

RESEARCH ARTICLE

We Who Are Sexy: Christine Jorgensen's transsexual whiteness in the postcolonial Philippines

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This article offers a close reading of the little-known 1962 Filipino feature film *Kaming Mga Talyada* (aka. *We Who Are Sexy*), an ostensibly comic popular entertainment that revolves around the appearance of transsexual celebrity Christine Jorgensen at a Manila nightclub. The film stages substantive questions about the effects of the Eurocentric medico-juridical discourse of transsexuality on the densely layered colonial histories of local Filipino constructions of sex/gender/sexuality – particularly the intertwined categories of *talyada* and *bakla*. Transsexual embodiment and gender identity are interpreted as anatomo-political somatechnologies that enmesh individual bodies with the biopolitical project of the state-based sovereignty; thus, the micro-political agonistics of *transsexual/talyada* interactions within the film enact a complementary narrative, played out on the macro-political scale, about the construction of the heteronormative Christian nationalist genders that sustain and reproduce Filipino sovereignty against the twin threats of Islamist and US imperialist challenges to the sovereign territorial integrity of the Republic of the Philippines.

Keywords: Christine Jorgensen; Philippines; transsexual; transgender; *talyada*; *bakla*; Foucault; Agamben; film; postcolonial; whiteness; somatechnics

Introduction

Kaming Mga Talyada (aka *We Who Are Sexy*), produced in 1962 for the domestic Filipino market by Sampaguita Pictures, one of the major studios in the Philippines movie industry, was an ephemeral piece of popular entertainment that took advantage of an extended appearance by US transsexual celebrity Christine Jorgensen at a Manila nightclub to tell a diverting tale about contemporary Filipino gender and sexuality (Cayado 1962). In spite of the film's ostensibly comic narrative and lack of pretensions, *Kaming Mga Talyada* nonetheless substantively engages with the effects of the newly-spectacularized medico-juridical discourse of transsexuality – which circulated globally in the 1950s and 1960s via the figure of Christine Jorgensen – on local Filipino configurations of sex/gender/sexuality, and thus on the biopolitical equations by means of which sovereign power reproduced and sustained itself.

Veering through several genres (romantic comedy, musical, war story), the film's convoluted storyline narrates the process whereby the production of normative hetero-patriarchal genders secures national territorial sovereignty in the Republic of

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the Philippines, by simultaneously suppressing a racialized internal Other (the Muslim Moros) while warding off the destabilizing pull of the white American metropole (figured in the person of Christine Jorgensen). In doing so, the film depicts a (post)colonial encounter between two competing “somatechnologies” that allow us to explore the interrelationship between micro-political techniques of subjective individualization (what Michel Foucault called the “anatamo-political”) and the macro-scale socio-political organization of the state, territories, and populations (what Foucault called the “biopolitical”). It is the “whole intermediary cluster of relations” Foucault describes as linking the anatamo-political to the biopolitical that I seek to identify with the neologism *somatechnic*, which, by supplanting the logic of the *and* in the phrase “embodiment *and* technology”, is meant to suggest that material corporeality (*soma*) is inextricably conjoined with the techniques and technologies (*technics*) through which bodies are formed and transformed, and to name the spaces in which, and practices through which, the lives of bodies become concretely enmeshed in the lives of nations, states, and capital formations (Foucault 1978, 139).¹

The spectacular whiteness of American transsexuality

Christine Jorgensen spent several months in Manila in 1962, performing at the Safari Club, during a Pacific tour that also took her to Hawaii, Sydney, and Hong Kong (Jorgensen 2000, 279–282). To the extent that Jorgensen is remembered at all today, it is as an iconic pioneer of the medico-juridical process of somatic transformation that became known in the mid-twentieth century as “transsexuality”. As I (and others) have recounted elsewhere, Christine Jorgensen made her debut as the first global transsexual celebrity in 1952, at age 26, when news of her genital transformation surgery in Copenhagen made headlines around the world – the first time that surgical and hormonal techniques for “changing sex” had been accorded such attention (Stryker 1999, 2007; Meyerowitz 2002, 49–98 and *passim*; Serlin 2004, 159–190; Docter 2007). Jorgensen, a New York native of Danish descent, stayed in the media spotlight for a quarter-century, and it was largely through coverage of her that the phenomenon of transsexuality first became widely known to mass audiences. As Jorgensen herself later noted, during 1953 – when hydrogen bomb tests vaporized atolls in the Pacific, England crowned a new queen, Jonas Salk invented the polio vaccine, and war raged on the Korean peninsula – more words appeared about her in the world press than about any other single topic (Jorgensen 2000, 133). Shy to the point of reclusiveness before her gender transition, but unable to find routine work due to her notoriety and the stigma attached to transsexuality, Jorgensen developed a lucrative nightclub act that exploited the public’s fascination with her, and that earned her upwards of \$5000 a week throughout the 1950s. She published a best-selling autobiography in 1967 (adapted for the screen in 1970 as the trashy exploitation film *The Christine Jorgensen Story*), and thereafter enjoyed a second career as a sought-after speaker on the college lecture circuit. Even in the 1980s, as Jorgensen’s star-power faded, she appeared frequently on television talk shows and at public events, until her death from bladder cancer in 1989 at age 62. Although now little remembered beyond the contemporary transgender communities that revere her as a founding figure, Jorgensen’s posthumous reputation has recently experienced a minor resurgence: in addition to a smattering of academic attention over the past

decade or so, the feminist Cleis Press re-issued her autobiography in 2000; the A&E Network cable television program *Biography* chronicled her life in 2004; Bradford Louryk's one-person off-Broadway show *Christine Jorgensen Reveals*, based on an interview Jorgensen recorded with the comedian Nipsey Russell in 1957, received a New York Drama Desk Award in 2006; and psychologist Richard Docter published a short biography of Jorgensen in 2007.

Although the young Jorgensen undoubtedly cut a charismatic and attractive public figure, and while she certainly exhibited grace under the pressure of unrelenting media attention regarding intimate details of her life, the scope and intensity of Jorgensen's initial celebrity in the 1950s remains something of a curiosity, given that she was by no means the first transsexual. Jorgensen's extremely modest acting, dancing, and vocal talents similarly provide an insufficient explanation of her staying-power. The scale and extent of Jorgensen's celebrity in the 1950s thus appear implausible, in retrospect, without taking into consideration the social history that structured the moment of her sudden fame.

As I have noted in previous work on Jorgensen, World War II brought about the largest mobilization of population in US history – it not only inducted millions of men into military service for deployment around the globe, but also attracted millions more rural residents to coastal cities for wartime work opportunities, and it brought an unprecedented number of women into the paid labor force for the first time. Part of the post-war adjustment was an intense effort to recontain female labor within the domestic sphere, accompanied by much public musing over appropriate gender roles. At the same time, sex-segregated conditions in the military, coupled with new surveillance mechanisms and administrative procedures to root out gay service-members, brought unprecedented attention and visibility to homosexuality as a social issue. Part of what people saw, when they saw Jorgensen, was the spectacle of medical science's supposed ability to engineer both sexuality and gender in ways that produced conventional heterosexuality. These trends cast Jorgensen – and through her the transsexual phenomenon embodied in her person – as a solution to a perceived social problem, and as an emblem of a new era (Berube 1991; Stryker 1999).

The spectacle of Jorgensen's transsexuality simultaneously evoked the same awe and anxiety associated with the atomic bomb – it offered another instance of scientific prowess triumphing over matter itself. Just as nuclear technology split the atom to literally destroy matter, transsexual technology destroyed the stable materiality of biological sex, thereby ungrounding gender representation from its presumed physical referent, and demanding new epistemological frameworks for structuring the semiotic production of embodiment's gendered meanings. Jorgensen's spectacularity can thus be read as a map of emergent postmodern conditions of signification in the mid-twentieth century; the “transsexual phenomenon” she figured can be seen as an ontologizing practice that resignified the relationship between gendered subject and sexed flesh within post-World War II biomedical and technocultural environment (Stryker 1999).

Building upon this earlier argument, in the present article I am interested in using Jorgensen's visit to the US post-colony of the Philippines, which had been granted independence only in 1945, to begin remapping the global spectacle of her transsexuality as a white (post)colonial phenomenon. It is not Jorgensen's pale skin or Scandinavian-American cultural heritage that made her white, but rather the

processes through which her presence racializes others while rendering opaque her own racialization, and the means by which unspoken prerogatives and presumed entitlements over the lives of others circulate invisibly beneath a mask of a presumed universality. Jorgensen's light-featured phenotype merely allows her to function as a white screen onto which is projected all that is fantasized of the metropole in relation to the colony: wealth, glamour, mobility, liberation, and self-fashioning, all situated according a spatialized racial hierarchy that locates darkness in the heart of the colonized territory, and whiteness at the colonizing imperative's point of origin.

Jorgensen's on-screen appearance in *Kaming Mga Talyada* allows us to ask, in the words of Alfred Lopez, "what happens to whiteness after empire", and to assess the ways in which white cultural norms remain embedded in postcolonial societies "as the marker or index of the traces of colonial legacies that yet lie latent (but not dormant) in the postcolonial world's own 'colonial unconscious,' which it owes to itself to uncover and interrogate" (Lopez 2005, 4, 6). If we acknowledge that the "white woman's body" has been depicted in American film as the fantasmatic space of the nation's birth at least since *Birth of a Nation*, perhaps we can begin to trace, through the figure of Christine Jorgensen, the outlines of the new US polity that emerged in the aftermath of World War II – a global (post)colonial neo-empire with its own peculiar administrative logics linking bodies, identities, territories, and populations, that become visible even in within seemingly obscure cinematic texts.

***Kaming Mga Talyada*: a queer kind of sexy**

Kaming Mga Talyada – filmed primarily in Tagalog, with some English and Spanish dialog – opens in the lobby of the Philippines National Bank in Manila, where several matronly women are gossiping about their children, when they spy Chelo, a former acquaintance whom they have not seen for 10 years. The women somewhat facetiously compliment Chelo, who exudes an over-dressed sense of self-importance, for wearing the most up-to-date fashions, and they tell her that she has become very beautiful, with a figure like Marilyn Monroe (although in truth it is somewhat more ample). When they ask where she has been hiding herself for the past decade, Chelo tells them that she married Captain Dimagiba, a Filipino man serving in the US military, with whom she has traveled around the world – she has in fact recently returned from "pleasure trips to Hong Kong, Paris, Tokyo and America". Chelo confesses, however, that her husband "loves the army more than her", and has more or less abandoned her to pursue the life of a military man in the United States. To compensate for her partner's preoccupation with his career, Chelo has devoted herself entirely to the pursuit of her own material satisfactions. Thus, before Christine Jorgensen ever appears on screen, the themes of what her transsexuality can be made to represent – a US-centered femininity enmeshed in consumerist hedonism, circulating transnationally with a privilege backed by military power – are prefigured in Chelo's character, and rendered simultaneously desirable and slightly absurd.

Fortunately, Chelo tells her former acquaintances, she has seven well-behaved, hard-working, unmarried adult daughters who support her financially while her wayward soldier-husband is stationed in the United States. The women become confused, because they remember Chelo as having seven sons. At this point, Chelo produces photographs of her children, and the audience is introduced to the seven

Dimagiba siblings – apparently male-bodied individuals, all striking stereotypically fey and feminine poses, several of whom are obviously wearing make-up. The scene then cuts to a song-and-dance number where Chelo’s seven grown children prance about and sing the film’s title song:

We who are talyada, you will always find us in Luneta
 We who are talyada, our beauty is always on display
 In any street, we are always there
 Even Miss Universe will be embarrassed
 By our beautiful talyada bodies and our baby faces
 Oy! Oy! Oy! Oy! Oy! Oy! Oy! Our group is always happy!
 Ay! Ay! Ay! Ay! Ay! Talyada!
 Especially if there are handsome men, our hearts pound and we would always look
 talyada!

In partially rendering the song into English, I have deliberately left the key term *talyada* in the original Tagalog, for it is on this term that the film’s narrative pivots. The English-language title of *Kaming Mga Talyada*, given in the film’s press packet as *We Who Are Sexy*, unproblematically translates *kaming mga* as *we who are*, but the translation of *talyada* as *sexy*, given the context in which it has just been used, is dense with layered meanings.

Derived, like many Tagalog words, from a Spanish root introduced during the initial European colonization of the Philippine archipelago in the sixteenth century, *talyada* is formed from the verb *tallar* – to sculpt or to measure – and its feminine past-participle, *tallada*. In Tagalog, *talya* literally means a “posture” or “sculpture”, whereas *talyada* means something that has been cut or engraved (*Tagalog–English Online Dictionary* n.d.). The word is commonly used, however, according to a Tagalog native-speaker informant, to mean “a woman’s praiseworthy way of carrying herself in public, particularly through the femininity of her clothing and appearance”. It thus has a positive connotation when used in reference to female subjects, and conveys much the same sense as the English idiomatic phrase “she cuts a nice figure”. Used in reference to male subjects, however, *talyada* (sometimes masculinized as *talyado*) has derogatory implications, and functions as a euphemism for the epithet *bakla* – usually translated, not entirely satisfactorily, as *faggot* – a term that has been somewhat recuperated within contemporary Pilipino usage in much the same manner as the English word *queer* (Benedicto 2008a).

Bakla, in contrast to the currently dominant gender-normative ideology of homosexuality within Eurocentric modernity, refers to a culturally specific combination of biological maleness, same-sex attraction, bodily expression of feminine characteristics or mannerisms, and – often but not always – elements of cross-gender dressing and adornment. According to J. Neil C. Garcia, “*bakla* and homosexual are terms belonging to two different knowledge systems, and therefore [they] can only irrevocably be different from each other” (Garcia 1996, xviii). Martin Manalansan describes the relationship between *gay* and *bakla* as being somewhat more flexible: not “self-contained modes of identity”, but rather “two coexisting yet often-times incommensurable cultural ideologies of gender and sexuality” that share a somewhat permeable boundary (Manalansan 2003, 21). Both scholars agree, however, that the problematic transitions between *bakla* and *gay*, where the former symbolizes a Filipino queerness and the latter a white queerness, represent an epistemological rift

within the problematic of (post)colonial representation (Manalansan 2003, 24; Garcia 1996, 39).

The *talyadas* in *We Who Are Sexy* are clearly intended to be read – at a time and in a medium in which a more overt characterization would have been impermissible – as *bakla*. Their exaggerated mannerisms are broad caricatures of male effeminacy; they pin their hair and line their eyes, they mince and sashay in their movements. Luneta (where, according to the lyrics of their song, they can always be found) is Manila’s large urban park, where gay men, female prostitutes, and transgender women cruise and stroll for sex. The *talyadas* are shown dancing and singing in front of the businesses, adjacent to one another in a low-slung commercial building, through which they support their mother Chelo: a hair salon, a massage parlor, a laundry – all of the time-honored trades of *baklas* who work as *parloristas*. Lynn Pareja, a professor of film and literature at the University of the Philippines who worked at Sampaguita Pictures when *Kaming Mga Talyada* was made, notes that *talyada* was widely-used “slang at the time for gay men”. She offers an alternate etymology for the term, relating it to *talsik* – a splash or ejaculation – in reference to the way in which effeminate men or sexually unconstrained women are believed incapable of controlling their inner nature, and as a result “splash” portions of their bodies about – head, hips, and especially fingers – and thus appear to “normal” people as “deviants” (David 2008).

And yet, by identifying its protagonists as *talyadas* rather than *baklas*, as “sexy” rather than “gay”, the film calls attention to intriguing slippages of desire and identification within the Filipino context that elude the conceptual sex/gender/sexuality schemas of Eurocentric modernity. *Talyada* functions not just as a euphemism, but as a polymorphous category of becoming and possibility that structures the entire film. As the *talyadas* dance and sing in the courtyard of their building, they are secretly observed by seven attractive and conventionally feminine young women, who live in a dormitory next door, where Chelo conveniently happens to be house-mother. The young women are visibly smitten with the feminine grace and beauty of the *talyadas*, and the “sexiness” of the meeting-scene revolves around a *femme-femme* attraction that plays out across the division of biological sex difference. One of the young women, who knew the seven Dimagiba siblings in their youth, tells the others that the Dimagibas were not always *talyadas* but had been made such by the unnatural influence of their abandoned mother, who wanted them to continue supporting her rather than marrying and making families of their own. Chelo herself, in her vain preoccupations, parodies the conventional sense of *talyada* as a complimentary performance of womanhood. The father, Captain Dimagiba, says one of the women, is rumored to be *talyada* himself – why else would he spend so much time away from his wife, in the company of other men? Gayness and heterosexuality, cosmopolitan sexiness and reproductive sexuality, perversity and normativity: each haunts the others whenever one temporarily moves to the foreground as it circulates through the category *talyada*².

The seven young women in the dormitory vow to woo and win the seven *talyadas* as their husbands, thereby inaugurating the film’s overarching plot. Many comic situations based on pronomial confusions, sexual double-codings, and gender transpositions then follow, throughout which the *talyadas* remain aloof and oblivious to the advances of the women who pursue them. A turning point in the courtship comes, however, when a group date is organized to attend one of Christine

Jorgensen's nightclub performances. Considered extradiagetically, Jorgensen's lengthy performance – consisting of a few songs filled with double-entendres, a quick-change number, a Marlene Dietrich impersonation and a rendition of the Tagalog-language standard “Dahil Sayo”, sung while ethnically cross-dressed in a traditional Filipina costume – leaves much to be desired (although the 20-minute-long sequence is probably the most complete surviving documentation of Jorgensen's stage act). Diagetically, however, the scene is meant to represent the height of polysemic metrosexuality, with Jorgensen offering different possibilities for pleasure and identification for all parties involved. In embodying a white American femininity self-evidently achieved through her own practical actions and put on display in Manila, she occupies the spotlight around which the action of the film revolves, betokening a potential for mobility of various sorts, along lines of racial hierarchy that flow toward whiteness across lines that separate colony from metropole, Filipino from American, man from woman, and gay from straight.

For all her ambiguities, Jorgensen is unambiguously positioned within the film as part of the “we” who are “sexy” and desirable, and as such her presence adds a further layer of complex connotation to the meaning of *talyada*: she is construed as a formerly male-bodied figure literally cut in an emasculating and feminizing fashion by the surgeon's scalpel and the body-sculpting influence of hormones, who (like a statue or fetish) acquires an artificial form through the application of particular techniques and who, in enacting a culturally legible womanliness divorced from a biologically female sex, becomes decorative or ornamental, beautiful in an aesthetic sense, but no longer reproductively functional; she exists solely as image and spectacle. Jorgensen thus occupies the category *talyada*, but points beyond it toward a new somatechnic horizon.

A Christian nationalist normative somatechnics³

The relationship of the globally disseminated transsexual discourse figured between Christine Jorgensen and the pre-existing concepts of *bakla* and *talyada* recapitulates the larger epistemological crisis of (post)colonial representation: it is here, at one point among innumerable others, that a postcolonial society confronts a colonizing power that organizes embodiment, identity, gender, and sexuality differently than the (post)colonial society does for itself locally. The dramatic turning point of *Kaming Mga Talyada* takes place after the group date to Jorgensen's nightclub performance, when Chelo decides that she will send her children to Europe to become “professionals like Christine” – thus trapping them forever in feminine subservience to her monstrous appetites. Determined to avoid the calamitous loss of their love objects, the seven young women write to Captain Dimagiba in the United States, urging him to return and to restore (patriarchal) order to his household. He does so, and subsequently drafts his *talyada* children into the Filipino military, in order to subject them to the fearsome discipline of a particularly ruthless drill sergeant who represents the last, best hope for restoring their normative masculinity. Another series of scenes intended as comic then ensues, in which the *talyadas* playfully resist and ultimately thwart the military's efforts to make men of them. In consequence, they wind up in the stockade; their father vows to go to his grave to escape the humiliation and dishonor they bring to the family name, and the seven young women

express their deep regret at ever trying to transform the *talyadas* into marriageable men.

At this point, when the film's narrative movement has come to an utter halt, an unexpected development takes the plot in an entirely new direction: Muslim insurgents in Mindanao province launch a rebellion against the government of the Philippines that threatens the territorial integrity of the nation, and Captain Dimagiba volunteers himself and his seven children for a suicide mission to nip the uprising in the bud. The film's mood shifts here from ludic to somber as the Dimagibas' impromptu counter-insurgency squad is whisked away to the southern island of Jolo, in the Sulu archipelago, to seek out and destroy the rebel leader Datu Roman and his followers. At this point, too, the film's attention moves from an anatomo-political concern with the production of individual gendered subjectivities towards the somatechnical linkage between techniques of individualization and the macro-political management of the state.

In relocating its action from Manila to Mindanao, *Kaming Mga Talyada* invokes the history of the multiple colonizations that structure Filipino society. The Sulu archipelago, stretching from the Zamboanga peninsula of Mindanao south towards Malaysia, had become Islamicized as early as the eighth century, through trade contacts with India and the wider Muslim world, and the Sultanate of Jolo was a prosperous regional commercial center. The Muslim population of Mindanao regarded itself as culturally distinct from the pagan animists who populated the northern islands of what, with the advent of Spanish colonization in the sixteenth century, would come to be called the Philippines. The Muslims of Mindanao, whom the Spanish called Moros (derived from *moor*), never recognized Spanish colonial authority, and they resisted, for centuries, Spanish efforts to displace them by resettling Christianized northern islanders in the south. When the Spanish ceded control of the Philippines, including Mindanao, to the United States in the Spanish-American War of 1898, the Moros resisted US colonial authority just as they had resisted the Spanish. And when the United States granted formal independence to the Republic of the Philippines in 1945, the Moros likewise continued to resist Filipino claims to sovereignty over their homeland. Thus, for centuries, the Moro represented the internal Orientalist threat of an ethno-religious Other for a succession of Christian-secular regimes attempting to rule the Philippines (Man 1990, 17–32, 46–62).

In *Kaming Mga Talyada*, the achievement of a normative masculinity for the film's protagonists transpires in the context of war against the Moros. After seeing their father shot and gravely wounded in a jungle ambush, the *talyadas* become enraged, and they rediscover their manhood in acts of battlefield courage. They defeat the insurgents in bloody hand-to-hand fighting, and return to Manila as heroes. In keeping with Meyda Yegenoglu's observation in *Colonial fantasies* that the representational interlocking of cultural and sexual difference is secured by mapping the discourse of Orientalism onto the phallogocentric discourse of femininity (Yegenoglu 1998, 73), the femininity of the *talyadas* is symbolically killed off precisely by the act of conquering the Orientalized Muslim men who threaten the territorial integrity of the state. This conceptual operation, rather than the love of good women or the harsh discipline of the military, secures for the former *talyadas* a normative manhood that is simultaneously nationalist and Christian, and that aligns

their personal identities with the structures that sustain the project of state sovereignty.

In the film's penultimate scene, the seven young men, now proudly reoriented toward their masculine social identities, visit their wounded father on his birthday as he recuperates in a Manila hospital. As the re-domesticated Chelo stands nearby, holding the birthday cake she has baked, they read aloud to him from a special commendation issued by the Secretary of National Defense praising them for their valiant efforts against the Islamic insurgency. The seven women who have pursued the Dimagiba boys throughout the film show up right on cue, and pair off with their favorites as the beaming parents look on. Christine Jorgensen's nightclub performance seems a far-distant event at this apparently happy heteronormative moment, but the film's final scene returns us to the questions Jorgensen's appearance in the film initially raised about the relationship of a normative Filipino Christian nationalist somatechnics to the US imperialist somatechnics that inform the intelligibility of the transsexual discourse. A brief, last-minute detour through another film, uncannily similar in its operative logics to *Kaming Mga Talyada*, paves the way for that discussion.

Transsomatechnics

Allan Punzalan Isaac, in *American tropics: Articulating Filipino America*, describes the 1939 Gary Cooper vehicle *The Real Glory* as one of several US films about the American Pacific empire that, while repeating imperial fantasies of white American citizens as noble settlers in the colonies who become naturalized elites, creates "moments of instability in which the management of masculinity becomes the operative trope to resolve internal anxieties of national integrity" (Isaac 2006, 82). The film opens with the withdrawal of US troops from Mindanao in 1906, which leaves behind only a few military advisors and a rag-tag band of Filipino troops to contend with a restive and not-entirely-pacified indigenous Moro population. To stem a deadly outbreak of cholera, American doctor Bill Canavan finds it necessary to boost the masculine self-esteem of the inept Filipino soldiers through the careful application of psychological theories, and thereby to transform them into an effective fighting force that can repel the savage Moros as they search the jungle for the dam that has polluted their water supply and caused the epidemic. Thus, Isaac concludes, "the movie recounts the birth of Philippine national unity and masculinity against an internal, racialized threat – the Moros – under the auspices of American psychomedical ingenuity" (2006, 85).

Transsexuality is another product of the same "psychomedical ingenuity" that facilitates Eurocentric modernity's biopolitical surveillance of Mindanao and its desired assimilation into the incipiently nationalist future (post)colony of the Philippines – a deployment and somaticization of categories of being derived from scientific sexology. Considered as a somatechnology, transsexuality functions as an anato-political technique for the administration of embodied subjects who contest the double binary of man/woman and homo/hetero that governs identity – and thus the relationship between the individual and state power – within Eurocentric modernity. It is a micro-political practice that recapitulates on the level of individual corporeality the logic of encampment that Giorgio Agamben asserts as the macro-political "space of modernity itself" (Agamben 1997, 113).

In his analysis of concentration camps, Agamben describes what could be called a virtual camp-function, immanent within modern nation-states, that materializes during crises in which a given state's particular nexus of geographical territory (or "determinate localization"), its social apparatuses (or "determinate order"), and the "automatic rules for the inscription of life", or determinate administrative procedures governing birth, education, employment, residence, marriage, health care, or death, begin to break down (Agamben 1998, 174–175). Encampment is a "state of emergency" organized against a "problem population" that frustrates the routine practices of government through which the subjects best suited for rule by that regime's internal operative logics are produced. The camp as mechanism for variously segregating, eradicating, or (re)integrating operates at the level of "problem bodies" as well as problem populations: it is this very operation of sovereign power that transsexual embodiment displays.⁴

Transsexuality is an administrative solution, with biopolitical consequences, particular to certain kinds of problem bodies within Eurocentric modernity – for bodies whose natal sex registration does not match their bodily habituses, whose gendered comportment does not accord with their societal gender status, whose subjective identifications with gender categories are not congruent with those typically associated with their reproductive roles or capacities, and so on. It is the juridico-medical apparatus of an institutional, state-sanctioned power that enmeshes itself with the bare life of individuals whose embodiment problematizes the regulatory function of the gender system. Directed towards the state's domestic populations, transsexuality can function, although not without violence, as an internally consistent means to a better life for certain of its subjects; displaced outward, it becomes part of the machinery of colonization, performing its operations on different kinds of problem bodies.

In (post)colonial contexts, transsexuality becomes – like its counterpart, modern gay identity – one line of flight from colony to metropole for locals living under the sign of sex/gender/sexuality configurations that hybridize Eurocentric modernity's categorical distinctions; like modern gay identity, it requires cutting apart things that are elsewhere conjoined as the price of the mobility it promises. To the extent that Filipino nationalism metonymically reproduces against the Moros the same colonizing moves it has experienced through the Spanish and American empires, it must likewise secure the normative somatechnics of gendered embodiment through which it reproduces itself against the pull of an American metropole whose techniques of embodiment simultaneously inform and threaten to undermine the nationalist project: this is the promise and peril embodied by the spectacular transsexual whiteness of Christine Jorgensen in the Philippines.

In the final scene of *Kaming Mga Talyada*, we see the army drill sergeant who earlier had been charged with the task of masculinizing the Dimagibas through military discipline, bawling out a new platoon of raw recruits. As he marches them off toward their barracks, when nobody is watching, the sergeant begins to sway his hips *talyada*-style. Although the closing image is obviously intended to restore the film's initially comic tone, it nonetheless invites new readings that unsettle the apparent correspondences between imperialist and nationalist forms of heteronormative masculine embodiment. The sergeant's swaying hips fleetingly materialize a *talyada* (or *bakla*) sensibility, a repertoire present within a reservoir of local Filipino cultural idioms, that, in its incommensurability with modern Eurocentric logics and

techniques of administering the embodiment of sex/gender/sexuality, offers a perhaps unexpected resource for (post)colonial resistance.

Although Christine Jorgensen is featured in only one extended scene of *Kaming Mga Talyada*, the spectacle of her transsexuality – spot-lit and center-staged – creates a penumbra within the film where conflicting modes of sex/gender/sexuality come into engagement with one another across the (post)colonial divide. On the one hand, Jorgensen embodies the white, fashionably self-fashioning, glamorous ethos associated with the post-World War II US material culture that the film figures as ultimately desirable, and, on the other hand, she represents a prospect that must be foreclosed. The world in which *talyadas* can become women physically and irrevocably through transsexuality is diametrically opposed to the one in which (for the lack of better phrases) a fleetingly embodied gender-queer sensibility survives the alignment of normative Filipino masculinity, patriarchal heterosexuality, national territorial sovereignty, and the suppression of a racialized internal Other.

As the field of transgender studies has taken shape over the past 15 years, it has been criticized for the perceived whiteness and Eurocentrism (or, even more pointedly, the US-centrism) of the term *transgender*: a term that originated among white, middle-class, American male cross-dressers, and which, by some accounts, recapitulates all the colonizing moves by which whiteness functions cross-culturally, between US–Europe and the global South, in the capacity attributed to it to name all imaginable non-normative variations of sex/gender/sexuality (Hill 2007; Valentine 2007). “Transgender whiteness” has thus become another index of a Northern conceptual imperialism that threatens to overwhelm, subsume, and refigure local and specific sex/gender/sexuality configurations in colonized locations. This currently happens primarily through international non-governmental organizations that deploy *transgender* as a funding rubric for healthcare and social service programs, thus making the embrace of the term a point of access for money and services (Cabral, Goknur and Stryker 2008). But as the close reading of *Kaming Mga Talyada* offered here makes clear, the colonial logics of transgender whiteness have deeper roots.

A strong counter-argument can be advanced – that global mappings of disparate and differently subjugated assemblages of sex/gender/sexuality, occupying diverse locations in transnational systems, might, by linking with one another through the term *transgender*, offer new possibilities for networks of resistance and transformation. This is why the queer close of *Kaming Mga Talyada* is also a provocative opening. In articulating Philippine histories, subjectivities, identities, genders, and sexualities with the imported category of transsexuality, the film offers a sly confirmation that a “transgender local” has always and already been there, in a way that rewrites the notion of “Eurocentric transgender” as simply an external import.

The Eurocentric whiteness of transgender’s theorization within the academy, however, can hardly be denied. In examining Christine Jorgensen’s cinematic foray in the Philippines, I hope to model the kind of intellectual and critical contributions that I believe can be made to a transformative or resistive transnational transgender politics by acknowledging and analyzing, rather than by denying or downplaying, the sometimes oppressive ways in which “transgender whiteness” functions in (post)colonial contexts, or how conceptual categories derived from social experience

within the United States impinge upon and interact with sex/gender/sexuality/identity configurations rooted in other socio-cultural formations.

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Note

1. See <http://www.somatechnics.mq.edu.au/about/>.
2. On the idea of Filipino categories of identity haunting postcolonial space, see Benedicto 2008b.
3. On the concept of a "normative somatechnics", see Osuri 2009.
4. On "problem bodies", see Sears 2008.

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