by heterosexual members of my own family.¹⁷ Although specific argots signify belonging to distinct groups, the methods by which the jargon of various Filipino subcultures are created seem to follow very similar linguistic patterns. Their use can even be found amongst those outside the social group, evidencing how marginal communities can simultaneously interact with and reference links to the nation at large, rather than shunning it altogether (Abastillas, 2018; Pascual, 2016).

Here I return once more to the use of English in everyday speech, but on the national scale. Although total fluency is attributed to higher levels of education (Gonzalez, 1998: 496), English still permeates every strata of the socioeconomic order through the phenomenon of ‘Taglish’ mentioned previously. Combining the words ‘Tagalog’¹⁸ and ‘English’, this term refers to the scattering of English words and phrases in amongst everyday Filipino speech to indicate emphasis, formality, and value (Osborne, 2017; Thompson, 2003). The unification of English and Filipino is a deliberate conflation of imperial ‘modernity’ and notions of tradition in establishing a national identity and English promoted as a lingua franca in order to subvert

¹⁶ Gender-neutral term referring to a romantic partner

¹⁷ A potential area of interest that goes beyond the scope of this essay could address the question of how such discourse is being received and interpreted by cisgender heterosexual Filipinos

¹⁸ Language of the pre-colonial Tagalog ethnic group

its perceived dominance and associations with the elite (Osborne, 2017). These negotiations of language and meaning are thus indicative of how ‘Taglish’ can function to mediate contexts and identifications that are seemingly opposed (Manalansan, 2003: 48). The designation of ‘foreign’ language as supposedly superior and the ‘indigenous’ as inferior in Filipino culture can also be traced back to the Spanish colonial project of religious conversion. Vicente Rafael analyses how the translation of Spanish religious vocabulary and ideology was in fact a ‘double process of appropriating and replacing what is foreign while keeping its foreignness’ (1988, p. xvii), rather than a totalising erasure of indigenous culture. Similarly, ‘Taglish’ users like my interlocutors situate themselves as valid actors within a globalised world whilst simultaneously maintaining a definitive sense of Filipino national identification (Osborne, 2017).

Notably, ‘Taglish’ as a post-colonial subversion plays a significant part in *Babaylan’s* ‘gay lingo’. English wordplay and puns are employed by utilising Filipino as a phonetic base, for example in the phrase *tom jones*: the Filipino word for hungry is *gutom*, the syllables of which are switched to form the slang *tom-guts*. This in turn was perceived as sounding like the name of Welsh singer Tom Jones, and so *tom jones* is used to mean ‘hungry’ in the specific ‘gay lingo’ that my interlocutors used. With the Filipino linguistic context in mind, the references to both *jejemon* and ‘Taglish’ by *Babaylan* members here can be seen to function as devices mediating value and meaning. The specific use of language in this manner not only conflates LGBTQ+ cultures with visibility and value, colonially opposed domains, but additionally conflates LGBTQ+ cultures with Filipino culture more generally (Garcia, 2013; Manalansan, 2003; Osborne, 2017). The ‘gay lingo’ of the organisation therefore emerges as a product of contemporary Filipino discourse, responding to and subverting the linguistic projects that once reworked the name of a *babaylan* goddess to a Biblical curse, and attempts to reverse the Othering of LGBTQ+ identification in the collective conscience of the Philippines at large.

CONCLUSION

Globalised concepts of contemporary queer theory are imperative in helping us situate certain discourses through cross-cultural analysis, but such comparisons can only take us so far. It is also vital to consider the culturally specific complexity of colonial influences, especially those discussed here that have worked to linguistically erase the diversity of Filipino gender and sexuality identifications, as well as making the national language itself hierarchically inferior (Garcia, 2013; Osborne, 2017: 119). If we examine linguistic concepts on a comprehensive scale, it is possible to identify trends across queer lexicons but this similarity perhaps does not function in the way that the ‘Gay Planet’ trope implies; that every aspect of LGBTQ+ verbiage can be reduced to direct cross-cultural parallels that laud the inclusivity of globalisation (Boellstorff, 2005; Manalansan, 2003).

I argue that ‘gay lingo’ used by UP *Babaylan* members does not reject hegemonic Filipino cultural norms outright but subverts the way they are usually implemented, resulting in linguistic transformations like *taroosh*, and revealing their variability and deliberate social construction (Butler, 1990; Manalansan, 2003). The use of other languages are additional tools in this endeavour, exemplifying how global discourses can create concepts of identification that span continents and connect Wales to Quezon City through the playful punning of pop singers, as well as articulating local LGBTQ+ practices and aspirations (Boellstorff, 2005: 6). This incorporation also addresses a key pitfall of the ‘Gay Planet’ trope and globalisation theory itself; imbuing global discourse with culturally unique meaning eventually and inevitably transforms it into local discourse, regardless of where in the world it originated (*ibid*; Garcia, 2013).

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