



PROJECT GRACE - UP
NATIONAL
LGBTQ
WRITERS
WORKSHOP

Teaching Philippine Queer Literature:

A GlobalGRACE Teacher Training Seminar for Senior High School and Collegiate Teachers of Literature in the Philippines

Sponsored by GlobalGRACE and the Likhaan:

University of the Philippines Institute of Creative Writing

December 9 and 10, 2021

GlobalGRACE and this Seminar

Funded by the UKRI and administered through Goldsmiths University of London, GlobalGRACE is a four-year program (2018-2021) of research and capacity strengthening that employs arts-based practices and multi-sensory research to investigate the production of cultures of equality and enable gender positive approaches to wellbeing internationally. GlobalGRACE brings together researchers and project partners from Bangladesh, Brazil, Mexico, the Philippines, South Africa and the United Kingdom to work collaboratively on six interlinked projects. These projects range from writing workshops with aspiring LGBTQ writers in the Philippines, to participatory film making with female construction workers in Bangladesh, to artistic residencies in Brazil focused on challenging forms of hegemonic masculinity. GlobalGRACE seeks to investigate the variety of ways that people's creative practices challenge systems of privilege and engender new possibilities for more equitable ways of living together.

The title of the Philippine Work Package of GlobalGRACE is *Making Life Loveable*. It aims to support and guide aspiring young LGBTQ+ writers in their journeys into their chosen crafts, through which they may come to embrace and affirm themselves, discover and experience life as loveable, and grow and thrive therein. We provided that support through a series of national and community-based writing workshops, held at the University of the Philippines Diliman and at the YMCA in San Pablo, Laguna, respectively, for aspiring and entry-level writers.

However, we recognize as a clear dilemma the absence of an institutional structure, in the Philippines's national education system, to present and properly teach queer texts in the senior high school and early tertiary levels, in which such texts are mostly missing. It is in these formative levels of General Education in the Philippines where queer cultural productions are most crucially needed. Moreover, in the typical Philippine humanities or literature classroom, the default interpretive position in making sense of representations of relationships, domesticity, desire, even nature and life itself, is heteronormative. The prevailing humanist perspective in the reading—and the creation—of the arts in the typical Filipino school room dismisses the difference that the question of queer desires and identifications makes to the creative process and output. Such a perspective either vilifies queer desires and subjectivities outright, or ignores and subsumes them into an oppressive ideology of universalist sameness, which deceitfully privileges the hegemonic model of cis-gender embodiment and the heterosexual matrix that it conceptually and ethically enables.

Affirming queer life as it is being lived by queer people is one thing, and is truly important. However, we also understand that dignifying and sustaining this life in the world in which it must assert itself to exist is another thing altogether, and that task is just as vital. Our creative writing workshops themselves were designed as occasions of pedagogical intervention and repair. That is to say, by enabling and recognising queer lives and identifications within and through the in-depth exegeses and discussions of creative texts, workshop fellows and participating panelists were able to challenge, supplant, and transform the prevalent heteronormative literary, ethical, and political educations that they had previously received and been subjected to. Rather than relegating to the backdrop the experiential life-ground, the workshops centralized and

dignified it. As such, they enabled the holistic, as opposed to strictly formalist, appreciation of creative texts, and provided a nurturing, rather than constraining and oppressive, artistic environment for aspiring LGBTQ+ writers (and readers).

As our culminating activity, and in partnership with the Likhaan: UP Institute of Creative Writing, GlobalGRACE is sponsoring this Teaching Training Seminar—a webinar titled “Teaching Philippine Queer Literature”—in recognition of the fact that the kind of educative environment and safe space that our workshops have offered, is not shared by the vast majority of Philippine classrooms, in which formally attuned, respectful, and context-sensitive close readings of queer work are simply not to be found. While we offer, as open access, our archive of queer literary materials, a queer-affirmative pedagogical approach needs to be utilized in the classroom for these materials to be properly understood and aesthetically appreciated, especially by the senior high school and early tertiary student. As exemplified by the various workshop sessions we have conducted, a queer-affirmative pedagogical approach is one that recognises and enables, rather than elides or stigmatizes, the diversity of desires and the plurality of subject positions among both writers and readers.

The seminar, to be held online on December 9 and 10, is addressed to literature educators in the senior high school and early tertiary levels in the Philippines, who wish to make use of the online archive of LGBTQ literary texts produced by the Philippine Work Package of GlobalGRACE. This archive may be accessed freely at www.pinoylgbtq.com

The modules that comprise this seminar will utilize the idea of *intersectionalities*—the complex and mutually implicating layers of realities and circumstances, the complexity, that necessarily attends the truth of LGBTQ life. Because the oppression suffered by LGBTQ individuals is multiple and intersecting, so are the resources of LGBTQ agency, so are LGBTQ lives. It is the intention of these modules to suggest—and not exhaust—pedagogical possibilities in the teaching of these fictional, nonfictional, and poetic texts, written by young Filipino queers. Facilitating, explaining, and demonstrating the teaching of these modules will be a panel of senior Filipino LGBTQ literature professors, who have had extensive experience in the fields of (queer) creative writing and literary pedagogy and tutelage.

The modules’ interpretive approach will be broadly thematic, tackling the texts through their representational content, as embodied in characters and plots, personae and dramatic situations, although formal qualities will also now and then be flagged, particularly as they may enrich the textual analysis. Queerness will form the central thematic, and it will be fleshed out and appreciated as being always already implicated in—that is, *intersectional with*—the sociocultural determinations in and through which queer lives must assert themselves, fecundate, and exist.

Teaching Philippine Queer Literature

A GlobalGRACE Teacher Training Seminar for Senior High School and Collegiate Teachers of Literature in the Philippines

December 9 and 10, 2021

Webinar cosponsored by the Likhaan: University of the Philippines Institute of Creative Writing

Featuring an expert panel of queer literature Professors:

Romulo Baquiran, Jr., Department of Filipino and Filipino Literature, UP Diliman

Ronald Baytan, Department of Literature, De La Salle University

Jhoanna Lynn Cruz, Department of Humanities, UP Mindanao

John Iremil Teodoro, Department of Literature, DLSU

Special Participation by Nerisa Del Carmen Guevara, University of Santo Tomas, GlobalGRACE Philippines Early Career Researcher

Schedule

Day 1: December 9

8-830	Opening Ceremonies
830-930	Module 1
930-1030	Module 2
1030-1130	Module 3
1130-12nn	Q&A / Reminders
130-230	Module 4
230-330	Module 5
330-430	Module 6
430-500	Q & A / Reminders

DAY 2: December 10

830—930	Module 7
930-1030	Module 8
1030-1130	Module 9
1130-12nn	Q&A / Reminders
130-230	Module 10
230-330	Module 11
330-430	Module 12
430-530	Module 13: GlobalGRACE Artist in Residence Program

5:30-600 Q & A / Closing Ceremonies

Assignment of Modules:

1	Queerness as (Sexual) Desire	Baytan
2	Queerness as (Gender) Identity	Baytan
3	Queerness and the Family	Cruz
4	Queerness and Religion	Teodoro
5	Queerness and Culture	Baquiran
6	Queerness and Violence	Teodoro
7	Queerness and History	Baquiran
8	Queerness and Mythology	Cruz
9	Queerness and Well-being	Baytan
10	Queerness and Class	Baquiran
11	Queerness and Love	Cruz
12	Queerness and Pride	Teodoro
13	Bringing Queerness Home: AiR	Guevara

Key Terms

The following definitions for certain key terms and concepts that grounded the literary and educational interventions of the Philippine Work Package have been composed by Nerisa del Carmen Guevara, Jaya Jacobo, and J. Neil C. Garcia.

Gender

As it is presently heteronormatively organized, gender is a historical category in which human 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,” performs this categorising procedure, specifying the “tao” (person) into “lalaki” (man) or “babae” (woman). This recognition of duality is, however, challenged by its absence in the pronominal system of any of the Philippines’s 180 languages on one hand, and on the other by the existence of indigenous words, spread across the 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 exist in the modern West. 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 one hand, and on the other when repeated reveals a principle of plenitude and diversity (“sari-sari”), that 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, and the sexual desires that attend them. As “sari-saring kasarian” (gender diversity, plurality, miscellany, anomaly, etc.), and in the liberative practices of Filipino gender and sexual dissidents, gender need not be experienced only as a normative regime, but also as a realm of freedom, personal and collective wellbeing, and happiness.

In/equality

To be equal, in the Filipino language, is to enjoy “pagkakapantay-pantay,” to occupy the same level or plane, two people standing together on the same ground, as it were, comparable in dignity, yet still distinct from one another, and not the same. In this word, “ka-” is an infix and it functions in the same way that it does, as prefixes this time, in the Filipino words for friend (kaibigan) as well as enemy (kaaway); on the other hand, “pantay” or level is repeated precisely to magnify its importance. In love and in strife, the terms of affection or contention must be equal. Inequality is the negation of this ideal, and happens when one party is not on the same level, not on the same footing, so to speak, of success or failure, as the other. On the other hand, and in a deeper level, in indigenous Philippine psychologies the other is always already implicated in the self: the

Filipino word for other is *kapwa*, and it denotes a paradoxical harmony or “continuity” between self and other—the self in the other, the other in the self. There may be no greater equality than this: a shared inner equality; a shared inner identity.

Decolonizing

Decolonizing is the process of extricating oneself and one’s people from the annihilating hold of colonial culture. It is therefore intimately tied up with the emergence of anticolonial nationalism in many places in the Global South, characterized by an initiating moment of nativistic nostalgia or counter-identification. As experienced by many nations therein, this is a decolonial moment that refuses to identify nationhood with the idea of a modernity in which imperial annexation and apprenticeship is a historical necessity, for this is an idea that promotes the establishment of a modern state founded primarily on violence, including gender violence. Decolonisation, however, is a dynamic process, and from this moment of counter-identification it moves to dis-identification, which is a praxiological stance in which the binaries of colonial thought are at the same time recognized and rejected, inverted, subverted, and/or critically exhausted from within. Nativism here is revaluated as the production of enabling myths, while the theory and practice of a national culture is embraced and promoted not—in the words of Franz Fanon—as “an abstract populism... [detached] from the ever-present reality of the people,” but rather as “the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify, and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence.” This “people’s culture” is, needless to say, translocal and constitutively mixed, and the necessarily complex tasks of decolonising recognize and work through this fact, in the continuing project of liberation. To decolonise gender is, hence, to acknowledge and inquire 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 superseded in the post-colonial space. The term for “colonising” in Filipino is to superimpose and/or overwhelm, “pagsasakop.” Finally, to fully decolonise is to achieve freedom (*kalayaan*) by enjoying sovereignty over one’s own life, over one’s own self (*kasarinlan*, whose root word is *sarili* or self).

Wellbeing

Translated into Filipino as “*maalwang buhay*,” wellbeing in this sense connotes a state of life affirmed by freedom, encouraging movement, and activated in various modes of self-determination. Here, the word “*alwan*” is related to “*aliwalas*,” a vernacular architectural term that designs a structure according to the unobstructed flow of sunlight, air, as well as exposure to light rain by the windowpane, allowing dwellers of the place to be in the tropics itself, communing with nature and enjoying perspectives of it, at the same time maintaining a sense of relative isolation from the social world. Finally, “*alwan*” and “*aliwalas*” relate to “*ginhawa*,” the state of bliss associated with a spirit unbound, and a body unrestrained in its ability to take in the force of life.

Identified by the fellows as an important aspect of wellness, of *being whole in oneself* (in Filipino, “*buo sa sariling pagkatao*”) is the concept of “*pagpapakatotoo*,” literally meaning *being true to oneself*. As experienced by so many young Filipino LGBTQs, being forced to “pass,” to conform to ideal gender and sexual norms constitutes a tremendous

everyday burden, and their dream is to be able to live authentically, to enact on a daily basis, in their own families and communities, their own personal truths, and simply be, in their innermost understanding of themselves, who they truly are.

Queer

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 extra-normative identities and sexualities. A refunctioned pejorative, its provenance in the West, particularly in the U.S., 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 that gestured towards but also profoundly troubled both conventional and progressive understandings of gender, sexuality, identity, subjectivity, and political action. Its 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, that 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.

Being LGBTQ in the Philippines

An attempt to describe the LGBTQ situation in the Philippines may be found in the following entry from the *gltq encyclopedia* archives. While not entirely current, its observations remain germane, and they should still help the subscriber take stock of the social and political realities of queer people living in this culturally diverse and developmentally challenged country.

http://www.gltqarchive.com/ssh/philippines_S.pdf

Module One: Queerness as (Sexual) Desire

The two texts for this session—a poem in English and a short story, originally written in Binisaya, with a translation in English—feature the character of the young “gay man” (bakla in Tagalog and bayot in Binisaya), looking back on their respective “origin stories.”

These texts clearly locate sexual desire—in this case, *homo*, or “same”—at the heart of the question of what queer being might be. Discussing them in class will bring up questions of the relationship between desire and identity—of how who and how we love the people we love affects our sense of who we are.

Queer children realize their difference early on, when they first encounter the truth of human desire. This realization, as these texts aver, almost always comes with a feeling of shame. Students should be encouraged to empathize with this situation, for shame is an affect that attends many other instances in children’s lives. Rooted in the sense of being different, of being queer, is the early form of selfhood that is born out of this experience of shame.

It should be useful for the class to be told, at this point, that this “shaming” of queer feelings, of queer desires, comes from the kind of institutionalized cultural script—heteronormativity—that privileges reproductive cis-gendered heterosexuality and demonizes or vilifies all other forms of loving, desiring, and being. It should also be helpful to remind the class that this cultural script has not always existed in the world, especially in the Philippines. Students should be made to think of how historically and culturally specific is the kind of mentality that should even deem the question of the gender of who one loves important enough that it has to invent names, classifications, or labels—indeed, entire bodies of knowledge—about it.

A short history about the “implantation” of this script—in which native Philippine genders became heteronormativized—may be found in the following article. For the very first session, before reading these literary texts, it might be pedagogically useful to ask the students to read this essay first. Of course, they will need to be guided by the teacher, as some of the concepts invoked in this article may not be readily understandable.

https://www.academia.edu/7707540/I_I_A_S_Male_Homosexuality_in_the_Philippines_a_short_history

Moreover, we encourage subscribers to this seminar to familiarize themselves with the following terms: cis-gender, transgender, heteronormativity, bisexuality, homosexuality, gay, lesbian, bisexual, nonbinary, and queer.

A very useful glossary of terms, assembled by American Queer Studies professors across a variety of disciplines, may be found here:

<https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/bbm%3A978-1-137-56766-6%2F1.pdf>

A good online resource would be the Queer Theory page sponsored by the University of Illinois in Chicago:

<https://researchguides.uic.edu/queertheory>

Text One (Poem): Crush by Nico Pablo

<https://www.pinoylgbtq.com/poet-nico-pablo>

Video of Nico Pablo reading his poem:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnkqaOcomoY&list=PLttyau9FJBVGidfcVMyibRsupEjdNbUbC&index=7>

Text Two (Short Story) Red Devil by Joseph Dazo

<https://www.pinoylgbtq.com/fictionist-joseph-dazo>

Module Two: Queerness as (Gender) Identity

Picking up from the previous session’s short historical accounting of traditional gender-crossing in native Philippine cultures, Module Two will now take up the issue of queerness as being a matter of gendered self-understanding, or identity.

The two poems in this Module feature the persona or character of the young transfeminine bakla and agi, both comparable terms, from Bicol and Kinaraya-a, respectively.

In Sumayao’s poem, bakla children are shown “cos-playing” powerful girl figures from what in Asia had been a famous anime series (titled *Sailormoon*), with whom they vicariously identify. It’s interesting to note that these performances are taking place in the plaza fronting the famous shrine of Bicol’s most powerful image of the Divine Feminine, the volcanic province’s beloved patroness, Our Lady of Penafrancia. This juxtaposition of incongruous feminine identifications is meant to suggest not so much a contradiction, as a continuity: a conflation of secular and religious norms, or the coexistence of ethical and knowledge systems that can be said to characterize queerness, to a certain degree.

Torrechilla’s personal essay, on the other hand, recounts the author’s journey as a transwoman, beginning from her early memory as being mothered not by her biological mother but rather by her grandmother, to the time she first entered and won in her hometown’s “Miss Gay” beauty pageant, to the present, in which she has discovered a sense of pride in being confidently who she is.

While these texts focus on transfemininity as early childhood identifications, they may serve as meaningful occasions in which a discussion about how gender, in general, is a lifelong process of self-identification with ideals and images—a self-identification that needs to be repetitively performed to be realized. Queerness constitutes the gamut of self-identifications and performativities that fall outside heteronormativity, and its privileging of cis-gendered identities and heterosexual conjugal desire.

Text One: Si Sailormoon sa Tahaw kan Quadricentennial Dome (poem) by Paul Sumayao

<https://www.pinoylgbtq.com/paolo-sumayao-1/si-sailor-moon-sa-tahaw--kan-quadricentennial-dome->

Text Two: Gypsy (essay) by Macky Torrechilla

<https://www.pinoylgbtq.com/poet-macky-torrechilla>

A useful explanation (in both text and video format) of what it means when we say “gender is performative” may be found here:

<http://www.openculture.com/2018/02/judith-butler-on-gender-performativity.html>

Module Three: Queerness and the Family

In the predominantly Roman Catholic Philippines, the heterosexual family arrangement is the norm. Most Filipino LGBTQs would have grown up in traditional families, and while many would have been accepted, many would have also suffered from shame and stigma and sometimes outright rejection. There are many texts in the workshops about the difficulties being faced by young Filipino queers inside their tradition-bound families, no matter the religious affiliation. Heteronormativity, after all, informs most scriptural religions, which in their respective ways extol heterosexual and cisgendered ideals and foist them on all their followers and constituents.

The first two texts are poems, written in English, by a young bisexual and young gay man respectively. They are tenderly written lyrics about their respective families.

In the former, the speaker addresses, in an apostrophe, his departed father, who had had a full and different life with another family in another place and time, before the speaker even knew him. The poem is therefore the attempt of the speaker—who is queer, this poem being part of a suite of queer poems, submitted explicitly to this workshop—to reconcile himself to his father’s death, which is a departure already foreshadowed and made “acceptable” by the father’s previous and inaccessible life.

In the latter poem, with affectionate amusement the speaker likens the parenting he and his siblings received to a kind of art-making, mother and father functioning as painter and musician respectively, shaping and reshaping their home and its children like works of art, which the speaker insists on calling “drafts.” At the end of the piece, the queer child himself is an artist, a writer, from whose mouth issues the ink that will speak and finally spell out his own life. In both pieces, we can detect comparable feelings of familial alienation, that both queer speakers felt and endured early in their lives. Poetry and the remembering it requires, however, appear to be the offered as a means to heal this primal wound.

The third text is a long and disturbing narrative—a novel excerpt, in actuality—about the protagonist Manuel’s existentially burdened story, which the author has yet to complete. In this chapter, however, we can already see the selfhood of the afflicted and doomsday-fixated Manuel becoming powerfully evoked in the linked episodes of his early childhood traumas (mostly familial), the psychosomatic effects of which he continues to bear in the difficult present, that animate—and complicate—his relationship with his best friend and romantic beloved. Clearly, on both a realistic and an allegorical level, this text presents a relatable story of queer suffering, particularly when seen in the context of the doctrinal condemnation—the normative extinguishing—of queer desires and identities that routinely afflicts many Filipino queer children. The teacher is encouraged to guide the students in the reading of this story, since it contains very disturbing childhood incidents, as these are endured by the queer protagonist.

Text One: Remembering the Farm (poem) by Thomas Leonard Shaw

<https://www.pinoylgbtq.com/thomas-leonard-shaw/remembering-the-farm>

Video of the Thomas Leonard Shaw reading his poem

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YEPbse_9fVo&list=PLtтыau9EJBVGidfcVMyibRsUpEjdNbUbC&index=1

Text Two: Heritage (poem) by Alfonso Manalastas

<https://www.pinoylgbtq.com/alfonso-manalastas/heritage>

Text Three: Notes on Extinction (novel excerpt) by Christian Tablazon

<https://www.pinoylgbtq.com/fictionist-cristian-tablazon>

Module Four: Queerness and Religion

Closely related to the previous thematic nexus between queerness and familial loyalty is the intersection with religion and religiosity, which are particularly germane in the Philippines, whose 110-million-strong population is famous for fervently observing pious traditions and rituals, both of the Christian (Catholic, Protestant, and evangelical) and Muslim kinds. It will be impossible to appreciate the situation the great majority of queer Filipino children grow up in without taking the powerful and all-pervasive presence of religion into account, since most of them, especially those living in the cities, would have received their private education in religiously affiliated schools on one hand, and would have resided in parish-identified local government units (called *barangays*), on the other.

As we know, both Christianity and Islam, as scriptural religions, have a history of being doctrinally erotophobic (particularly, homophobic and transphobic). While in spirit—as opposed to in letter—these religions are being reclaimed by a variety of queer and/or queer-friendly theologians and members of the clergy, in the Philippines most queer people, as they grow older, simply turn into “lapsed” or merely nominal followers, if they do not in fact abandon their childhood faiths altogether.

The two texts for this Module feature a queer speaker attempting to come to terms with and reconcile himself to the burden of his own upbringing, particularly as it may be characterized as religious, first and foremost. The first text is a lyric reimagining of the encounter between Christianity—and its crucified God—and the indigenous animist spirituality that preexisted it in the Philippine archipelago. The poem urges the reader to consider the possibility that it is the idea of sacrifice that may have functioned as the unwitting common point or “contact zone” between these faith systems, and it facilitated the conversion of pagan natives, precisely because it was something already inherent in their own realities and spiritual intuitions. We may take this as this queer poet’s “intellectual” attempt to recontextualize and possibly reclaim the faith he was born and raised in, by arguing for its historical specificity on one hand, and for its persistent sense of “transcendent mystery,” on the other.

On the other hand, forming the constitutive backdrop for the personal essay by the pseudonymous Tausug bantut (loosely, “gay”) writer Ibrahim Taib is his people and his family’s strict adherence to the orthodoxies of Islam, which is the dominant religion in many areas in the fractious and conflict-ridden southern Philippines. Needless to say, the kind of “double life” the writer admits to need to live out—being selectively and pseudonymously out in the national capital, while choosing to remain steadfastly closeted to his blissfully “unknowing” family, still residing back in the far-flung province—is, to him, made necessary precisely because of the tremendous power that Islam continues to wield over his and his loved ones’ lives.

Text One: *Mysterium Crucis* (poem) by Nico Pablo

<https://www.pinoylgbtq.com/poet-nico-pablo>

Text Two: Where I come from (essay) by Ibrahim Taib

<https://www.pinoylgbtq.com/fictionist-taib>

The Filipino gay advocate and lawyer Raymond Alikpala has written a personal essay about his own reasons why he persists to be a Catholic, despite this religion's institutional intolerance. It might be useful as a supplementary text in more fully fleshing out the insights of this Module.

https://www.vice.com/en_asia/article/n7w7vg/lgbtq-gay-catholic-religion-philippines

Module Five: Queerness and Culture

We have been trafficking in this seminar in the anglophone medium, and yet the linguistic worlds these texts come from and are grounded in are, in truth, inescapably syncretic and “culturally simultaneous.” At this point in our seminar, the subscriber is urged to be more self-reflexive and to take this important difference into account, despite or precisely because of the global uniformity—and seemingly unproblematic “intelligibility”—being suggested by the use of English as a medium of analysis and the perfunctory deployment of the LGBTQ signifier.

As a framing critical text, the subscriber is encouraged to read the following scholarly essay, that clarifies just what the history of LGBTQ discourse has been in the Philippines, and how its local operationalities in this country are and have always been translational. Meaning: as made by Filipinos, anglophone utterances must always bear the remaindered difference of the untranslatable, for all translations are at best approximations, and must, in the end, always be characterized by hybridity.

<https://journals.ateneo.edu/ojs/index.php/kk/article/view/KK2013.02003/840>

The two poems in this Module may be used as evidence for the cultural translation that characterizes the dispersal of “queer” discourses—thus denominated—across the world, in particular, the Philippines. They both come from the province of Bicol, in the southernmost portion of the Luzon island, and are originally written in the language spoken in that part of the Philippines.

Sumayao’s poem already bears out, going by its title alone, the translational fate that the “gay” signifier has needed to suffer, in various anglophone contexts. As opposed to its American signification, gay in the Philippines has mostly been synonymous with bakla, which is a native category bespeaking effeminacy and male feminine (now called transfeminine) identification, alongside (homo)sexuality. For almost half a century now, across the archipelago, local and town- or village-based “miss gay” beauty pageants have accompanied the celebration of fiestas and holidays. In this poem, Sumayao paints a tragicomic portrait of one such gay beauty contestant, one of whose objectives in joining in such competitions is to earn her own keep, as well as “deserve” the love of her boyfriend, who in the Philippines is understood to be a heterosexual “real man.” Obviously, the ubiquitous and culturally sanctioned existence of such an erotic arrangement—between a benefactor “gay” bakla and a beneficiary “straight” lalake—is already a glaring instance of the Philippines’s “cultural otherness,” even or precisely where issues of queer gender and sexuality are concerned.

Marvin Aquino, the author of the second text in this session, is a public school teacher from the Bicolano-speaking province of Camarines Sur. This poem is the first piece in a lyric sequence that makes use of what in the Philippines is a culturally resonant and folksy priapic conceit of the gamgam or “bird,” in order to carry out its queer project of

self-disclosure. The speaker here is a Bicolano bakla, upon whose tactile sensibility the naughty and somewhat pesky avian allusion lands again and again. While these are rather brief (almost epigrammatic) lyrics, the sheer repetitiveness of the image and the signification it conveys amount to a poetic redundancy of sorts, that may subsequently be read as an excessive use of the device of ironic indirection. In any case, crucial to the full appreciation of this poetic project is familiarity with the folk association between the penile and the avian. This is an association that proves how culture-bound the queer imagination—like other imaginations—inevitably is.

Text One: Ya Gaganahan sa Miss Gay (poem) by Paul Sumayao

https://www.pinoylgbtq.com/paolo-sumayao-1/ya-gaganahan-sa-miss-gay*

Text Two: An Gamgam na Matugdon Sako 1 (poem) by Marvin Davila Aquino

<https://www.pinoylgbtq.com/poet-marvin-aquino>

Finally, for a discussion, written in the 1990s, about the cultural differences between queerness and kabaklaan—particularly as they relate to their respective epistemes—subscribers encouraged to ask their students to read the following article, titled “The Queer and the Bakla.” It elaborates on the divergent theories of subjectivity from which the postmodern-identified concept of queerness and the “humanistic” local concept of kabaklaan (i.e., “bakla-ness”) emerge. While the global and local situations have appreciably changed between the 1990s and today—with the queer signifier becoming more globalized, and consequently localized across various cultural and national settings, including our own—this essay should still provide a useful way of pedagogically framing any discussion of contemporary LGBTQ texts by Filipinos, for whom the histories of kabaklaan and other native gender concepts have not yet been entirely superseded.

<https://www.facebook.com/notes/j-neil-c-garcia/the-queer-and-the-bakla/10150205289834324>

Module Six: Queerness and Violence

The fact that queer life is challenged and imperiled in most places around the world is borne out by the testimonial writings and art works of queers coming from different cultures and countries. The Philippines is no exception.

The three texts in this Module are poems, and they treat the subject of queer oppression—and abjection—in the form of lyric meditations. The author of the first text, “Playing Passover,” identifies as nonbinary and bisexual, who prefers the pronoun “they”. There is a most interesting poem in that it is characterized by the excessive use of a metonymic structure, in which images progress not so much because they are logical on a deep or metaphorical level but because they are related on the level of surface association. Reading this poem therefore requires that one keep reminding oneself what its central literal situation is, as the associations can often wander off into directions quite unrelated to it.

Through a series of stunning and mostly violent word pictures, Alonzo’s poem treats the reader to a scene in which impoverished young lumad or native girls from the southern Philippine coast are daring to play games normally played by boys (in this case, basketball). The poem ends with the idea that the girls are able to get away with their gender “transgression” because they will use the “ablibi” that the “forbidden sounds” of their boyish mirth are those “of a backstrap loom” (weaving being a traditional task that many lumad girls are consigned to doing).

The second text is a poem written by a Manila-residing gay man. It is about a casual and most probably anonymous sexual encounter between men in the bushes—*talabiban*, in Tagalog—most likely located along a deserted thoroughfare or on an empty residential lot, late in the evening. Haunting this scene is the very real prospect of violence. It needs to be said that casual “hook ups” of this sort are uniquely vulnerable to this kind of eventuality, as incidentally the third text for this session avers. This last poem, originally written in Kinaraya-a, a language spoken on Panay island, located in the central Philippine archipelago, functions as a kind of lament but also as a form of protest, given the understatement on which it concludes. The ironic note on which this poem ends is one that plainly references—but not without quiet indignation—the monetary “thingifying,” the disposability, of queer life in this part of the world.

Text One: Playing Passover (poem) by Mariel Alonzo

<https://www.pinoylgbtq.com/mariel-alonzo/playing-passover>

Video of Mariel Alonzo reading their poem

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5tvL9qhWCkY&list=PLtтыau9FJBVGidfcVMyibRsupEjdNbUbC&index=2>

Text Two: Talahiban Blues (poem) by King Llanza

<https://www.pinoylgbtq.com/king-llanza/talahiban-blues>

Text Three: “Singkwenta” (poem) by Macky Torrechilla

<https://www.pinoylgbtq.com/macky-torrechilla/singkwenta>

For a situationer on the “hate crimes”—most of which remain unreported, or not recognized as such—that have plagued queer communities and individuals in the Philippines, the subscriber is urged to read the following news article.

<https://news.abs-cbn.com/focus/07/01/15/gay-friendly-discrimination-still-claims-lgbt-lives-ph>

Module Seven: Queerness and History

As has been the experience of other minoritized groups, the use of historiographic material by queer artists must be taken as an attempt at *legitimation*: in “renarrativizing” the official heteronormative versions of communal—in the Philippines more specifically, national—history, they clear a space for queer truths and lives within the political reality that such versions denominate, discursively enable, and effectively materialize.

For this session, two novel excerpts in Filipino attempt to appropriate and to queer familiar ethnographic and historiographic accounts—of heroism and revolution on one hand, and of rural communities’ celebrated genteel and idyllic lifestyles, on the other—in order to articulate the queer subject position within the national vision that such accounts have hitherto conjured in the popular imagination of many Filipinos.

In “Mabitac,” the author writes a fictional paean to his own hometown—in the southern Tagalog province of Laguna—through the domestic saga of a young bakla protagonist, who returns to his familial roots and uncovers a secret about his deceased father (namely, that he was also a bakla, and that his true beloved was his brother-in-law, who apparently fully reciprocated the affection). The plot is a familiar one, calling to mind the many famous sentimental and “romantic” novels of the Tagalog tradition, which themselves were rooted in traditional and Hispanic colonial forms of theater and metrical poetry. Other than to tell the story it wishes to tell, this novel also aims, hence, to at once flag and queer its easily recognizable literary provenance, which has been much revered by nationalist literary historians.

In “Dibuhong Martir,” the author more directly engages in a queer historiographic enterprise—one that dares to impute queerness to well-known (but supposedly closeted) heroic personages and events in official accounts of Filipino nationalism, and to perform a queer ekphrasis of such “revisionings,” in the person of a feminine-identified bakla protagonist who is a painter, and whose “sacrificial love” for the “real man” of her dreams is melodramatically rewarded by erotic reciprocity, in the end.

Text One: Mabitac (novel excerpt) by DJ Ellamil

<https://www.pinoylgbtq.com/fictionist-dj-ellamil>

Text Two: Dibuhong Martir (novel excerpt) by Andrew Estacio

<https://www.pinoylgbtq.com/fictionist-andrew-estacio>

For an interesting scholarly inquiry into the sexual and gender identities of the most famous Filipino hero—the founding father of the modern Philippine nation, the polyglot writer and martyr Jose Rizal—read the following article, provocatively titled “Was Rizal Gay?” If anything, this essay proves that the “queering” of official versions of Philippine

history is eminently doable (and desirable), and indeed it need not always happen through historiographically fictional means.

<https://www.facebook.com/notes/j-neil-c-garcia/was-rizal-gay-part-1-of-2/10157870309554324>

<https://www.facebook.com/notes/j-neil-c-garcia/was-rizal-gay-part-2-of-2/10157872082124324>

Module Eight: Queerness and Mythology

The affinity of the queer imagination to mythology is readily understandable: ex-centric identities are usually identified—and indeed, self-identify—with the eccentric, even or especially where the inner or the “fantasy” life is concerned. Mythology of course is not just about the unreal or the fantastical, even if nowadays, the cinematic and literary genres of Fantasy and Science Fiction invariably recycle mythic motifs and characters, in order to at once mine their age-old wisdoms and contemporize them.

Most queer fictionists—particularly if young—are probably quite at home in the speculative mode. This may not be easily apparent, going by the works in this Work Package’s archive, although three stories included in it do clearly exemplify the literary project called *mythopoeia*—the reworking and appropriation of mythological material by contemporary artists, most commonly fictionists and poets.

Our three stories for this Module are plainly “mythopoetic” in that they reference and channel the energies and inner promptings of earlier myths—which are not and indeed need not always be local or even Philippine—in order to envision alternative realities that coincide with or at least prove comparable to the ex-centricity and/or “otherness” that queer identities and desires may be said to both literally and figuratively embody. We need to remember that myths are metaphors for mysteries, and while their value is no longer as descriptions of the world—having been effectively superseded by science, in this regard—as powerful communal fictions they are “social technologies” that still have the power to bind societies together, and to proffer guidance, as well as inspiration, on how to live meaningfully inside them.

De Guia’s work takes off from and revises the by-now-cultic anglophone story by one of the Philippines’s most famous canonical writers, Nick Joaquin. While he never quite professed it in his writings, this famous author himself was queer, as can be evidenced from his work, using strategies of “cryptohomosexual” analysis.

In particular, the Joaquin story in question reveals the author’s queerness as a form of gendered allo- or cross-identification, using his own imagined version of a histrionic and male-fixated femininity: a kind of transfeminine impersonation, actually, so typical in his fictional oeuvre, that sees him, an officially closeted bakla author, arrogating unto himself the feminine subject-position, in terms of narrative consciousness and/or dramatic voice. De Guia’s text chastises and “rectifies” this project, however, by queering (more specifically, “lesbianizing”) the supposedly protofeminist “Tadtarin” myth to which Joaquin’s story itself refers. What’s ironic is that it is De Guia’s deconstruction of Joaquin’s initial inversion that ends up more powerfully realizing this astonishing myth’s inmost “essence”: genuine female solidarity and antipatriarchal self-possession.

Jacob’s story is an excerpt from the second book in a planned series of Young Adult Fantasy Novels, all centering on the heroic adventure of the unprepossessing transfeminine teenager, Tuan, who is apprenticing with an androgynous shaman, Muhen. The mystical powers of this guru chiefly lie in his ability to summon emissaries from the insect kingdom, and to make them do his bidding. The project’s secondary world is the precolonial Philippines, in particular, the mountain fastnesses and lacustrine environs of

the southern Tagalog region. In this excerpt, Muhen finds an unexpected solidarity in a cross-eyed slave girl, whom he encounters and saves from a misogynistic monster in the forest. Echoing while at the same time also “tweaking” the monomyth, both Muhen and Tuan’s stories trace a hero’s journey of queer self-transformation, through a series of trials and tests, many of which are characterized by the kinds of surprising solidarity with fellow abjects and misfits that this chapter’s story encapsulates. Overall, Jacob’s novelistic project seeks to provide adolescent and young adult queer Filipinos an empowering mythos, whose fictional strangeness actually intensifies its analogical force.

De Castro’s story, on the other hand, poaches its substance from a cornucopia of popular-culture Orientalist fantasy material and rehashed East Asian myths, in order to accomplish his own queer version of Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*. While disturbing in its proffered solution for patriarchal oppression—that requires, basically, the extermination of antediluvian women, who are hopelessly suffering from “false consciousness”—this story clearly exemplifies the problematic cross-identifications inherent in the very idea and practice of LGBTQ creativity. Discussing this story should occasion not only the fictionally generative intersectionality between queer and mythological imaginations; it should also lead to an unpacking of any facile notions of solidarity that the coalitional identity invoked by the LGBTQ signifier might unwittingly promote.

Text One: Here Come the Women (story) by Rayji de Guia

<https://www.pinoylgbtq.com/fictionist-rayji-de-guia>

Text Two: The Consequence of Crossing Gazes (story) by Joel Donato Ching Jacob

<https://www.pinoylgbtq.com/fictionist-cupkeyk>

Text Three: From the Tales of Cho Fu Sa, by Liu Xing (story) by Nimruz de Castro

<https://www.pinoylgbtq.com/fictionist-nimruz-de-castro>

To a certain degree, Jacob’s fictional project is not entirely unique. Among artists and activists in both the queer and feminist communities in the Philippines, the search for an enabling myth has led to the archival recuperation of the precolonial and early colonial babaylan (“shaman”) identity. As a political and organizational effort, this may best be represented by the first officially recognized LGBTQ student group in the country, and by a 1990s collective of women’s right artists, both of which have famously gone by the name Babaylan. The babaylan proves particularly attractive, and useful, in this regard, because as a quasi-mythic figure she may be said to embody a more gender-egalitarian and sexually unencumbered form of being and becoming. For a historical discussion of the early colonial babaylan’s association with indigenous concepts of gender-crossing and femininity—an association that has animated its contemporary queer and feminist appropriations—the subscriber is referred to the following article, “Baylan, Asog,

Transvestism, and Sodomy: Gender, Sexuality and the Sacred in Early Colonial Philippines,” written by Carolyn Brewer.

<http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue2/carolyn2.html>

Module Nine: Queerness and Well-being

Central to the entire GlobalGRACE Project is the fostering of well-being through the championing of gendered “cultures of equality”—cultures of creative resistance against inequality, cultures of solidarity and social justice among marginalized sectors in the Global South, cultures in which embodiments of robust and holistic wellness can exist and definitively take root.

We can say that well-being, both personal and communal, is a theme that naturally intersects with queerness.

Simply put: freedom from intolerance, from violence and injustice, from deprivation, from illness, is a social “good” toward which the queer project, as emancipatory and empowering, as personal and communal, necessarily aspires.

Included in our digital archives are two stories that explore the topic of well-being, by understanding it contrastively—which is to say, by viewing it through the optic of infirmity and disease. In particular, in the Philippines at the current time, tackling the issue of “queer wellness” will necessarily bring up the reality of HIV/AIDS, and the medical difficulties as well as the social stigma that typically attend this chronic health condition.

The medical and social management, epidemiological control, and de-stigmatizing of HIV/AIDS constitute some of most pressing public health problems in the Philippines today. We need to say, at the outset, that the Filipino queer community is particularly impacted by this crisis, the highest rates of seroconversion being increasingly evidenced, for a few years now, among the sector epidemiologists refer to as MSM (an acronym for the behavioral category, Men who have Sex with Men). The two stories for this session feature protagonists who are sufferers of this condition, and as fictional advocacies their common objective is the dignifying of the life and the identity of the “Pozzie Pinoy”—a nickname that emerged from the community of HIV-positive Filipinos, who have of late mostly been gay and bisexual men, as well as male-to-female transgenders.

Like other recent stories of its kind, Pescador’s “Ultima Twink” exhibits an “ontological break” from the first wave of (mostly Western) AIDS literature—written in the 1980s and 90s, when the disease was untreatable and amounted to a death sentence. What distinguishes it, of course, is its groundedness in the realities of contemporary HIV-positive Filipinos, many of whom are grappling with self-worth and self-image issues, as foisted on them by the stigma of their condition on one hand, and by their varying levels of socioeconomic precarity, on the other. What’s most memorable about this piece is, of course, its formal hybridity. A postmodern-inspired pastiche of textualities and modalities, registers and forms, this is a fictional romp that fabulously proposes an argument against univocality on one hand, and celebrates the boisterous and life-affirming energies of camp resilience on the other.

The aesthetics of the second story, written in Filipino, advances a politics of writing that challenges the genteel habits of conventional humanist reading, which are heteronormatively coded. Its characters fictively inhabit the underbelly not only of the

dominant but also of the counter culture, emplotting lives of the “other other”: the sheer undiscipline of vulgar, distasteful, potty-mouthed, and lumpenic identities that may perhaps be made to answer—self-mockingly—to the appellation “gutter faggot” (locally called baklang kanal). This is a story that seeks to reverse the tables on polite society, daring it to avow its brutality and intolerance in plain sight, by championing the willfully perverse, the execrable, the virally afflicted and diseased, and the deviant. And yet, it complicates its own radical vision, by allowing its memorably named cast of abjects and “others” the fictional room—the creative agency—to be selves, but always on their own terms, and without apology or shame. Belying the terrible social and medical maladies that afflict them, the characters of Pacolor’s story are not amoral in the least, for within the world of this story they exist in full fellowship and mutual responsibility with one another.

Text One: Ultima Twink (story) by Adrian Pescador

<https://www.pinoylgbtq.com/fictionist-adrian-carl-pescador>

Text Two: Ang Kakaibang Lamyos ng mga Bakla (story) by Carlo Paulo Pacolor

<https://www.pinoylgbtq.com/fictionist-carlo-pacolor>

For a very useful resource on the HIV/AIDS situation—as well as on issues of holistic health—as it pertains to the queer community in the Philippines’s National Capital Region, the subscriber is urged to visit the online site of TLF Share, a three-decade-old Quezon City-based “non-profit non-governmental organization of peer educators, trainers, and advocates working on the sexual health, human rights, and empowerment of gay men, bisexuals, other men who have sex with men, and transgenders.”

<https://www.tlfshare.org/>

Module Ten: Queerness and Class

Because in the humanist classroom queer being is overdetermined by such massive but mostly discursively dissimulated and overlooked forces as class, it will be necessary to treat it in a separate Module. However, as the subscriber should be well aware by now, many of the stories, essays, and poems that have been utilized in the preceding sessions may in fact already lend themselves, with just a little critical recalibration, to a class-specific reading, as well. Aside from using the texts suggested for the Module, the subscriber may therefore choose to revisit a selection of literary works that have already been invoked in the previous Modules, in order to surface and *visibilize* a plenitude—as well as a diversity—of class readings.

In any case, for illustrative purposes, two poems are hereby presented to the subscriber. We have chosen these texts because they would appear to lend themselves relatively easily to an engagement with the question of the materiality of queer desire—particularly where it concerns the identity of the feminine-identified bakla and its Kinaray-a equivalent, the agi.

Torrechilla's poem features a feminine-identified agi speaker, who is both impoverished and unapologetically resentful, identifying herself spitefully with the “anti-life” anathema that her heteronormative and procreative society ascribes to her. She gives head to men in the midnight darkness of the public cemetery, which in her hometown is one of the very few places this kind of desire can find precarious room to express itself in (it is, literally and symbolically, in the “improper” margins of Kinaray-a life, and one does not need to pay to gain access to it). What's most memorable here is that this poem's lyric conceit leads to the articulation and the frank transgression of a taboo, for it concludes on a hyperbolic and shockingly psychopathic thought.

Sumayao's speaker remains anonymous, although going by the peculiarity of his articulation we can infer that he is a Bicolano bakla, who is a resident in the town where the plaza and its regular bevy of fifteen men, coming from a variety of working-class if not downright destitute backgrounds, hang out, and wait to be “picked up,” most likely for a fee. The parting stanza makes use of a coy folk metaphor for casual sex: rainwater slaking the thirst of the parched earth. It is implied that at least one of these men, who are all ready, poised, and eager to get cruised in this town's best-known cruising area, during this unholy hour will be providing just this kind of “refreshing” respite to the sexually keen and famished bakla speaker.

These two poems paint portraits of the bakla's—and the agi's—erotic lives as necessarily unfolding within the context of class inequality. They therefore complicate our understanding of desire, as being not exclusively libidinal, but also, inextricably, material: how and who we desire is necessarily prised through our embodied difference, one of whose inescapable circumstances is socioeconomic.

Understanding the script within which erotic liaisons and relationships between the bakla and the “real men” or *tunay na lalake* are allowed—and in a manner of speaking, encouraged—to happen by the local culture itself will implicate the idea of masculine heterosexuality's symbolic valorization on one hand, and the bakla's symbolic

debasement and erotic dependency on it, on the other. While the economic hierarchy between the two is self-evident (more or less), what will require further scrutiny is the symbolic hierarchy that confounds and coexists alongside it. This is an ontological hierarchy that sees the slavish fascination of the bakla with the “real man,” and amounts to the bakla’s inability to become erotically sufficient without him.

Most certainly, as the fact of these poems’ provincial provenance suggests, this traditional erotic arrangement may have a cultural dimension as well. In Metro-Manila and other highly urbanized centers in the Philippines, it’s very likely that this model has already been complicated and/or supplanted—possibly, effectively replaced—by the “modern “gay” arrangement of mutual attraction and desire, between (or among) equally desiring and comparably “homosexual” partners.

Text One: Patyo (poem) by Macky Torrechilla

<https://www.pinoylgbtq.com/macky-torrechilla/patyo>

Video of Macky Torrechilla reading her poem

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5tvL9qhWCkY&list=PLttyau9FJBVGidfcVMyibRsupEjdNbUbC&index=2>

Text Two: Quince Hombres de Bicol (poem) by Paul Sumayao

<https://www.pinoylgbtq.com/paolo-sumayao-1/quince-hombres-de-bicol%2C-2015>

Module Eleven: Queerness and Love

For the young, perhaps the most relatable intersectional theme in this archive of queer Philippine texts is that which pertains to romantic affection. Most certainly, almost all the poetry suites submitted to the national workshop included, at the very least, a couple of love poems. The tradition of LGBTQ love poetry in the Philippines has been more or less an extensive one, with anthologies and personal collections (mostly gay and lesbian) coming out regularly since the mid-1990s. On the other hand, among many of the stories and essays in our archive, the need to freely experience erotic love also visibly figures as a persistent concern.

We shall allow the texts in this session to pretty much speak for themselves, as they are nothing if not straightforward love stories—told in both prose and poetic forms.

The first text is a realist lesbian story, told in the first-person, about the “unequal affection” between the homely and province-loving narrator and her obviously more physically fussy beloved, who is as emotionally flighty as she is cosmopolitan. Gayangos’s text is interesting, because its language and manner of presentation—which we can perhaps call “minimalist”—themselves register the theme that this as well as a few of her other lesbian stories seeks to fictionally en flesh: queer love lacks the volubility to speak (about) itself, primarily because it remains beleaguered in our time, enjoying no institutional support, and often needing to be championed against overwhelming cultural odds.

The second text is a poem, originally written in Kinaray-a, and translated into English by the author herself. On one hand, it speaks about queer love as thriving best in the shadows, in the “half-light,” for this is the paradoxical space between mystery and knowledge, which of course is the liminal zone in which the imagination is allowed to invest, to invent, and to foment and intensify desire. On the other hand, the situation to which the poem refers gestures toward a not entirely metaphorical truth, for even or especially in the poet’s conservative rural society, queer encounters can only happen outside the pale, in the “nether” and marginal spaces of public life. While these spaces lend themselves to erotic suggestion and libidinal moments, we must remember that they are also precarious and perilous spaces, in which queer life is rendered at once more possible and impossible.

The third text is a love poem in Filipino, written in the same vein as so many Philippine gay poems already familiar to local readers. Here, as in all love poems, it is the lover who discourses, who speaks, while the beloved must remain silent, as the poem’s receiver, its addressee. The “everydayness” of the situation it purveys—of the beloved coming to the aid of the lover, whose finger has been cut by the jagged edge of a tin can—is perhaps one of this poem’s easiest charms, alongside the supremely relatable platitude, about how much more pleasurable than good food is good love, with which it concludes.

As prised through the imaginative works of queer writers, queer love proves to be as true and as necessary—and as ordinary and as extraordinary—as any other form of human love.

Text One: All that remains of Summer (story) by Sigrid Marianne Gayangos

<https://www.pinoylgbtq.com/fictionist-sigrid-gayangos>

Text Two: Dalam Tulay (poem) by Macky Torrechilla

<https://www.pinoylgbtq.com/macky-torrechilla/dalum-tulay>

Text Three: Terramycin (poem) by Steno Padilla

<https://www.pinoylgbtq.com/steno-padilla/terramycin>

Video of Steno Padilla reading his poem

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jW6PhSV4quU&list=PLttyau9FJBVGidfcVMyibRsupEjdNbUbC&index=3>

Module Twelve: Queerness and Pride

The penultimate Module of this seminar must of course be about the championing of queer pride: an affirmation and celebration of the inherent dignity of queer people, in all their plurality, complexity, difference, and embodiment—the dignity of their own choices on how they must live and love, on how they must be and become.

We present two texts for this session, both personal essays—responses to the prompt, “Where I am From.” They are accounts of the personal journeys of these two writers—self-identifying as trans nonbinary and cis-gay, respectively—that attempt to track the growth of both their outer and their inner lives.

That these authors have not yet arrived at their destinations—their “homes”—doesn’t seem to be the point of their autobiographical narratives.

For now, for these and all the other queer writers who have taken part in our workshops, creating—writing, itself—is *home enough*.

Text One: Where I Come From (essay) by Carlo Paulo Pacolor

<https://www.pinoylgbtq.com/fictionist-carlo-pacolor>

Text Two: Where I am From (essay) by Paul Sumayao

<https://www.pinoylgbtq.com/paolo-sumayao>

Module Thirteen: Bringing Queerness Home

The foregoing modules have all drawn from the archive of LGBTQ texts that have emerged out of the Creative Writing Workshops of GlobalGRACE's Work Package 4. These texts have hopefully communicated well and evocatively enough to the subscribers of this seminar, and therefore also to their students, in whichever milieu or local context they may be sited in, that they may now understand the "queer question" better, precisely because this question has been viewed from the varicolored optics of the literary arts.

The last module now bids this seminar's subscribers to keen inward, turn introspective, and *go back home*. After the imaginative "migration" that the experience of reading these specifically located texts has afforded them, they must now, guided by the insights gleaned from these stories, poems, and essays, attempt to locate home-grown queer "learning moments," in the form of literary or any other creative texts, visual, auditory, or both, and to use these in his or own specific classroom, for their own specific needs. This might conceivably mean looking up a queer text (or set of texts) written in the native languages of their students, or conceptualizing relatable vernacular activities through which any of the intersectional queer themes taken up in the class can be experienced by them, at that very moment, in situ, *right when and where they are*.

What might help subscribers in crafting the thematic and formal content of this session is a discussion of the "dilemmas"—challenges, really—that the proponents and facilitators of this Work Package have needed to confront, and are still in the process of more robustly addressing. What follows is a discussion of these challenges, all of which should clarify further the context within which this Work Package has needed to operate, and which may now, hopefully, aid the subscribers to this seminar, who are themselves educators, to study and reflect on the specificities of the situation their respective students must live and love, as well as read and write, in.

Finally, it is also our hope that appreciating the import of these dilemmas/challenges will help subscribers in more effectively teaching the queer literary works contained in the archives of this Work Package, precisely by giving them an idea of the difficult contexts within they have emerged.

The first challenge relates to the problem of "coming out": on one hand, some fellows simply cannot come out as easily as others; on the other, the task of encouraging and inviting young writers to take part in these workshops remains fraught with difficulty.

While all the national writing fellows are selectively out, and their having applied for a fellowship to these avowedly political workshops betokens their desire to become identified, professionally, as queer writers, being young not all of them possess the kind of economic independence that will enable—embolden—they to risk losing their families' support by coming out. Also, a few of our national workshop fellows, particularly those whose hometowns are in the regions, but whose employments had taken them to Metro Manila, revealed to us that their families back in the province (still) didn't know about their queerness.

Coming out is a personal decision, and every queer person should be allowed to arrive at it on their own terms. The workshops provide the kind of nurturing and enabling environment to allow our fellows to make this and other important decisions with wisdom, commitment, and compassion.

Becoming “enfolded” into a community of peers and companions in the life of the mind, of the arts, has proven to be immensely helpful to our fellows, a couple of whom have since mustered the courage to come out to (certain members of) their families, precisely through their writings.

On the other hand, as has been observed in the Community Workshops, another reason for the difficulty of many young LGBTQs to come out is the continuing problem that religious intolerance poses. This truth becomes plainer to see once you begin to understand the fellows’ situations, and particularly the role that religion plays in their personal and familial backgrounds. After all, the culture of San Pablo City, located in the province of Laguna, as is the case with many other provincial towns in the Philippines, is still very traditional and patriarchal. Many of the local families remain conservative through and through, and in Christian evangelical homes, coming out is obviously a formidable challenge. In such families, children are mostly obliged to remain silent, their problems denied or swept under the rug. Often, to be accepted, they have to be catechists or servants in the local parish or church.

Of course, there’s also the practical situation that many young LGBTQs who may wish to hone their talent in writing, simply can’t spare the time to participate in these residency-based workshops, being breadwinners and/or working students.

The second challenge relates to the fact that not enough women (cis or trans, lesbian, bisexual, or queer) participate in the workshops, simply because not enough of them apply.

For our UP Diliman workshops, slots are nationally competitive. Because not enough women apply or submit manuscripts after the call is made, in the end very few women are chosen to become fellows. As a context we may need to remark that this gender disparity, even at the point of submission, has been observed to be the case even for the established and more traditional national writers workshops (for example, that of the Institute of Creative Writing of the University of the Philippines, which actually commissioned a study on this issue, as part of its 50th anniversary, in 2015).

The third workshop, tentatively scheduled for the first quarter of 2021, will feature creative nonfiction. We anticipate that this genre—the personal essay, which includes biographical and autobiographical narratives, like travelogues and memoirs—will attract more women applicants, this time around. We have decided to reserve five slots for cis or trans women writing fellows in this year’s workshop.

The third challenge is the following: there has been, in the two national workshops especially, a preponderance of urban writing, resulting in the underrepresentation of provincial realities.

We have observed that not enough fellows draw from rural material in their works, simply because most of them reside and/or are educated in the big cities, where employment opportunities and the better schools are located. On the other hand,

religiously conservative and ‘clannish’ hometowns are also invariably sites of trauma for these young writers, who have found provisional refuge in the anonymity, relative secularity, and heady capaciousness of the urban center, in which pockets of queer cultures have dared to stake their makeshift homes.

Every writer knows that childhood is an inexhaustible wellspring of creativity and inspiration. Under the careful guidance of the workshop facilitators, the fellows have been asked to respond to the writing prompt titled “Where I am from.” This writing exercise is an invitation to revisit childhood, with the point of remembering, imaginatively reclaiming and reconfiguring, and in many ways embracing and “forgiving” it.

The fourth challenge may be simply stated as: anglophone writing predominates in these workshops.

Despite the fact that the poetry and fiction workshops involved manuscripts written in five Philippine languages, in either case five slots have gone to the writers in English, simply because around 50 to 60 percent of the submissions were in this language. This is merely a symptom of the national education situation, in which English instruction, as promoted by and couched in the idioms of information technology, is increasingly taking center stage.

While Philippine literature in English has a rich and established postcolonial tradition, in light of the nature of our workshops we find this to be an interesting dilemma, for language crucially makes a difference, in that it constructs identities and desires. A case in point: as revealed in the fellows’ poems and stories, the local gender category “bakla” is—and isn’t—coterminous with the “gay” or even the “queer.”

In other words, as evidenced in the manuscripts that are discussed in these workshops, in the Philippines sexual and gender identities are overdetermined linguistically. This realization has been generative in the workshops, urging the fellows to use code-shiftings and variations in verbal register in new and creative ways.

On one hand, the discussion of the anglophone works in these workshops has invariably insisted on their translational and hybrid qualities, which instates their truth as post- and/or de-colonial utterances. On the other hand, the manuscripts written in the various Philippine languages have been occasions for cultural remembering and affirmation. Allo-identifications and a cross-fertilizing of aesthetics, politics, traditions, and poetics have wonderfully taken place in these workshops. Because all of the writing fellows are, at the very least, bilingual, finally it is our hope that they will be writing, professionally, in more than one language, sometime in the foreseeable future.

The fifth challenge pertains to the realization that there is a need to increase intersectional diversity (ethnolinguistic, class, gender, sexuality, religion), among the fellows, their manuscripts, and both.

This is a dilemma that, during the “evaluation” session at the very end of the workshop both the fellows and the panelists have recognized.

While the lack of the former kind of “empirical” diversity may not be easily soluble—for the nature of our workshops as competitive limits their constituencies to the kinds of submissions we receive from the get go—the second kind of diversity (the textual and/or thematic one) is something that the workshops themselves can encourage, through the allied instruments of tutelage, instruction, mentoring, and fellowship itself.

Of course, over and above the usual intersectional divides, there is the diversity that inheres in individuals themselves. In and through the workshop, writing fellows are encouraged to recognize and respect this source of personal and inalienable dignity—a dignity rooted in their difference/s from one another, as well as in their difference/s from and within themselves.

The sixth challenge is the following: there is a need to sustain the “safe space” these workshops provide, even after the workshops are over.

To realize the literary “culture of equality” that our workshops have given them the cognitive and affectional tools to intuit and desire, the writing fellows themselves have promptly constituted themselves into cliques (“barkadas”), collectivities, and/or communities, both actual and virtual. Especially in this pandemical moment, this experience of abiding solidarity and fellowship is doubtless providing a source of hope, inspiration, courage, and strength.

It’s been our observation that, in and through social media, our workshop facilitators and fellows are continuing to stay in touch, giving practical professional advice (on publishing opportunities, future workshops, etc.), basically mutually encouraging and inspiring each other through this pandemic’s difficult passages and defiles.

Finally, the seventh challenge bids us to do something about the realization that more allies—non-LGBTQ-identified supporters and friends—need to be invited into the project.

The participation of young LGBTQs is our utmost goal for this work package. However, if we want to make them feel safe and accepted, we also need to develop ways to increase participation of compassionate allies in the work package’s activities: professors, older people (for example, grandmothers of LGBTQ youth), people in authority. The lack of dialogue between young LGBTQs and allies impedes the process of full acceptance. We need to bridge this gap.

GlobalGRACE AiR and Covid 19: Parting Questions

The experience of holding the community and national writing workshops of *Making Life Loveable* spurred several important questions that reflect on and/or extend the general problem and dilemmas faced by the GlobalGRACE Philippine team. We have sought to address these questions in a number of ways, most recently through the virtual Artist in Residency (AiR) programme that was directed by GlobalGRACE Early Career Researcher Nerisa del Carmen Guevara in partnership with the YMCA Rinali.

In brief, the AiR programme drew together LGBTQI+ entry level artists from outside of Manila in Laguna province with mentors and advisors drawn from across the Philippines and created a virtual artistic and learning platform and LGBTQ community linked by messaging and videoconferencing applications, Google drives, and a private Facebook group. An archive of AiR productions is now available as open access, alongside the archive of LGBTQ literary works that emerged out of our national and local creative writing workshops. In doing so, AiR responds directly to a number of concerns and insights arising from the earlier workshops, including the need to move beyond the purely literary to encompass other forms of artistic, embodied and textual performances, to encourage and enable greater participation of queer women, to diversify and challenge the urban and anglophone dominance of literary and artistic production, and to avail of and engage with the digital literacy of young LGBTQ people. The latter, indeed, became a necessity in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Here is a “distillation” of some of the key “learning moments” in the following set of questions grouped under four key thematics. When considered alongside of the discussion of the challenges faced by the *Making Life Loveable* project, these questions may prove helpful to others seeking both to use, and add to LGBTQ archives, of art and literature in and beyond the classroom, as they may be seen to further clarify the nature and the value these texts, visual and performative arts, bear in relation to queer education and personal well-being in general.

1. Making Safe and Creative Queer Spaces

What are specific challenges that queer learners must navigate and how do we ensure that we create a safe space for all participants? What kinds of familial and societal pressures can queer creativity address, palliate, challenge, reject? What kinds of transmedial experiences and texts can lend themselves best to the learning and enhancing of queer creativity? How might a creative writing or artistic workshop transform itself into a life-long support system for the young writers who take part in them?

2. Queer Texts & Queer Readings

How should queer texts—which can be scriptural, audiovisual, and/or performative—be “read”? What kind of contextual analyses do they require, so that they can be properly understood? How might heteronormativity be avoided as a default interpretive procedure in the reading of literary and artistic texts? What are the pedagogical steps a teacher or workshop facilitator can take to help young queer readers, writers, and artists realize their full potentials? Since writing presupposes reading, and since both are finally

indistinguishable from each other, what kinds of queer reading experiences might the workshop incorporate, to help “feed” its participants’ imaginations, and complicate their artistic and/or political visions? Inasmuch as it is the home of self-reflexivity and autocritique, does critical theory have a place in the creative writing or art workshop? If so, what is the optimal way for this interdisciplinary dialogue to take place, particularly within the workshop setup?

3. Intersectionality

What are the intersectional themes that present themselves in the reading of queer texts? How might these themes best be explained to learners in the senior high school and tertiary classrooms? How can the workshop method complicate the task of representing queer lives? How can intersectionalities of oppression and resistance be operationalized in the writing and workshopping of texts composed by young and aspiring queer writers? In the interest of encouraging intersectional diversity in the texts that young writers are producing, how might lessons on the ethics of cross-identification be inculcated in the mentoring of creative manuscripts? What are the ethical affordances—as well as the limits—of solidarity, and more broadly speaking, of empathy?

4. On Technology and Other Possibilities

What kinds of “technologies” might be mustered to help this project along? How do we migrate from a traditional creative writing or arts workshop to one for digital natives? How might the lessons learned in the queer classroom be inserted into the public domain? How might the workshop structure be utilized to proliferate publishing or exhibition opportunities for young queer writers and artists? How do we transform creative writing or art teachers to become pro-active allies?

Additional Video Resources

A. National Workshop

1. Excerpts from the evaluation of the two workshops, in which some of these dilemmas/challenges were articulated, in the form of recommendations.

First workshop:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iMn8T_477UQ&list=PLttyau9FJBVHLYIookvOsyJS9ZKvIAeVD&index=14

Second workshop:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vF7aQeecMjg&list=PLttyau9FJBVHLYIookvOsyJS9ZKvIAeVD&index=23>

2. Excerpts from the workshop sessions.

First workshop:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tNYXDkMXJQQ&list=PLttyau9FJBVHLYIookvOsyJS9ZKvIAeVD&index=24>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SA99QDoygkU&list=PLttyau9FJBVHLYIookvOsyJS9ZKvIAeVD&index=25>

Second workshop:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bTczbdmSMKY&list=PLttyau9FJBVHLYIookvOsyJS9ZKvIAeVD&index=26>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56aaeqTCmSo&list=PLttyau9FJBVHLYIookvOsyJS9ZKvIAeVD&index=27>

3. Excerpts on Queer Pedagogy:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UMM8Sn4g1_o&list=PLttyau9FJBVHLYIookvOsyJS9ZKvIAeVD&index=1

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UpxoQst8-88&list=PLttyau9FJBVHLYIookvOsyJS9ZKvIAeVD&index=2>

B. Community Workshop

First Workshop:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SyXb0K9SR54&list=PLttyau9FJBVGE2GyuVIDOKpqdcAi2dYiD&index=4>

2nd Workshop:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zmzkUKYnEk&list=PLttyau9FJBVGE2GyuVIDOKpqdcAi2dYiD&index=5>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GcK4p3XebGQ&list=PLttyau9FJBVGE2GyuVIDOKpqdcAi2dYiD&index=1>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PsB-eDVt6i0&list=PLttyau9FJBVGE2GyuVIDOKpqdcAi2dYiD&index=2>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ckpRQTy_kLw&list=PLttyau9FJBVGE2GyuVIDOKpqdcAi2dYiD&index=3

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https://www.undp.org/content/dam/philippines/docs/Governance/Philippines%20Report_Final.pdf

2. Nativism vs. Universalism: Situating LGBT Discourse in the Philippines

<https://journals.ateneo.edu/ojs/index.php/kk/article/view/KK2013.02003/840>

3. WP4 site:

www.pinoylgbtq.com

4. WP4 Youtube Channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCv2H1ZF-4hJlqRLE2ba7DIw>

5. Timidity and Excess: the postconfessional poetry of young Filipino LGBTQs paper read at EUROSEAS Berlin 2019

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPizXqM8DxA&list=PLttyau9FJBVHtj9D-eu5EAzuLSfpoER6O&index=2>

6. The bakla and the agi: our genders which are not one.

<https://revistaperiferias.org/en/materia/the-bakla-the-agi-our-genders-which-are-not-one/>

6. Making Lives Loveable: 2nd Community Writing Workshop

<https://www.globalgrace.net/post/making-lives-lovable-2nd-community-writing-workshop>

7. Writing For Social Action: Affect, Activism and the Composition Classroom

https://scholarworks.umass.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1796&context=open_access_dissertations

8. “Let’s Get Real: Queering the Queer in the Philippines,” keynote, National Queer Studies Conference, Center for Women and Gender Studies, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, October 26, 2020.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I2XPpV6bp8o&list=PLttyau9FJBVHtj9D-eu5EAzuLSfpoER6O>

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