

The Exclusion of the Bakla in Philippine Contemporary Cinema

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Abstract

This paper explores representations of the *bakla* (a Filipino gender category that conflates sexual orientation and gender identity through the performance of the four components of effeminacy, cross-dressing, same-sex sexuality, and lower class status) and gay globality (which emphasizes hypermasculinity, desiring sameness, and upper class status) in contemporary Philippine cinema. An analysis of three films makes apparent the subtle exclusion of the more traditional *bakla* performed by both members of elitist gay cultures (upper class, urban gay men) and heteronormative people. This exclusion can be linked to aspects of social class, normative conceptions of masculinity, and the exercise of male (homo)sexuality. The *bakla* is often portrayed as a low-income beautician whose economic status denies him entry into urban gay landscapes. Ironically, what little income he has is often shown being spent on sexual dalliances with purportedly straight men. The *bakla* is also portrayed in manners that resemble western conceptions of transgenderism; cross-dressing and hyperfemininity are part of his standard repertoire – two things which further alienate him from the community at large, which treats his gender-bending as comic relief. This association with feminine aspects codes him as backward and passé, while the hypermasculine gay is considered modern. The root of his social exclusion is perhaps his sexuality, which when directed toward the otherness of the *lalake* (straight, masculine man) must be policed and controlled through any means necessary, and unequivocally denied when directed toward other gay men.

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Introduction

In the Philippines, categories of gender and sexuality operate on a sort of typology (Garcia, 2010), reflected in the non-sense childhood rhyme “Girl, Boy, *Bakla*, Tomboy”, which functions as a local version of sorts to the English play-rhyme, “eeny, meeny, miny, mo”. The Tagalog word for this gender matrix is *kasarian*, which literally means ‘type’ (Garcia, 2000). In this matrix, the girl (*babae*) and the boy (*lalake*) are considered the normative genders, but their sexualities are not restricted to heterosexual sexual acts. Traditionally, they are allowed to transgress heteronormative lines without carrying the burden of being labelled homosexual if they engage in same-sex sexual activities with purported tomboys or *baklas*, respectively (Garcia, 2010).

Bakla is a Tagalog term that conflates the ideas of homosexuality, transgenderism, transvestism, and effeminacy (Manalansan, 2003). “*Bakla* as a term is specifically denotative of the identity of the effeminate and/or cross-dressing male...” (Garcia, 2009, p. xxi). *Bakla* itself is a clipped word that combines the Tagalog words for women (*babae*) and men (*lalake*). The Filipino concept of the self is rooted in the interior (*kalooban*) and *kabaklaan* (being *bakla*) is seen as a form of psychosexual inversion – where the self is anchored on a heterosexually defined interior based on the binary of male and female, regardless of a person’s exterior or body (Garcia, 2009). In other words, it is the *bakla*’s feminine ‘spirit’ that anchors and legitimizes her desire to be directed toward the *lalake*. A common way of looking at the *bakla* is through the metaphor of a woman trapped inside a man’s body (Garcia, 2010).

While the *bakla* remains bodily male, she is internally female – this internal femaleness is reflected externally in the *bakla*’s cross-dressing, effeminacy, and sexual desire directed at the masculinity and maleness of the *lalake*. Unlike the gay man, whose sexual desire is directed mostly at other gay men who reciprocate this desire, the *bakla*’s desire must be directed toward the *lalake*; it is often considered incestuous when one *bakla* has sexual relations with another *bakla*, since all *baklas* are supposed to be ‘sisters’. “*Bakla* connotes a certain comportment in the same-sexual act which differentiates [her] from [her] masculine partner who is not considered *bakla* precisely, while homosexual connotes a certain form of orientation, preference, or desire which both parties in the same-sexual experience engender and share” (Garcia, 2009, p. xxi-xxii). Thus, the sexual object of the *bakla* is the *lalake*, but the *lalake* who engages in same-sexual activities with the *bakla* are not themselves labelled *bakla*. Often, this relationship is not only sexual in nature, but also economic – it is common for *bakla* to provide for their masculine partners financially.

The *bakla* has roots in the gender-crossing *babaylan* of pre-colonial Philippines, who acted as spiritual and social leaders in ancient times and embodied both male and female spirits (Garcia, 2009). Before Spanish occupation, local cultures in the Philippines practiced a form of religious animism headed mostly by women – thus, women occupied a social rank in pre-colonial Philippines that paralleled that of men (Garcia, 2009). Women were considered more spiritually linked to the animist gods. *Babaylanism* was an occupation dominated by women (Garcia, 2009) however it was not exclusive to genital females. Males would be allowed to perform the *babaylan* function provided they took on the garb and mannerisms of women (Garcia, 2009).

The *babaylan*, however, did not merely cross-dress but took on the “social and symbolic role of the other, complementary... sex” (Garcia, 2009, p. 165). This means that they shared all the rights, roles, and responsibilities of genital women.

While the contemporary *bakla* has retained traditional vestiges of *babaylanism* (cross-dressing, effeminacy, and sexual desire directed at the masculine *lalake*), it lost its position of privilege in society through centuries of Spanish Catholic rule, which coded the practice of *babaylan* shamanism as demonic and immoral, and the incursion of American psychiatric discourse, which emphasized the pathology of both homosexuality and transgenderism (Garcia, 2009; Tan, 1994). The incursion of other labels like MSM (men who have sex with men), from HIV/AIDS discourses, and the Eurocentric political “gay” label have posed problems for the *bakla*. From being ancient religious leaders in the form of the *babaylan*, the *bakla* came to be identified with the occupations of fashion design and hairstyling (Garcia, 2009). The most pervasive stereotype of the *bakla*, since the ‘70s is that of the *parloristas*: a low-income beauty salon worker (Benedicto, 2008).

To distance themselves from the *bakla* and its connotations of lower class status, urban homosexuals have begun to identify as gay rather than *bakla* (Benedicto, 2008). The urban Manila “gay” scene always seeks to project an image that is compatible with Western, and therefore modern, images of male homosexuality (Benedicto, 2008). This is reflected in the proliferation of various bars, clubs, gyms, and saunas patterned after imaginations of American gay lifestyles (Benedicto, 2008). The *bakla* is seen as an outdated identity that needs to be rooted out but is nevertheless pervasive in ‘modern’ urban gay culture (Benedicto, 2008). “The struggle of gay men in Manila has been cast in terms of finding ways to perform homosexuality without being coded as *bakla*” (Benedicto, 2008, p. 323).

The effacement of the *bakla* is not only rooted in their association with the lower classes but also in their purported effeminacy and cross-dressing, which make them undesirable sexual partners (Benedicto, 2008). The recent popularity of discourses on transgenderism/transsexualism also poses a challenge for the *bakla* identity. In 2008, the Society of Transsexual Women of the Philippines coined the term “transpinay” to refer to transgender women of Filipino descent (Sassot, 2011). Unlike the terms gay or *bakla*, transpinay does not connote sexual orientation but gender identity; not does it connote surgical status (Sassot, 2011).

Bakla is also often used as a pejorative, so the distancing of the transgender identity from the word *bakla* is quite understandable, but nevertheless privileges western conceptions of gender over endemic ones. Transgenderism, it seems, is a new kind of modernity being imposed on the *bakla* that further stigmatizes the identity as being out of sync with the times. The *bakla*, however, co-exists contemporarily with practices of transgenderism and gay male homosexuality in both rural and urban cultures in the Philippines. Martin Manalansan (2003) argues that in diasporic contexts, Filipinos use the *bakla* label to “negotiate the violences that accompany their dislocation” (in Benedicto, 2008, p. 318). In this paper, I argue that contemporary Philippine cinema presents an economically elevated image of the *bakla*, whose effeminacy is accepted as part of the *bakla* identity, but also tries to police its practice of sexuality, especially when directed toward the *lalake*.

This paper looks at three recent films: Olivia Lamasan's *In My Life* (2009), Chris Martinez' *Here Comes the Bride* (2010), and Wenn Deramas' *Petrang Kabayo* (Peter the Horse) (2010). *In My Life* is a drama set in New York City about a Filipino gay couple that features a cross-dressing *bakla*, Hillary, who serves as the movie's comic relief character as well as an important catalyst for the movie's primary character, Shirley, to come to terms with her gay son's relationship with his lover. *Here Comes the Bride* is a comedy about the soul-switching that happens among five primary characters and features the *bakla parlorista*, Toffee, who achieves the ultimate goal of becoming a woman by entering bride-to-be Stephanie's body. *Petrang Kabayo* is a remake of an '80s comedy about a wealthy but mean-spirited *bakla*, Peter, who is cursed to turn into a horse until he learns to control his temper.

Class Status

In contemporary mainstream cinema, the *bakla* is still associated with their traditional professions in the beauty industry. Unlike the common lower-class stereotype, however, the *bakla* in most mainstream films is economically elevated. They may still be hair-dressers, but they are coded as entrepreneurs rather than low-income earners. This economic elevation is reflected in their style of dress, their possessions, and the worlds in which they move.

Hillary in *In My Life* owns her own New York City flower shop, and then employs Shirley part-time. She is fond of wearing colourful dresses often with floral patterns. Her fondness for high-end fashion is also reflected in her preference for colour-blocking and accessorizing with gold. Hillary first appears on-screen wearing an orange floor-length gown with a black fur-trimmed bolero. When she is first introduced to Shirley, Hillary wears a bright pink jacket cinched over the waist with a thin, blue belt over a yellow floral-print mini dress. Her colourful wardrobe seems to reflect the humour in her personality, and only during the funeral scene do we see her in an all-black outfit, and even then, she accents her look with gold hoop earrings and a brass-studded belt. It's important to note that Hillary's costumes are not coded as drag since there really is no aspect of spectacle or parody to Hillary's dress. Despite a certain semblance of camp aesthetics in her wardrobe, the function of her costume seems to be to code her character more as trendy and economically stable rather than to parody heteronormative norms of dress.

The lovers, Mark and Noel, are also contrasted in terms of class. Shirley's son, Mark presumably holds US citizenship as does his mother, works as an advertising executive while Noel is an illegal immigrant who is content at working odd jobs to earn a living. They live together partly because Noel is not able to afford his own rent. The apartment they live in is stylishly furnished, with matching furniture, its walls decorated with interesting pieces of art. Mark is perennially shown wearing tailored suits and dress shirts, while Noel wears ratty old t-shirts, street wear, or his chauffer's uniform.

The film also uses language to code the economic backgrounds of their characters: Noel speaks English fluently but with a thick Filipino accent, and often codeswitches when he is talking with the other Tagalog-speaking characters in the film. Mark, however, speaks with an affected Brooklyn accent and often uses English instead of

Tagalog in conversing with the other characters. This is a reflection of the commonly held belief in the Philippines that English is the language of the upper classes.

In *Here Comes the Bride*, Toffee first appears wearing a black, wide-brimmed hat, knee-high boots, and red couture clothes accessorized with half-a-dozen rings and necklaces. When he enters into Stephanie's body, his first move is to make Stephanie's look more high-end, which he does by camping her up with thick make-up and big hair. Later, he revamps Stephanie's bridal gown by using the décor in her room, turning the plain dress into haute couture. Toffee's gay friends, Alfie and JR, wear designer men's wear and drive luxury four-wheel drives. The salon they own also caters to upper-class clients. Collectively, all three queers refer to themselves as 'image stylists' to distance themselves from the more common title of beautician.

In *Petrang Kabayo*, Pedro grows up in the slums raised by a physically abusive father. He runs away and is adopted by a rich old maid, who then names him heir to her estate. Pedro changes his name to Peter to class-up his persona. Growing up as heir, he has developed a mean-streak and has become verbally and physically abusive to the household staff and farmhands. When the old lady dies, Peter inherits her fortune and is tasked to run an airline company as well as a farm that breeds pedigree racehorses. Peter, who is perennially dressed in couture and surrounded by bodyguards, travels from his country estate to the office driven in a luxury van by a personal chauffeur. Peter likes to boast of his new-found wealth by calling his staff *hampas lupa* (dirt poor) and *patay gutom* (poor people who are starving to death). When his meanness leads to the death of a prized racehorse, the Goddess of Horses, another *bakla* character, appears to him and curses him to turn into a horse every time he loses his temper. Unlike either Hillary or Toffee, Peter is coded as a corporate professional; he is shown strutting into the office while employees scurry to get out of his way, hiring new employees for the airline, and berating his staff during a board meeting.

Effeminacy and Cross-dressing

Contemporary mainstream films also reflect 'modern' practices of queerness in Philippine society. The *bakla* has bifurcated into two rather distinct identities that have been subsumed under the English label of 'gay': the cross-dressing *bakla* (that seems to operate on a similar level to that of the transgender) and the non-cross-dressing *bakla*. What is interesting in these films is that, unlike what Benedicto (2008) has argued, the effeminacy of these characters is not challenged – it is seen as a simple, logical marker for their queerness.

In *In My Life*, Hillary's performance of femininity is unremarkable – she sashays down the streets of New York, dances playfully provocatively in one of the gay bars, and acts as Shirley's self-improvement coach. She takes Shirley to a salon to get her hair done and then coaches her on what she has to do during interviews to get a proper job.

Neither Noel nor Mark is as effeminate as the more stereotypical depictions of the *bakla* or the gay man in contemporary cinema. Compared to each other, however, it is easy to see that one of them is more feminized than the other but on different levels. Mark's performance of *kabaklaan* is much closer to that of the global gay image than

Noel's. Mark is independent and keeps himself busy with work, but we also see that Mark often works out – he is shown jogging in one scene and then later abandoning Shirley to Noel saying, “I need to run to the gym.” Even his outfits reflect this kind of lifestyle; he prefers to wear tight muscle shirts at home, while Noel wears loose t-shirts. This reflection of the global gay image in Mark is further reinforced in a scene where he takes Shirley and Noel to a client's party and the client happens to be a gay bar. Shirley watches with a visibly uncomfortable Noel as Mark dances on the dance floor with several shirtless men: a beer in one hand, the other raised in the air, pumping to techno music. Mark is also coded as the primary provider in their family, as he is the only one with a professional job. Mark, however, is much more feminized than Noel when it comes to his movements and gestures. In one scene, we see him giggling at photos of his nephews. In another, he sits with Shirley near a fountain in Central Park with his knees locked closely together and his arms hugging his torso.

Nothing in Noel's actions code him as gay, save for one display of overcompensating hypermasculine behavior when he visits with his homophobic relatives. What feminizes Noel is his feelings and his attitudes and his inability to challenge either Mark or Shirley's displays of power, and also his working class status. The film implies that most of Noel's financial needs are taken care of by Mark, putting Noel firmly into the position of house-husband. In the film, Noel constantly sought to impress and please Shirley and so he is more reflective of the stereotypical daughter-in-law (Hillary says as much in one scene), than he is of either *kabaklaan* or gay globality.

In *Here Comes the Bride*, Toffee wears some sort of drag and then proceeds to drag up Stephanie's female body. Alfie and JR, however, do not cross-dress but, being image stylists, they do wear some make-up and carry big feminine handbags. All three are also incredibly effeminate, a fact that is emphasized when another character, Bien (the groom's grandfather), enters into Toffee's body and uses it to rediscover his lost youth and seduce a bridesmaid. When Bien first wakes up in Toffee's body, he admonishes Alfie and Toffee for acting so effeminately. Unaware of the body-switch, Alfie and JR bully him into doing his job as a make-up artist. When he is unable to do this properly, Alfie and JR exaggeratedly scream at him and throw him out of the room.

When Toffee enters Stephanie's body, she begins to act in an exaggeratedly feminine and campy manner, also using *swardspeak* – gay lingo that makes use of elements of English, Tagalog, Japanese, and Spanish along with certain celebrities' names spoken in a hyperfeminized fashion (Benedicto, 2008). Stephanie starts calling her mother 'Mamu' instead of Mom and uses terms such as *spluk* (speak) and witticisms like '*ang haba ng hair ko*' ('my hair is so long', implying physical beauty or attractiveness). At the movie's climax, when all five characters attempt to re-create the accident in an effort to switch back to their proper bodies, *swardspeak* is yet again used to code the *bakla* identity.

As a kid, Peter is very feminine and dresses in tight t-shirts and hot pants. When his father sees him wearing a dress and plucking hairs from his armpits, Peter gets beat up and dunked into a tankful of water – an allusion to the many abusive practices that *bakla* kids supposedly go through when their fathers want them to stop being *bakla*. When Peter opts to play with other *bakla* kids instead of taking care of his father's

horse, which then runs away, his father severely beats him up, straps him to his *kalesa* (horse-drawn carriage), and makes Peter pull on the carriage as a replacement for the horse.

When Peter is adopted by the rich old maid, *Manang Biday*, he starts dressing in more feminine clothes and dances for his adoptive mother, who then comments, “You are like a real woman!” Peter also starts to adopt a fondness for equestrienne clothing, often roaming around the *hacienda* in riding boots and carrying a riding crop, which he also uses to intimidate both the horses on the farm and the human staff. His corporate attire consists of high-fashion pieces, often with exaggeratedly big shoulder pads reminiscent of ‘80s-era fashion. Peter also often wears stiletto heels when going to the office or even when simply lounging around at home.

Sexuality

All three films code the *bakla* as a primarily sexual identity, while attempting to control this sexuality with violence or social exclusion, or by purging the *bakla* from any form of sexuality altogether.

The lovers in *In My Life* share several romantic moments, but it is not until ninety minutes into the film that we get to see an actual kiss. One scene poignantly points out this policing of affection. Early in the film Mark enters their apartment and discovers that Noel has decorated the living room with displays of romantic quotes to celebrate their anniversary. Noel begins to read out one of the quotes, and then begins to touch Mark’s cheek. Just as the audience sees Noel looming in on Mark for a kiss, he starts tickling him instead, reverting to juvenile displays of affection.

The film’s script offers a look into how the characters perceive the nature of *kabaklaan* as an identity that is based mostly on sexual practice. In one scene, Mark takes Shirley on a picnic and they start talking about how she first found out about Mark’s sexuality. Mark says, “*Naaalala mo nung second year ako, nung nalaman mong bakla ako dahil nahuli mo kami ni Tommy?*” (Do you remember when I was in second year, when you found out I was gay because you caught me with Tommy?). Mark opens up about how Shirley has been distant after this, “In fact, since then you just shut me out. *Pagkatapos noon, kahit anong gawin ko, parang hindi na kita mapasaya.*” (After that, I felt like what ever I do, I could never make you happy.) Mark goes on to list how Shirley had always put him down despite his achievements and concludes, “You will never be proud of me because I failed you as a son.”

This dialogue reflects Westernized discourses on the nature of the *bakla* by equating *kabaklaan* purely with sexual practice (rather than being woman-hearted, effeminacy, or cross-dressing). Shirley’s attitude toward Mark’s sexuality has also led Mark to imbibe within him the attitude of *kabaklaan* as some form of failed masculinity. This perceived failure to perform masculinity as an idealized image of the son is constantly reinforced by Shirley’s passive-aggressive behavior. Shirley and Mark’s relationship and dialogues also reinforce rather dated Freudian discourses about the male homosexual as the product of an over-bearing mother and an absentee father.

Hillary is also an interesting counterpoint to the lovers in the film. She is the sole character in the film that does not talk about love or gets paired up with someone. She

remains celibate throughout the whole film, a fact that becomes even more obvious because she is surrounded by romantic couples: Mark and Noel, their friends Vince and Mia, and even Shirley, who starts dating an American man toward the end of the film.

In *Here Comes the Bride*, Toffee's primary goal while in Stephanie's body is to experience sex with a man. Toffee heads off to the beach in Stephanie's newly made over body and begins to seduce random men. He runs into Harold, Stephanie's fiancé, and begins to seduce him, pulling him into a room and desperately attempting to pull off his shorts while he reminds Stephanie of their vow to wait until they're married before consummating their love.

The film also uses the word *bakla* liberally, both as a marker for the *bakla* identity and as a pejorative. The three image stylists freely refer to each other as 'sis' or sisters, and in one scene JR calls Alfie and Toffee's attention by yelling, '*Hoy, mga bakla ng taon!*' ('Hey, fags of the year!') But the presence of homophobic language is also quite obvious. When she first discovers the soul-switching, Stephanie seeks out the other parties. She first finds Bien in Toffee's body, and later her aunt, Precy, in the body of the nanny. When Stephanie realizes who is in her body, she becomes flustered and panicked and says, '*Ninang! There's a gay man inside my body!*' to which Precy simply says, 'My God!' When they confront Toffee, just as he is seducing Harold with a pole dance, Precy also comments, '*Malaswa!*' ('How indecent!') When Harold realizes that the person he married was not Stephanie but Toffee, Bien comments, '*Si hijo, na-tanso ka,*' a term that means one has been hoodwinked into thinking that something fake is actually the real thing. This calls to light discourses regarding *kabaklaan* (being *bakla*) and mimicry—the *bakla* is an identity that is an in-between: neither truly male/masculine nor truly female/feminine, but one that exists somewhere in between those two poles (Manalansan, 2003). Finally, when Toffee gives chase in an effort to experience sex using Stephanie's body, the others call after him with words like '*Pigilan ang baklang yan!*' ('Stop that faggot!'), and even in Spanish, '*Vuelve maricon!*' ('Stop you faggot!') When they catch him, Toffee ends up bound and gagged. He stays this way for the rest of the film. In order to switch back into their original bodies, they must wait two years and then try to re-create the accident that led to the soul switching. For two years, they all live in one house taking care of each other and trying to adopt to their new bodies. Throughout this period, we see glimpses of Toffee, still in Stephanie's body, bound by the wrists, chained to a bedpost, or isolated and alone during birthdays and Christmas.

JR and Alfie, also attempt to police Toffee's sexuality, deriding him for insisting on having a *lalake* as his partner. They suggest that he tries 'boys who like boys', to which Toffee replies with an indignant retort commenting on how the other two are just as reprehensible by their preference for equally effeminate partners. The traditional *bakla's* protest against this model for same-sex relationships is quickly shut down when Toffee's friends comment on how old-fashioned and stereotypical he is.

JR and Alfie also police the lines between gender hierarchies. When they see Bien using Toffee's body to seduce one of the bridesmaids, Alfie vomits and JR has an emotional breakdown. Later, they call him disgusting and liken him to a tomboy: a

bakla who chooses a *babae* as a sexual partner cannot be a heterosexual *lalake* (or even a bisexual), but is relegated to the lower level of the tomboy, reinforcing the hierarchic rhyme of ‘girl, boy, *bakla*, tomboy’. JR and Alfie are also notably absent during the last few moments of the film, while everyone waits for the chance to switch back into their bodies. It seems they have abandoned their friend, whom they now view as a tomboy. The film ends happily for Toffee though, who ends up in the hospital, back in his original body, being tended to by three good-looking nurses, who seem eager to receive his flirtations.

In *Petrang Kabayo*, any form of Peter’s sexuality is met with violent retribution. In one scene, he secretly watches three farmhands bathing in the open. Peter hides behind one of the horses, who then starts urinating on him. Peter begins to beat up the horse, which attempts to run away from him but instead drags him around all over the farm as his boot had been caught up in the horse’s reins. Peter orders that the horse be butchered and made into *tapa* (cured meat), but the farmhands refuse. Peter fires all of them. Later, Peter is transformed into a female horse (hence the name Petra), and by working hard and doing good deeds, earns the affection of Erickson – one of the farmhands whom Peter had fired. Only if a man kisses him while in horse form can the spell be broken. At the end of the film, Erickson kisses the horse and it transforms back into Peter. Peter giggles naughtily, while Erickson is repulsed by what he had just done.

Conclusion

Contemporary mainstream films that feature *bakla* characters often code these identities as economically elevated, divorcing them from stereotypical portrayals of the *bakla* as existing in states of relative wealth amidst abject poverty, as is a common image seen in films from the past decades. Unlike most contemporary independent cinema in the Philippines, which have a proclivity for settings its stories in urban poor or rural contexts, mainstream cinema offers audiences images of ludicrous wealth and imaginings of globalization and economic success. This perhaps accounts for the distancing of the *bakla* from poverty.

The *bakla* in contemporary mainstream films come in two major varieties: the cross-dressing and the non-cross-dressing types. Effeminacy is not seen as problematic in these films, but merely as a marker for the *bakla* identity – both the cross-dressing and non-cross-dressing type of *bakla* are coded as highly effeminate. The non-cross-dressing type of *bakla* is coded as modern and closely linked to global imagining of the gay identity. Interestingly, the cross-dressing *bakla* is coded not as transgender or transsexual. Discourses of transgenderism do not exist in contemporary mainstream cinema, even though there are references in some films to *bakla* characters who have undergone sexual reassignment surgery.

The primary marker for the *bakla* identity remains sexuality directed toward the otherness of the *lalake*. There are instances of reciprocated same-sex desire, but the dominant model for *bakla* sexuality in contemporary mainstream films is that of the *bakla* and her *lalake* partner. The *lalake*, though, remains heterosexual, but to safeguard this heterosexuality, the *bakla* ends up being violently bound and gagged to control any exercise of sexuality. The best model for the *bakla* is apparently still one that is divorced from sexuality and serves no other primary purpose but comic relief.

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