Abstract

As regulatory discourses that Filipinos have needed to assimilate across the post/colonial centuries, Christianity and heteronormativity are mythologies that lend themselves to reinterpretation and "translation." This article presents the argument that contemporary Filipino creatives who are fond of doing mythopoeias—retellings or adaptations of mythological narratives—and are seeking interesting material to work with may look to how the beliefs and practices of Catholicism and heteronormativity have been resignified and transformed in the devotional and gendered lives of contemporary Filipinos. In the ritual enactments of their everyday lives, the Filipino folk Catholic and the *bakla*, *tibo*, and other Filipino "queers" may be seen to be "repurposing" and/or translating the stories of Christianity and gender into their own mythopoetic performances, which Filipino creatives may not need to imaginatively tinker with or retell but may indeed simply choose to document or describe.

Keywords

folk
catholic
bakla
creation stories
santo niño

TRANSLATIONAL MYTHOLOGIES:

Christianity and Gender (and Queerness) in the Philippines[1]

J. NEIL C. GARCIA

FOR THIS PRESENTATION, I wish to make a case for the old idea that Christianity, like all religions, is itself a mythology, and as such it is material that creative writers can use in their mythopoetic undertakings.

A mythology is a body of interconnected and powerfully resonant stories, communal in origin, that seek to approach the truth of mystery through the movements and evocations of narrative and figurative language.[2]

Myth is the name we give to these stories, which other than gesture toward the mystical also describe and explain reality and function as a social technology that can guide and bind the members of a community together.[3] Myths can do this because they bid us to accept their descriptions and explanations as a matter of religious faith.

It is important to realize that the distinction of our mythopoetic projects is they tap into the power of myths as a matter no longer of religious but rather of poetic faith. It is the enduring relevance of mythology that even as its explanatory value has been overtaken in our world by materialist

knowledge systems—for instance, mechanistic science—it continues to embody aspirations, desires, and intuitions of the transcendental. From immemorial times, myths have offered these intuitions to humanity, both as a form of consolation and as an abiding source of hope.

With this presentation, I wish to encourage us to engage with the mythology of Christianity—and also, not exactly incidentally, the mythology of gender—the way we would with the variety of precolonial *alamat* and *mito* that so many young Filipino creatives are already busily rehashing, reworking, and retelling. This task should be especially interesting and exciting to carry out when we see that the way our people practice these myths is already mediated, or translational. Once we appreciate the fact that the practices and beliefs of the majority of our people, their "folk Catholicism," are the translations of this originally colonial religion into our native mythological idioms and sensibilities, then the creative work of appropriating—in a manner of speaking, also translating—these practices and beliefs becomes all the more curious and fascinating (and all the more uniquely our own).

Let us begin, then, from the beginning. As we know, in our country, bamboo as an image has mythic undertones: In a famous creation story (comparable versions of which may be found all over our archipelago[4]), it was from this primeval reed that the first man and woman emerged, after it had been cleft into two by the beak of a fantastic bird (some versions equate this bird with the creator deity itself).

As some of us may remember, this story has been invoked by local and regional feminists as an enabling myth, an "antidote" to the Judeo-Christian account of creation, which legitimizes the masculinist oppression of women[5] (because Eve merely comes out of Adam's side, implying that Eve is Adam's property). By contrast, in the story of the bamboo, man and woman are practically twins and thereby equals, born into creation at the same instance—children of the same vegetal source.

This last point is important, for instead of the violent dualism between nature and humanity—a dualism ontologized to the point of despair by Judeo-Christianity, which has deemed nature, ergo the body and its appetites, as fallen and needing "redemption" through the "corrective" rituals of codified religion—this mythology intuits and posits a continuity between the human and the worldly, and between the worldly and the divine.

Filipino cosmogonies understand gender difference as being underpinned by an elemental unity, and therefore as complementary rather than hierarchical, something that the native languages of the

Philippines, all pronominally gender-unitarian, themselves also reveal. (On the other hand, it's also worth noting that one of the precolonial Tagalog names for gender-crossers, *bayoguin*,[6] derived from the name of a native species of clumping bamboo, *bayog*, which is slightly narrower but also, interestingly, sturdier than the common bamboo.)

This myth provides me now the occasion to ponder the question of locating Christianity in our colonial past and decolonizing present, particularly as prismed through the question of gender. Crucial to understanding the difference that colonialism has made in the lives of its subjects across the world is the idea and reality of translation, which is commonly interlingual (meaning, across languages; for example, Spanish and English and our plenitude of local languages) and intralingual (meaning, synonyms) but also *intersemiotic*, meaning, across sign systems—which in our case would be our immemorial orality, on the one hand, and our uneven and "modern" literacy on the other.[7]

That there is no seamless or complete translation or "conversion" across languages and signifying frames is something that we who have been working in this area of study already clearly understand. In many ways, postcolonial resistance, *decoloniality*, is nothing if not the recognition of this fact—of the dialogic nature of colonial power,[8] of colonial authority's ever-frustrated need to be perfectly translated in order to be recognized and acknowledged by its subjects, and of the syncretism or hybridity that necessarily ensues out of the project of conversion/translation, which is to say, out of the representational and therefore cultural project of colonialism itself.

To be more specific, the question of translation bids us to remember how the imposition of religious dogma and sexological thinking, courtesy of the Spanish and American dispensations, did not completely displace nor supplant existing understandings of the mysterious and the divine, and of their relationship to the bodily or the sexual, even as the intervening centuries did admittedly change—which is to say, *did translate*—these indigenous practices and beliefs into new and hybrid forms.

Recognizing the truth of this translational difference—the incommensurability between source and target—is not necessarily an easy or self-evident task, however. We already know that equivalence is an illusion that any work of translation may either flag or dissimulate. In the former case, the target text's language ends up becoming self-ironic or "foreignized," while in the latter, it is made uniform or "domesticated."[9] Generally speaking, the practice of the scholars of our colonial and postcolonial histories and

cultures, writing primarily in English, has been characterized by a mostly domesticizing form of translation—if these scholars have even acknowledged that they have been translating ideas and realities, to begin with.

On the other hand, the mediation of knowledges occurs everywhere in our society, and scholarship, which is analytical in its orientation, need not bear the brunt of our attention, in this regard. There are of course the normative apparatuses, for example religious institutions, which are typically purveyors of education and moral instruction. Being self-conscious that they are in the business of translating is generally not the case with these institutions, which do not typically analyze but promulgate and enforce discourses. To wit: It's simply not in the interest of our Church authorities to acknowledge, let alone endorse or celebrate, the "translatedness" (hence, the distortion) of the Faith as it has been received and as it is being practiced by our people. A schism with the Roman magisterium lies this way, even as it's true that this highest dogma-setting structure of the Catholic Church has, since the Second Vatican Council, been grudgingly giving tokenistic room for what it calls "folk expressions" among the multicultural faithful spread across the globalized world (for example, in the area of liturgical music).

And yet, translationality—which is to say, hybridity—is indeed how things mostly are in our postcolonial society, in which residual animist and ancestral beliefs stubbornly inform and stimulate the devotional life of many Filipinos. Intoning the words of the "Ama Namin" (Pater Noster), our understanding of Divine Will as "loob" takes it not so much as absolute and inexorable—which is to say, the imposition of a commandment—as personally affective and negotiable, even as, in our everyday lives, our adherence to folk ways of familialism and situational or "noncategorical" thinking demonstrates yet again the persistence of orality's psychodynamics despite or precisely because of the tenuous presence of textuality in our lives. We may recall that the Filipino concept of the inner life, of the deeply experiential world of *kalooban*, is of course lexically rich and eminently interpretable, being the root word of more than 200 psychological—more accurately, psychospiritual—derivatives.[10]

Think of the national "cults" of the Santo Niño, and how they reveal our people's preference for the image of a God who is docile and malleable, a pink-cheeked, cherubic, and mild-mannered child-deity who is amenable and bespoke to its devotees, arrayed and attired in the manner that they are. The Santo Niño fiesta in Tondo is particularly instructive, here: The feast-day procession that starts in the afternoon and ends toward midnight sees

a cornucopia of assorted images of the Holy Child, perched on colorfully bedecked *carrozas* and practically dressed like dolls, representing the interests of the specific segments of the local populations bearing them aloft.

In all the times I've participated in this "maringal na prusisyon," I've seen Santo Niños dressed as a fireman, a basketball player (complete with jersey and branded sneakers), a fisherman, a *panadero*, a street sweeper (or Metro Aide), a policeman, a muscle-shirt-wearing gym rat, even as what appeared to be a fabulously coiffed and feather-boa-wearing Moulin rouge dancer (these last two images were sponsored by the association of Tondo's gym owners and beauticians, respectively). As against the well-known scriptural lesson, to Filipinos, the Santo Niño is God taking after their pied images, in all their fleshly multiplicity: the celestial that follows the earthly, cast as it deliriously is in the likenesses of a variously embodied humanity.[11]

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bz1mDbO9D4

In other words, across the last five centuries, the mythological system of Christianity has needed to dialogue with and in the process become translated by and through the mythological systems of our archipelago in order to become locally viable and take root. This translation hasn't been just across languages but also across the oral/scriptural divide, and its resultant deformations—indigenizations—bear these dynamics out.

Again: Think of the Tagalog singsong *pasyon* and how it nativizes the Gospel narratives to such a powerful degree that it has effectively subsumed, into itself, the epic energies of the Tagalog communities, whose indigenous heroic tales it has come to eclipse, precisely because of their analogous thematic and internal

"movements." Among other things, this indigenization saw the transposition of Christianity's sacrificial story from the ahistorical to the historical: As our nationalist critics have come to discover, in the early twentieth century, it was the pasyon that provided Filipino revolutionaries the inspiration and guiding ideology in their struggle against colonial rule.[12]

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MGMcR3Dy7l0

Nonetheless, because Christianity and our own folklore are both forms of mythology—in which resonant imagery and powerful narrative play crucial roles—their similarity lies, inevitably, in their figurative nature. To be specific,

what this means is that their stories, wondrously diverse as they are, do gesture toward and express comparable yearnings for transcendence. Despite the fact that they are products of vastly disparate histories and cultures, this desire for transcendence, for the "Spirit," is arguably their foremost contact zone, their common *tenor*—even as their metaphorical *vehicles,* as culturally specific fictions, have of course been appreciably divergent.

This translational state of affairs may be evidenced in gender, as well. As it is presently biomedically defined and heteronormatively organized, even in our country gender is a regulatory discourse—in a manner of speaking, a socially imposed mythology—in which bodies are identified and expected to identify with and perform social roles according to the binary model of masculinity and femininity grounded in assigned birth sex, believed to be self-evident, factual, and immutable. *Kasarian*, the Filipino term for gender, with the root *sari*, arguably performs this categorizing procedure, as well, specifying the *tao* ("person") into *lalaki* ("man") or *babae* ("woman").

However, this recognition of duality is challenged by its absence in the pronominal system of any of our country's 180 languages on one hand, and on the other by the existence of indigenous words, spread across our archipelago, for "gender-crossers," similar to contemporary trans identities, except that they are not premised on—primarily because they chronologically and conceptually predate—the anatomical dimorphism of the biomedical discourse within which these trans (as opposed to cis) identities have come to exist in the modern West. In fact, up to now, *bakla* and their counterparts across the archipelago—*agi*, *bayot*, *bantut*, *binabae*, etc.—continue to evince a predominantly gender concept, which bespeaks a kind of "psychospiritual depth"—of being "woman-hearted" or having a feminine kalooban, on the one hand, and in terms of sexual desire of being masculine-fixated, otherwise described in the literature as being slavishly fascinated with the "real man" or *tunay na lalaki*, on the other.[13]

Held in esteem during precolonial times, these traditional identities have, however, been progressively sexologized and demeaned across the colonial and postcolonial centuries, and are now the bearers of the stigma of the pathologizing discourse of homo/sexuality. Nonetheless, a deconstructive possibility is inherent in "sari" itself, which can pertain to notions of type, variety, or kind that are not even remotely related to genitality, on the one hand, and on the other when repeated reveals a principle of plenitude and diversity (*sari-sari*), which conceptually proliferates and pluralizes personhood, embodiment, or even being in

general, thus challenging binaristic thinking itself. These derivations from the word "sari" enable "kasarian" to engender nondualistic and polyvalent possibilities, both on the level of gendered personhood and expression, on the one hand, and the sexual desires that attend them on the other.

A "theme" I therefore see and would like to recognize but not necessarily elaborate on here is the translated and therefore "problematic" situation of dualistic logic—central to both Christianity and the secular discourses of Western modernity—in our cultures, in which the residual energies of the "unifying" vision of our precolonial orality persist. Doubtless, the possibilities offered by nonbinary thinking can prove to be very generative in our creative engagements with myth.

In my keynote[14] for the First National Queer Studies Conference, sponsored by the Center for Gender and Women's Studies of the University of the Philippines a year ago, I discussed the insights of *nonduality* that may be found, in great measure, in the ancient epic corpus, the oral *sugidanon*,[15] of the Panay Bukidnon people.

In these chanted epic cycles, oppositions are recognized and yet finally superseded, in the tales of beautiful sorceresses transforming themselves into intrepid datus (in order to defend their own dignity), of a cave-dwelling villainess who is really a selfless and benevolent mother, of a gallant hero who cravenly steals a she-monster's golden pubic hair, and of vanquished usurpers becoming revealed as long-lost relatives (like an uncle or a sibling) and resurrected by the almighty grandmother goddess for the sake of harmony and peace.

At the end of my keynote, I invited the scholars working in Philippine queer studies to precisely tap into our country's abundant reserve of oral and folk "energies," still vibrant in our many native languages and lore, whose reality and force remain mostly spoken rather than written, and therefore continue to be uncodified and bracingly vital. In that keynote, I called this task, in our case, a Philippine-specific form of "queering the queer."

At this point, allow me to briefly engage with the question of "queerness."

As we know, within the activist and academic discourses of contemporary anglophonic globality, more and more "queer" is functioning as the shorthand for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and other extranormative identities and sexualities. A refunctioned pejorative, its provenance in the West, particularly in the US, includes its deployment in the AIDS/HIV activist movement in the 1990s, when this disease was entirely lethal, although during the same period it was also being invoked in critical theory

circles as a postfoundational category[16] that gestured toward but also profoundly troubled both conventional and progressive understandings of gender, sexuality, identity, subjectivity, and political action.

Queer's currency in the Philippines is mostly confined to urban-centered activist and academic communities, although among the country's anglophone youth cultures, which enjoy global connectivity through IT gadgets like smartphones, it is being used more and more as a form of self-identification, which bespeaks an openness to complexity as far as gender and sexual identities are concerned. It's important to say that, as with the other earlier anglophone categories—like gay, lesbian, and bisexual—queer as it is circulating in the Philippines's linguistically dynamic, culturally simultaneous, and unevenly anglophone world is understood mostly translationally, subsuming, syncretizing, but not entirely superseding earlier and even more traditional concepts of gendered personhood and sexual desire.

This perhaps constitutes this word's greater relevancy, here and in other anglophonic contexts: as a verb, queer after all signifies reflexivity, self-irony, and autocritique, which makes it entirely open to the idea and the practice of becoming itself deconstructed, critically interrogated, and refunctioned—needless to say, *queered*, in this case through the transformative process of translation, anywhere and everywhere it may be found.

And so, we decolonize queer, we decolonize gender itself, by acknowledging and inquiring into the translational exchange between modern binaries of sex and sexuality and traditional notions of gendered expression and embodiment, which these binaries have never exhausted nor entirely replaced in the postcolonial space. To my mind, the challenge of channeling mythology in our creative endeavors as Filipinos must involve not just the task of imaginative appropriation but also that of willful decolonization—a task that critiques the dominance of colonial knowledges and stories, primarily by demonstrating how, as we have assimilated them, they have become intractable versions of the myths of our everyday lives. We need to realize that the folk Catholic practices, the gender performances, of our people reveal the transformative dialogue between the old and the new and the native and the foreign; they are nothing if not the mythopoetic enactments that we ourselves seek to carry out.

We may not need to do too much, inasmuch as our culture and our people have already done the tremendous work of mythic resignification in their everyday enactments of their devotional and gendered lives. We may only need to describe, to transcribe, in scriptural or multimedial languages,

these translations of the Christian faith and of heteronormativity that are in abundant evidence everywhere in our contemporary society. In other words, in their everyday practices, the Filipino folk Catholic devotee and the contemporary *tibo* and bakla are both performing—are both "ritualizing"—the norms contained in the powerful stories, in the mythologies of Christianity and our increasingly globalized world's sex/gender system, as our lifeways have transcoded and transformed them, in the simple (f)act of accepting or "assimilating" these neo/colonial impositions.

This is a realization that can certainly help our most important work as creatives: to mythologize the present by gesturing toward the enduring sense of mystery that, still and all, continues to animate and enhance it.

As a conclusion to my paper, I would like to bring up a project I recently participated in. It is a project that, in the end, saw me and my team queering the aforementioned Filipino myth—one about the origin of gender difference, as our ancestors once told it.

GlobalGRACE: Global Gender and Cultures of Equality[17] was a research and arts consortium located across five countries in the Global South and the United Kingdom. It was funded by UKRI, as administered through Goldsmiths, University of London.

This consortium sought to celebrate gendered and sexual cultures of equality by supporting intuitions and practices of well-being and resistance and by championing creative communities. These practices included theater production, short filmmaking, and street dancing, as sited in collectives as diverse as female sex workers in Cape Town, women construction workers in Sylhet, Bangladesh, and urban poor men living in the favelas of Rio de Janiero.

The Philippine work package of GlobalGRACE featured verbal expressivity and forms of textual performances by young Filipino LGBTQ individuals who were beginning writers and artists. I was its director, and we sponsored local and national creative writing workshops and residencies, in which we affirmed and cultivated the artistic practices, both personal and community-oriented, of young queer creatives.

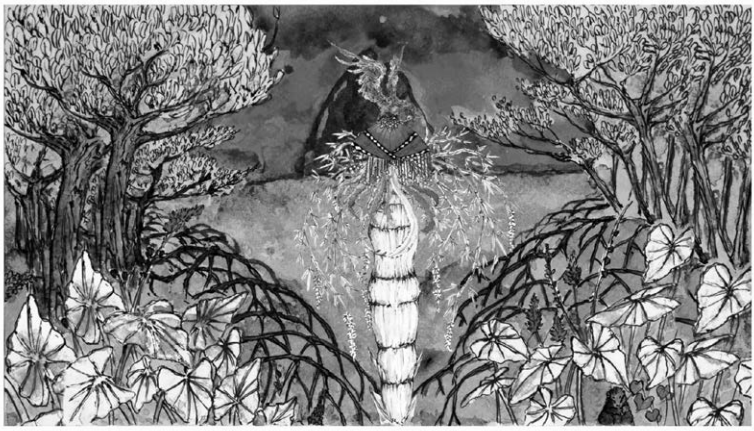
All told, the work that we have done in GlobalGRACE has been less about creating than identifying, nurturing, and connecting collective ways of being and becoming—"cultures," yes, which are complexes of meaning-making practices, arguably communal, of gender inclusivity, of lovable life, of livable love, and of justice, across our various localities.

What a wonderful thing it has been: this conversation among voices

across the decolonizing world, about our various gendered practices that all aspire toward imaginative and culturally inflected ideals of equality.

Our last output has been an online exhibition, and it features the productions of our respective projects. I would like to show you the landing page of the Philippine installation, through which a selection of videos of our poets and artists talking about their works may be viewed. The design of this page is an example of how we have queered myth.

https://exhibition.globalgrace.net/installation/doing-gender-doing-equality/



Allow me to read the installation's text, hence:

> Gender is a historical category whose meanings are not exhausted by normative regimes that dualize its possibilities and regulate people's embodiments and desires. In the ethical and equality-aspiring practices of sexually dissident and gender non-conforming people, gender is and can still be experienced as a realm of freedom, self-presentational pleasure, and expressive joy.
>
> In the Philippines, precolonial gender valuations persist, providing nativist inspiration for its queer citizens to harken back to understandings of embodiment that recognized dualism but at the same time transcended it. In this native story of creation, everything begins with the image of primordial unity, the mystical bamboo that the creator god, in the form of a magnificent bird, pecks, and splits into male and female difference.

> Here we encourage our visitor to "envision" equality by reimagining this creation story. We invite you to drag—pun intended—a variety of queer sundries and sartorial items onto the bamboo, which is the entry point into embodiment, into being and becoming, in this myth.
>
> Once completed, the bamboo will be split open by an icon of the sacred bird, and will in turn reveal contemporary acts of queer self-creation through art, text, or performance. Coming from the young Filipino writers and artists who have participated in the programs and workshops of GlobalGRACE Philippines, these are living demonstrations of queer creativity, that can and do contribute to the formation of cultures of equality, through the resistant, ethically affirmative, and imaginative practices of queer genders and sexualities.

***

The story of the Garden is, in Judeo-Christianity, the myth of the Fall.

This is a story that accounts for our suffering world, our exile from paradise, our separation from the divine.

According to this story, our material nature—which is to say, nature itself—is corrupt.

It is important to say that this myth had no counterparts in our indigenous mythologies, which all saw the natural world, humanity, and the divine as constituting one sacred and continuous stream.

In fact, it would be safe to say that, outside of the mythological world of the fertile crescent, even during the time of its inception, no other culture had a myth of the Fall.

Here now are three poems from my collection, *Kaluluwa*.[18]

I wrote the poems of this lyric sequence as my own imaginative engagement with the story of the Garden.

My task here was to revision Eden from the perspective of our own mythologies, which while recognizing duality also seek to transcend it, back to the Oneness from which everything began, the original Grace that founds and sustains all of creation.

From *Kaluluwa*

XL

What happens to me after
is not anything I can predict:
as we are sometimes told,
from an ending just might gesture
a beginning. I would like to believe, as did
my people whose breath was soil—
I shall remain useful
even if only as an aspect of soil.
Out of my feet sweet yams perhaps, my fingers
curled forth into the graceful backs of snails,
from my stomach something flesh-bound or fat
like pulpy shoot or vine with off-white blooms
dangling from its sides, my tongue,
that difficult slab of weathered wood,
just might whisper its new-found language
in fragrant syllables of herb and mushroom
and amber sap. Consider it:
anything is possible
when you are one with earth—
giving ground in which dreams stab downward,
take root like love, and come to fruit.

LIX

For you, my love, a story:

We were born blind into a garden—
of tears and molded mud
and a god's
scintillant breath.

We were happy beyond all asking:
lost in birdsong, our feet
solid upon the loam,

we knew nothing about the past.
Which is to say, we knew nothing
about the future.

We had no knowledge of our coming death,

for instance, that the earth composing us
would someday claim us,
crumbling our edges down
till we could no longer feel ourselves
in the ostensible world.

But something happened.

We found our way to water.
Stumbling hand in hand we followed burbling sounds
to the spring at the end of a prickly hedge.

We bent down and washed the mud off our eyes,
and saw.

We did not care that we were naked
and hungry, for the garden that embraced us
was more beautiful than we had ever dreamed.

We have lived there ever since.

LX

My grandmother's gardenia is back in bloom
when it flowered only two months ago:
in this confusing weather, trees follow no logic
other than the air's.

Forget the dire warnings of our coming doom.

You and I will abide in this life, I am sure of it.
Open your eyes and see

that always we are taught ongoingness:
the same and turning leaf, earth's
rhythmic tilt and tow,

the soul candling into shadow
before it flickers back to light.

Notes

1 Delivered by the author as a prerecorded online video lecture for the 6th Amelia Lapeña-Bonifacio Writers Workshop, with the theme "Retelling the Lore/Resurrecting the Lure," July 20, 2022, Likhaan: University of the Philippines Institute of Creative Writing.

2 Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers. *The Power of Myth* (New York: Anchor Books, 1991), 7–15.

3 Robert A. Segal, *Myth: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press), 12–14.

4 Damiana Eugenio, *Philippine Folk Literature: The Myths* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2004), 67–69.

5 Shelly Errington, "Recasting Sex, Gender and Power: A Theoretical Regional Overview," in *Power & Difference: Gender in Island Southeast Asia*, edited by Jane Monnig Atkinson and Shelly Errington (Stanford University Press, 1990), 1–58.

6 J. Neil C. Garcia, *Philippine Gay Culture: Binabae to Bakla, Silahis to MSM* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press; Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press), 181–83.

7 These of course are the "kinds" of translation first defined by Roman Jakobson in his famous essay, "Linguistic Aspects of Translation." See *The Translation Studies Reader*, edited by Lawrence Venuti (New York: Routledge, 2000), 113–18.

8 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1993).

9 Lawrence Venuti, "Introduction: Translation Studies, an Emerging Discipine," in *The Translation Studies Reader*, edited by Lawrence Venuti (New York: Routledge, 2000), 1–8.

10 One of the most exhaustive analyses of the complexities of the Philippine concept of "loob" or "kalooban" may be found in: Albert Alejo, SJ, *Tao Po? Tuloy!* (Quezon City: Office of Research and Publications, Ateneo de Manila University, 1990).

11 From my Facebook post about one such participation in the Santo Niño de Tondo Fiesta, which I wrote right after I came home from my friend's Tondo residence, back in January 2011: "The permission and permissiveness of Divinity as a child, meek & approachable: I just witnessed the Sto. Niño procession in the Tondo of my childhood, a dense (& this time, rain-drenched) parade of dancing & suppliant humanity, all arrayed as they are, bearing aloft an image of God incarnated in the sundry habiliments of mortal desire, personned as one of us, the sacred embracing the profane, redeeming it absolutely! . . . I suppose it really has to be as a child that God can be imagined and presented as all-welcoming, non-judgmental and human, and our peoples intuitively know that. We arrived at my friend's house on Varona Street (where the parade passes every year) a little late, so we missed the pagoda bearing aloft the centuries-old regally attired image of the Sto. Niño de Tondo, perched on an ornate pedestal, which the bearers swayed left and right (the way a child in our arms would want to be carried). But that's okay because there were so many other 'versions' of the Sto. Niño in luminous evidence everywhere, and they bore witness to the 'malleability' of this remarkably pliant infantile incarnation, arrayed in the ordinariness, worldliness and particular human givennesses of its devotees. . . . The firemen carried a miniature firetruck topped by Sto. Niños brandishing hoses and wearing a fireman's outfit. The policemen's Sto. Niño was all akimbo in the appropriate and stern-looking uniform, complete with holster and gun. The neighborhood bakers' Child, large spatula in hand, straining to fish the freshly baked bread out from the mock brick oven. The local basketball leagues of Tondo, all dancing in step with the wildly thrumming drums, bearing aloft not one but a whole team of jersey-wearing Niños, dribbling, doing lay-ups, and shooting miniature basketballs on a miniature court of a carroza. And finally, the beauticians' Niño was dressed up in a glittery moulin rouge outfit, satiny cape, feathered boa, and all. . . . Oh, and by the way, I wasn't there when it happened, but apparently, when the gym trainers and body builders came march-dancing by, wearing only towels draped around their slender waists, a collective gasp was heard from every corner of the densely packed street, rising up to the drizzly, sanctifying sky. . . ."

12 As we know, the crucial role played by the pasyon in popular uprisings by Filipinos against the Spanish and American colonial regimes was thoroughly investigated by Reynaldo C. Ileto in his paradigm-shifting book. See Reynaldo C. Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines, 1840–1910* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila Press, 1979).

13 For a conceptual history of *kabaklaan* as gender-transitive (homo) sexuality, see Garcia, *Philippine Gay Culture,* 316–31.

14 This keynote was given at the National Queer Studies Conference, sponsored by the Center for Women and Gender Studies, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, on October 26, 2020. It was subsequently published. See J. Neil C. Garcia, "Let's Get Real: Queering the Queer in the Philippines," in *Likhaan 16: The Journal of Contemporary Philippine Literature,* edited by Jose Dalisay Jr. (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Institute of Creative Writing, 2022).

15 To date, nine volumes of this "mega-epic" have been published by the University of the Philippines Press, since the series' first book, *Tikum Kadlum*, came out nine years ago. See *Tikum Kadlum: Sugidanon of Panay, Book 1,* chanted by Federico Caballero and Teresita Caballero-Castor, and translated by Alicia P. Magos (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2014).

16 For a lucid explication of the evolution of queer politics in the West, see Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 90–98.

17 From this project's website, we have the following overview: "Global Gender and Cultures of Equality (GlobalGRACE) is a 51 month programme of research and capacity strengthening funded by the UKRI's Global Challenge Research Fund (GCRF) delivered through the Arts and Humanities Research Council. GlobalGRACE employs arts based practices and multi-sensory research to investigate the production of cultures of equality and enable gender positive approaches to wellbeing internationally. . . . Underpinning our projects are three basic organising ideas. The first is that equality is a cultural artefact: we investigate the variety of ways that equalities are made and contested in different parts of the world. The second is that cultures might best be understood as the practices through which people create the worlds they inhabit: we investigate how people's creative practices challenge inequality and engender new possibilities for more equitable ways of living together. The third is the commitment to recognise people's hard-won achievements and their ongoing struggles: GlobalGRACE is working with partners to highlight just a few examples of this equality work worldwide. Attending to, learning from and sharing about the productions of cultures of equality globally is central to creating sustainable futures for us all." "More About Project," accessed January 4, 2023, https://www.globalgrace.net/more-about-project.

18 J. Neil C. Garcia, *Kaluluwa: New and Selected Poems* (University of Santo Tomas Press, 2001).