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## Power, invulnerability, beauty: producing and transforming male bodies in the lowland Christianised Philippines

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*Occasional Papers in  
Gender Theory and the Study of Religions*

NO. 1

**POWER, INVULNERABILITY, BEAUTY: PRODUCING AND TRANSFORMING  
MALE BODIES IN THE LOWLAND CHRISTIANISED PHILIPPINES**

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In memory of Dr Julia Leslie, Reader in Sanskrit and Hindu Studies  
Chair of the Centre for Gender & Religions Research

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### *Abstract*

In this paper I analyse three socio-religious bodily rituals: the annual procession of the Black Nazarene around Quiapo Church in Manila, beliefs and practices relating to making the male body invulnerable from harm by metal weapons and male beauty contests. I argue that these social practices are occasions at which lowland Filipino men experience their bodies in particular ways. As such, I analyse these social practices in terms of local conceptions of power and potency and notions of vulnerability and invulnerability in the shifting contexts of Philippine history and modernity.

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## Introduction

This paper was written after a brief period of field work conducted in Manila and the provinces of Laguna and Quezon amongst lowland, Christianised Tagalog-speaking peoples on the northern island of Luzón in the Philippines. It locates the male body as a site and occasion of struggle, antagonism, and dislocation between competing sentiments, values, practices and beliefs relating to notions of self and masculinity. Social practices such as schooling, family relationships, and work discipline are not analysed. Rather, I limit myself to analysing the role played by what can be understood as religious beliefs and practices in the production and transformation of male bodies. In particular, I analyse three socio-religious bodily rituals: firstly, the annual procession of the Black Nazarene around Quiapo Church in Manila where large numbers of young men gather in groups to obtain a 'blessing'; secondly, beliefs and practices relating to making the male body invulnerable from harm by metal weapons particularly blades and bullets; and, thirdly, male beauty contests.

These social practices constitute, in Van Gennep's phrase, '*rites de passage*'. Anthropological approaches to ritual have tended to focus on how rituals function as instruments of social control: their role in the creation and sustenance of collectively held sentiments and values, the formalisation and impoverishment of action, speech and thought, the coding and masking of hierarchically structured social relationships, and hence the production of (ideological) misrecognition (see Bloch 1986; Bell 1992). Although the rituals referenced above encode aspects of local culture such as notions and conceptions of spiritual power and potency, they are nevertheless marginal and their public legitimacy questionable. Importantly, however, they are critical occasions at which lowland Filipino men experience their bodies both through ritualised performance and through watching such performances.<sup>1</sup>

Local interpretations of these bodily rituals or social practices—practices attended and participated in by poor urban and rural boys and men—are mediated by a series of what can be called 'everyday' discourses. These discourses reproduce certain tropes and stereotypes in newspapers, on television and local cinema, a notable feature being the tendency towards nostalgia and self-orientalisation as well as the creation of uncivilised objects in need of disciplinary supervision. For example, poor, rural Filipinos are portrayed as the 'salt of the earth', as 'authentic', and as the 'true Filipinos' in elite patrician and Catholic discourses. However, simultaneously elite and Protestant missionary discourses construct the poor and the villages, slums and makeshift dwellings in which they live, as sites of potential disorder and irrationality.

In these latter discourses, poor, rural and urban boys and men tend to be associated with gambling, illegal drug use, drinking, gangs, violence, poor education, and a lack of sexual restraint. Indeed, the discourses that make men and male bodies both objects of enquiry and intervention appear to differ little from Spanish and American colonial discourses that legitimated colonisation precisely through the construction of individual Filipino bodies and the Filipino social body as essentially disordered and in need of radical intervention.

These discourses also express certain anxieties about Filipino modernity and the condition of Filipino culture. For example, they express, in attenuated form, the fear of the mob, the fear of popular religion and its alleged excesses, the fear of sexual activity that lacks productive intent and disorderliness in general. Interestingly, similar discourses and fears were central to the successful campaign to oust former President Estrada from power. Lurid tales about Estrada's *barkada*<sup>2</sup> and of

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<sup>1</sup> Judith Butler notes the importance of ritualisation and bodily experience to gender: 'Gender ought not to be constructed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylised repetition of acts*' (cited in Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994:40).

<sup>2</sup> *Barkada* refers to a group—sometimes gang—of men, who come together at a young age in their neighbourhood

gambling, drinking, mistresses, hired thugs, gangsterism and ill-gotten wealth targeted not only the character and conduct—indeed the body—of Estrada himself, but also those of his friends and supporters. Likewise, newspaper reports concerning so-called EDSA Trè or People Power III, a demonstration organised by supporters of the by then ousted and disgraced Estrada, alleged that the demonstrators—by and large poor, urban men and boys—were a ‘mob’ high or out of control on drugs.<sup>3</sup>

Critically, during the early months of 2003 when the field work for this paper was conducted, the Philippine media was debating the country’s high population growth and issues such as the family, divorce, sex education, the availability and use of contraception, and homosexuality. The catalyst for these debates was the staging of the Fourth World Meeting of Families—an international conference organised and sponsored by the Catholic Church—in Manila. The ouster of Estrada, representations of EDSA Trè, and the staging of the Fourth World Meeting of Families provide significant interpretative contexts for the bodily practices/rituals I analyse in this paper. However, two further contextual horizons require elucidation. Firstly, I will situate this work beside recent literature on gender in Southeast Asia. Secondly, I will interrogate the function of the category of the body in Spanish and American colonial literature and I will analyse the U.S. colonial régime’s elevation of José Rizal to the status of the Philippine national hero. I will then engage in a detailed description and analysis of the procession of the Black Nazarene, practices relating to the making of the invulnerable body and male beauty contests as sites for producing and transforming male bodies, practices intimately inflected by cultural and historical factors and processes. I will also examine how these bodily social rituals are represented in the media, particularly in newspapers, film and in Catholic and state discourses and practices.

Finally, the fact that these shifting contextual horizons do not, as it were, add up—that they appear disjointed and are not seamlessly woven together through narrative—indicates my belief that field-work is not the uncovering of any grammar of culturally encoded dispositions, behavioural repertoires, habits, and utterances that, taken together, constitute the truth of the other.<sup>4</sup> Rather, it is the awareness that culture is not a seamless realm of pure inter-subjectivity or a discrete embodied and cognitive universe of shared meaning but is made and constrains in history (see Gupta and Ferguson 2001). In this instance, the juxtaposition of shifting contexts reveals male bodies as they are unevenly produced and transformed in embodied practices and performances and as they are constituted discursively as objects of inquiry and intervention.

### *Theorising Gender in Island Southeast Asia*

According to Ong and Peletz, ‘dominant scholarly conceptions of gender in Southeast Asia focus on egalitarianism, complementarity and the relative autonomy of women in relation to men—and are framed largely in local terms’ (1995:1). The relative equality of women in relation to men in Southeast

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or school and stick together through thick and thin. Or so they claim. See Dumont (1993).

<sup>3</sup> Reflections on EDSA Trè have attempted to distinguish it from previous eruptions of so-called People Power (EDSA’s I and II) which allegedly united ordinary Filipinos with the military, Church groups, and senior politicians in opposition first to Marcos and then to Estrada. Thus, EDSA Trè was a ‘riot’, a ‘mob’ and was ‘ugly’ precisely because it galvanised only the urban and rural poor or a segment thereof, Estrada’s primary support base. Demonstrators, it was claimed, were bribed into taking part with cash incentives, free meals and *shabu* (methyl amphetamine)—the great unwashed, those who vote for whom they are told to vote, gathered *en masse* to vent their (misplaced) fury. This discourse of exclusion—one that excludes the poor from politics because they urinate in the street and leave litter and because they are, in short, undisciplined—reflects the deep divisions within Philippine society, and demonstrates how colonial narratives and tropes re-surface in suitably amended forms within contemporary elite political, economic and social discourses and commentaries.

<sup>4</sup> For example, compare Hobart (1995) with Cannell (1999).



Asian societies has in particular been related to bilateral forms of kinship (Errington 1990; Karim 1995a).<sup>5</sup>

Much of the work on gender in Southeast Asia and the Philippines has been conducted among minority peoples living at the margins of states (see for example Rosaldo and Atkinson 1975; Rosaldo 1980; Eberhardt 1988; Kammerer 1988; Meñez 1999). These studies not only emphasise gender symmetry and complementarity but also broadly egalitarian modes of sociality. The 'egalitarian' sociality and 'rich' cultures of these peoples appears to provide a stark contrast to accounts of lowland peoples that emphasise hierarchy and, in the case of the lowland Philippines, an alleged absence of authentic culture and traditions (Cannell 1999).<sup>6</sup> In the Philippines, highland minority peoples resisted both Spanish and American colonialisms, while lowlanders found themselves forced to negotiate extensively with the colonisers. Comparisons of so-called egalitarian, pre-modern societies where gender relations are defined in terms of egalitarianism and complementarity with industrial class societies where gender relations are asymmetrical (Klein-Hutheising 1990 and 1995) have tended to assume that gradual participation within a capitalist economy will distort the egalitarian ethos of a given people or culture.<sup>7</sup> It is an argument that challenges Ortner's claim that 'the secondary status of women' is a 'pan-cultural fact' (1983:67). Moreover, it echoes Engels' (1942) analysis of the origins of the family, private property and the state where Engels argued that patriarchal modes of organisation are directly linked to the emergence of property owning classes and the problems such groups face in ensuring the transmission of property from one generation to the next. According to this analysis, capitalism represents the most advanced form of patriarchy.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See King and Wilder (2003) for an overview of anthropological analyses of gender in Southeast Asia.

<sup>6</sup> Cannell's analysis of lowland Bicolano culture begins by noting how lowland peoples in the Philippines have been represented as somehow lacking in culture, and Bicolanos appear to end it with a positive excess as Cannell proceeds to tie practices such as marriage, spirit-medium-ship, a local 'cult' of the dead Christ, and transvestite beauty contests to what Lahiri calls a 'pervasive logic of cultural practice' (2002:45) centred in and around local practices of exchange, debt, obligation and pity.

<sup>7</sup> See also the essays by Alting von Gesau, Tapp, Magannon and Uchibori in Taylor and Turton (1988), all of which interrogate the problems faced by highland or minority peoples in their relations with lowland states and 'developers'. These essays document the increasing impoverishment and disenfranchisement of minority peoples in northern Thailand, the northern Philippines and Eastern Malaysia: 'The issue of the "terms of incorporation" of such minorities into contemporary states and "national" societies, is particularly acute, and the costs of "development" often high. Insofar as they are now peasants within larger political and economic systems, they suffer some of the worst conditions of the poorest sections of the peasantry as a whole. Insofar as they are distinct linguistic, cultural and social groups, they suffer additional social and cultural disparagement and disadvantage, as well as economic marginalisation. Many would readily accept social and economic integration on equal terms, but resist exploitation and policies of cultural assimilation. Given their ecological location, most practice forms of swidden agriculture, an extensive use of land which can be efficient and conservationist if there is space and freedom to operate systematically. But this use of land—indeed their very occupation of large, sometimes geographically peripheral, tracts of land—is widely seen by state planners and developers as posing a threat to national resources, national development, and national security. Ironically, minorities receive misplaced blame, while the hills are increasingly occupied by lowland farmers, mining and timber companies, plantation owners etc. responding to conflicting economic pressures and priorities. The latter are likely to have far fewer scruples in their management of natural resources. The economic dilemma—in some cases catastrophe—for the minorities, is compounded by political, legal and other forms of social discrimination at state and local official levels' (Taylor and Turton 1988:211-212).

<sup>8</sup> See Kuhn and Wolpe (1978) and Sayers, Evans and Redclift (1987) for feminist engagements with Engels' analysis of the relations between patriarchy, the family, private property, modes of production and the state, and Bloch (1985) for an analysis of the relation between *The Origin* and the early anthropological writings of the likes of Lewis Henry Morgan and J. J. Bachofen.

The increasing penetration of Southeast Asian state power to upland areas and the transformation of subsistence economies and practices of shifting cultivation through participation in capitalist production suggests, as Ong and Peletz observe, that 'gender identities are made not exclusively according to local knowledges, but in ever widening geographies of production, trade and communications' (1995:8). As such, they argue that gender in Southeast Asia might usefully be understood as a site of conflict in struggles over modernity(ies), nationalism(s), and globalising processes. Thus, any analysis of gender in Southeast Asia must consider the importance of both local sentiments and values in structuring gender relations and in producing gendered bodies and conceptions of self and person, but also modernising and globalising processes where quite different values may be privileged or imposed.<sup>9</sup> According to Errington, in order to understand gender in maritime Southeast Asia, 'we cannot begin with gendered bodies but must understand local ideas of power prestige' (1990:58).<sup>10</sup> A significant context then, according to Errington, for interpreting gender in island Southeast Asia is local conceptions of spiritual power and potency. However, as Ong and Peletz suggest, local sentiments and values cannot be isolated for analysis from the modernity(ies), nationalism(s), and globalising processes with which they must negotiate. The task of this paper, then, is to track, or rather to historicise, local, culturally encoded notions of power, potency, and prestige as they are reconfigured 'in the dynamic postcolonial contexts of peasant outmigration, nation building, cultural nationalism, and international business' (Ong and Peletz 1995:2).<sup>11</sup>

### *Colonial Bodies*

Colonial texts written during both the Spanish and American occupations of the archipelago elaborate images of disorderly bodies in order to justify their interventions. Spanish texts composed both by ecclesiastical and government officials focus on a cluster of indigenous social practices: 'marriage', 'slavery', 'usury', and 'idolatry' receive extensive treatment and through these analyses the construction of the Filipino body as a site of disorder, cruelty, and indolence emerges. Governor General Francisco Sande, writing in Manila (June 7, 1576) asserts that 'they [the *indios*'] are greatly addicted to licentiousness, and drunkenness, and are accustomed to plunder and cheat one another' (Zaide and Zaide Vol. 2 1990:225). Similarly, Miguel de Legazpi, writing of the inhabitants of Cebu (July 7, 1569), claims that 'the natives are the laziest people in the world' and moreover that 'privateering and robbery have a natural attraction for them' (1990:38). Later accounts by the likes of Chirino (1604) and Morga (1609) strive towards greater balance, yet a recurring theme of Spanish accounts is the attempt to legitimise the colonisation and Christianisation of the archipelago as the bringing of order to peoples without knowledge or experience of either Christ or civilisation. The Jesuit Diego de Bobadilla writes in 1640:

It was a lamentable thing to see with what violence and for how little a thing, these chiefs made slaves. For, however small a sum one owed to another, the interest, for lack of payment, amounted to so great a sum that it was impossible to pay it; and consequently, the person of the debtor being pledged for the debt, he became the slave of his creditor, together with all his posterity. They also made slaves with unusual tyranny and cruelty, for crimes of slight importance, such as not keeping

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<sup>9</sup> See for example Blanc-Szanton (1990) where she notes important shifts in the construction of women's bodies and sexualities in the Philippines that correspond to the Spanish and U.S. colonial interventions and the advent of the post-colonial period.

<sup>10</sup> Karim (1995b) argues that Southeast Asian cultures are cultures characterised by bilateral kinship and informality. He suggests that scholars studying Southeast Asian societies should analyse informal networks— which bisect both public and private spheres—where strategies are brought into play for reducing hierarchy and rank. According to Karim, mechanisms for the levelling of status differences are a distinctive feature of Southeast Asian societies.

<sup>11</sup> See also Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994); Cohen, Wilk and Stoeltje (1996); Hodgson (2001).

silent at the graves of the dead, and for passing in front of the chief's wife when she was in her bath. Those captured in war were also made slaves. Now with baptism, all those acts of violence and tyranny have been suppressed

(Zaide and Zaide Vol. 4 1990:331).

Later accounts by Father San Agustin (1720), Father Murillo (n.d.) and Father San Antonio (1738) represent Filipinos in terms of antinomies: as 'fickle', 'malicious', 'lazy', 'proud', 'cowardly' but simultaneously as 'humble', 'bold', 'diligent', and 'careful'. The Filipino social body—like individual Filipino bodies—is marked by an excess of signifiers, such that it overwhelms Spanish efforts at representation. In later accounts by foreign observers such as Comte de La Perouse (1787), Henry Piddington (1819-1822) and Filipino nationalists such as José Rizal (1890), an inversion occurs: Filipinos are re-written as the victims of a cruel colonial régime. Yet the trope of the disordered and disorderly body re-emerges in U.S. colonial accounts in the immediate aftermath of their occupation of the archipelago in 1898.

The early years of the American occupation generates a host of textual and visual representations of the islands, as the Americans subject their new possession to scrutiny and assessment. Rafael (2000) examines U.S. representations of the Philippine-American War. He turns to the writings of Dean C. Worcester, a professor of zoology from the University of Michigan who arrived in Manila in March 1899 as a member of the Schurman Commission:

Colonial warfare was not meant to conquer and exterminate the native populace. It was instead a kind of police action that would quell the disorder on the islands caused by the stirrings of deluded peasants and workers led by a gang of ambitious, mixed-blood Filipinos. These Filipino leaders...were illegitimate representatives of the Filipino people. Indeed, there were no Filipino people as such, only a heterogeneous collection of imperfectly civilized tribes and 'wild men' speaking a bewildering variety of languages, bereft of a common culture and subject to impulsive and irrational behavior

(Rafael 2000:20).

President McKinley himself described American colonial objectives in terms of 'benevolent assimilation'. Indeed, the remit of the Philippine Commission set up by President McKinley in 1900 was to initiate policies whose net effect would be the tutelage of Filipinos so that they would, in time, be capable of self-government. As such, American colonial rule was conceived of as a civilising mission that foresaw a point in the future at which Filipinos would be both capable and ready to govern themselves. Woodrow Wilson, who became President of the United States in 1912, wrote, with reference to the Philippines and the notion of the government of the Self:

Self-government is a form of character. It follows upon the long discipline which gives a people self-possession, self-mastery, and the habit of order and peace...the steadiness of self-control and political mastery. And these things cannot be had without long discipline...No people can be 'given' the self-control of maturity. Only a long apprenticeship of obedience can secure them the precious possession

(cited in Rafael 2000:22-23).

Rafael also examines representations of Filipinos and the Philippines contained in the *Census of the Philippine Islands* published in 1905, and pays particular attention to representations of the body in photographs of tribal or minority peoples and of those lowland Filipinos who collaborated with their American colonisers in the collection of census data. These visual representations are arranged through volume one of the *Census*, with, according to Rafael, so-called Negritos or Aetas signifying the most primitive stage or level of technical and cultural development, and the Western-dressed indigenous élite alongside their American counterparts as exemplars of true civilisation. Moreover, Rafael suggests that this arrangement of photographs conforms to the once popular 'Wave Theory' of

migration to the Philippines, which supposed that the archipelago had been settled by successive waves of different peoples, each 'wave' being technologically more advanced than preceding waves and, further, each with lighter—or rather whiter—skin.<sup>12</sup> Critically, the theory neatly culminated with the occupation of the islands by technologically superior, white-skinned Americans:<sup>13</sup>

The privileged poise of seeing a regulated and well-policed future already prefigured in the heterogeneous and disorderly past comes across with special clarity in the photographs of Filipinos that appear in the census report. Set off from the textual and statistical sections of the census, the photographs are arranged to form an album of colonial subjectivities. 'Typical' examples of wild and civilized peoples are featured in the photographs in the first volume, along with pictures of native enumerators and their local supervisors. Dressed in their tribal attire for the camera's lens, images of colonial bodies are wrenched from their historical and social contexts. In their frozen state, they suggest the appearance of specimens undergoing different stages of tutelage. At the lowest extreme, the scantily clad Negritos hunched over the ground, with tangled hair and minstrel-like grins, are made to appear farthest removed from the civilizing touch of colonial rule. Head-hunting Igorots, those putative descendents of the first wave theory of Malay conquerors, along with Muslim Malays appear more erect, even regal, decked out in their tribal ornaments signifying their more advanced state. Closest to civilization are the Western-clad census workers. Set against a background of American flags, their appearance suggests well-disciplined bodies, while the portraits of local supervisors identified by name and area of responsibility produce images of bourgeois respectability assimilated into the state machinery

(Rafael 2000:37).

In the 1905 *Census* can also be found a large number of often contradictory opinions about the Philippines and its people compiled from the writings of European and American observers. These include concern expressed about the effects of the climate upon the character and conduct of Filipinos and Westerners alike. This includes, by David Barrows, head of the bureau of non-Christian tribes and who would later become professor of anthropology at Berkeley, a lengthy disquisition on population growth in the Philippines which links ideas about population growth and sexual fecundity to the expansion of commercial and political power and to diligent productivity:

The conclusion to be derived is that the Christian Philippine population shows a power of multiplying scarcely exceeded by any race of people. The hope of building up here in the course of a few generations a people equal in numbers and national resources to the Japanese at the present time does not seem illusory. Given a prolific shock, expanding prosperity and commerce, and favourable political conditions, population, as historically proven by a hundred instances, can go up by leaps and bounds. I believe that all these conditions together may be realized here in the Philippines. A great deal depends also upon the mental attitude of the people. If it be hopeful, aspiring, cheered by increasing gains and opportunities—then is there added a factor of the utmost consideration. Population has no deadlier enemies than despondency and melancholia

(Vol. 1 1905:444–445).

The Schurman Commission, Philippine Commission and the 1905 *Census* were all concerned, one way or another, with producing obedient and disciplined bodies that would at once be productive and receptive to colonial rule. To complement these disciplinary procedures, the new colonisers made José Rizal the national hero of the country. The elevation of the European-educated Tagalog novelist and doctor—who was executed by firing squad by the Spanish colonial régime on December 30 1896—and the reproduction or serialisation of his self-disciplined and Western-attired body in monument form in town squares across the country may be interpreted as an attempt, by the new colonisers, to instruct their 'little brown brothers' in self-discipline. As such, Rizal's body became a

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<sup>12</sup> See Francisco (1985) and Jocano (1998) for discussions of 'migration theory'.

<sup>13</sup> This 'theory' is still taught in Filipino schools (Hedman and Sidel 2000).

critical site for mediating ideas about modernity, modern masculinity, bodily discipline, and rational selfhood. If the 1905 *Census* and the writings of members of the Schurman and Philippine Commissions authorised racialised representations of the Filipino social body, at the same time José Rizal's body was constituted as a site of self-discipline and restraint. One element of the American colonial project was, then, the production of a normative, disciplined masculinity.

In the photographs, in the statues to be found in the central plaza of every town in the Philippines, and even in the representation of his death by firing squad that stands in a grove on the edge of the Luneta in Manila, Rizal is depicted fastidiously dressed in Western attire. In these representations, however, it is not only Rizal's attire that is of importance: it is also his posture. Rizal always stands straight and erect, his face calm and serious. Indeed, he appears in photographs, paintings, and monuments with the same self-consciously imposed discipline and dignity with which he faced his own death.<sup>14</sup> (A doctor present at Rizal's execution took his pulse moments before he faced his firing squad, and reported it to be normal).

This self-discipline can be read in at least three ways. Rizal's self-control can be read both in terms of Christian and enlightenment separations of the mind from the body where the body is constituted as a site of discipline and restraint. A common Christian conception of the body constructs flesh as the locus of the passions and sexual desire that is at once the prison of the soul and an object that must be mastered by the mind. In enlightenment thought, the body, by contrast, emerges as a sensation machine which, if used correctly, can aid human beings to achieve complete identity between the real and mental representations of the real. In modernity, the body again emerges as an object of discipline and restraint, and Nagel (1998) examines the appearance of a 'normative masculinity' in the nineteenth century that emphasises alleged virtues such as 'will-power', 'courage', 'honour', 'discipline', 'quiet strength', 'adventurousness', and 'independence' among others. Importantly, these so-called qualities are, according to Nagel, linked in complex ways with the emergence of nations, capitalist relations and processes of modernisation.<sup>15</sup> As such, the American colonisers and their Filipino collaborators used Rizal's policed and disciplined body as a means of imagining the nation and mediating modernity. This gendering of the nation and of modernity, among other things, privileged the access of an élite, urban, Western-educated male subject to political power.<sup>16</sup>

However, Iletto (1999 [1982]) argues that Rizal's disciplined and policed body was understood by rural or subaltern Filipinos in quite different ways, specifically in terms of Indic-derived conceptions of spiritual power and potency.<sup>17</sup> Elsewhere, Rafael (1988) and Iletto (1989) have argued

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<sup>14</sup> The contrast with statues of Andres Bonifacio—founder of the *Katipunan* that initiated the 1896 revolution against Spain—is instructive. Whereas statues and monuments commemorating Rizal are always located in town centres, those erected in memory of Bonifacio are generally located in out of the way places. Moreover, while Rizal is a picture of restraint, Bonifacio is depicted with his arms aloft and *bolo* raised ready to strike, his face etched in anger and fury.

<sup>15</sup> Lloyd (1995) focuses on the gendering of reason and the body in Western philosophy. Hodgson (2001) concentrates on modernity as a gendered phenomenon: 'The assumptions, component processes, and consequences of Modernity are inherently gendered. Modernity is commonly viewed as a masculine phenomenon, in which the male ideals of rationality, competitive individualism, progress, and order are promoted and valorized in comparison (and through contrast) with the supposedly female ideals of emotion, social bonds, continuity, and "tradition". Modernity not only presumes and promotes such gendered binaries as nature/culture, domestic/public, past/future, and traditional/modern, but it genders them, usually rendering the first, devalued term, female and the second, privileged term, male' (2001:8-9).

<sup>16</sup> McCoy's (1999) analysis of the Philippine Military Academy – which was founded in 1936 at the beginning of the Commonwealth period – demonstrates the critical juxtaposition of nationalism, military service and the production of gendered bodies.

<sup>17</sup> There are in the region of 300 words of Sanskrit origin in the Tagalog language, most of them denoting

that local notions of power and potency—encoded in cultural practices of debt, obligation, pity and empathy—both facilitated and subverted conversion to Christianity during the Spanish colonial period. In this instance, Iletto argues that subaltern interpretations and narrations of Rizal's death focused on the fact that Rizal's *loób*, or 'inside', had remained calm and tranquil in the face of imminent death which thus revealed Rizal to be one who had accumulated a considerable store of spiritual power such that he himself had become a node of potency. Interestingly, Filipino rebel and religious leaders have frequently claimed either to be in contact with Rizal or actually to be Rizal as a means of accessing the spiritual power Rizal is thought to embody.

In an examination of these kinds of beliefs and the practices associated with them, a model of the body and of selfhood emerges which is structured around notions of inside and outside (*loób* and *labás*) that intersects with the notions of *alus* and *kasar* referenced by both Anderson (1972) and Geertz (1976) in their writings on Java. Accordingly, *loób* refers to an interior space within the person that can, if the correct prayers are recited and if the appropriate bodily practices are undertaken, function like a battery and become a repository for spiritual power or potency. *Labás* refers to the person's conduct in the world. For example, it is commonly believed in the Philippines and elsewhere in Southeast Asia that a person of power will never display any extremes of emotion, but will remain calm and tranquil regardless of the circumstances in which they find themselves. As such, Rizal's self-composure in the moments leading up to his execution by firing squad emerges as a clear display of potency and power or, *kapangyarihan ng loób* ('inside power').

Important consequences follow from the above: bodies are individuated not according to the presence or absence of particular physical attributes, but rather in terms of access to and/or the successful (embodied) performance of (spiritual) power and potency. Official accounts of Rizal's life and representations of his body reproduce a notion of the Self as a willing, thinking agent and author of action.<sup>18</sup> The lacuna between official and subaltern accounts of Rizal's death are particularly important if one accepts the claims of Cannell who argues that social relationships among lowland Bicolano (and lowland Filipinos more generally) are 'dynamic engagements' defined by attempts to 'establish and negotiate relationships with various figures of power' where 'persons are potentially changed in every interaction with others' (1999: 228, 229, 230). According to Cannell, Bicolano conceptions of self focus on process, mutability, and transformation through contact with persons, objects, places, or entities of greater or lesser potency or power (see also Cannell 1995a). On the one hand, then, popular conceptions of power and potency mediate contemporary social relations in the Philippines, particularly those between persons of different status suggesting a notion of self as fluid and mutable. On the other, colonial/modern conceptions of a disordered social body and disorderly individual bodies surface—in suitably amended forms—in everyday discourses where the emphasis is on Self, will, and rationality.

### *Powerful Bodies*

The procession of the Black Nazarene takes place every January 9 at Quiapo Church in Manila. No attempt has been made to transform the procession into a spectacle for the tourist's gaze. Crowds began to gather around dawn outside the church, and the procession itself was preceded by masses repeated every hour until the Nazarene appeared and which were broadcast via huge video-screens and a public address system to the throng outside the church, accompanied by the throwing of holy water over the crowd and short speeches from local and national dignitaries.

Before leaving my hotel and making my way to Quiapo, I watched local television news reports and took in local newspapers to see how the procession was being reported. The procession

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specifically religious notions. See Francisco (1971; 1985), McCoy (1982), and Iletto (1999 [1982]).

<sup>18</sup> See Orendain (1966), Gagelonia (1968), Aquino, Bernardino, Enriquez and Torres (1987), Zaide (1992), and Maria Sta. (1996).

was notable for its absence from the main pages of the newspapers bar a few lines warning of traffic disruption or reiterating security assurances, while early morning television represented the crowds already congregating at Quiapo and the event generally in terms of disruption to Manila's at best patchy circulation of vehicles and bodies. Quiapo emerged from these reports as an area best avoided. Nevertheless, on my arrival at the square I found that several Filipino media vans were in attendance, and several stories and features appeared in the newspapers after the event.

The crowds gathered in the square outside Quiapo church were largely Manileños, though some had travelled considerable distances to participate. The majority were young men, bare-footed, tattooed, often wearing t-shirts designating membership of a particular fraternity—fraternities defined by locality—for honouring the Nazareño and often sponsored by local politicians. As soon as the so-called Black Nazarene emerged on its carriage with its fraternity guards from the church into the square, these groups of young men pressed forward, throwing their head towels to the men on the carriage, who would then wipe the towels on the icon and throw them back. Others, helped by their *barkada* or fellow fraternity members, attempted to clamber upon the carriage itself to touch the Nazarene themselves. The passage of the carriage was, as such, extremely slow and fitful. Its progress across the square through to the streets around the church was constantly interrupted by groups of young men attempting to obtain a 'blessing' from the Nazarene. These men described themselves, and were described by others, as '*fanaticos*', because of their devotion to the Nazarene.

As the Nazarene left the square and entered one of the narrow streets around the church, the crowd in the square began to thin. Behind me was a Philippine media outside-broadcast van, and a camera was mounted on its roof. A young and apparently well-known female broadcaster was up there as well. Within a few minutes a crowd, composed of women and men, had gathered around the van. Most tried to peer into the van's interior. Then, two women tossed their head towels to the woman atop the vehicle. It was as if she, and the van itself, now possessed the same powers of attraction that only a few moments before, had led thousands to follow the Black Nazarene.

This event was as significant as the procession itself. It pointed towards a feature of lowland Philippine society, which in political science literature on the Philippines is conventionally characterised in terms of clientelism and patronage (but see Sidel 1999). What is enacted at Quiapo is the reproduction of particular norms and conventions surrounding types of social relationships, specifically rules that surround dealings with persons and entities of higher (and lower) status that inscribe linkages between men, male bodies, notions of weakness and vulnerability (*mahinà*), and strength and invulnerability (*malakás*),<sup>19</sup> and which constitute a cultural code for approaching authority and entering into a reciprocal relation of debt and obligation that functions as a guarantee of protection. As such, what is expressed at Quiapo is not (or at least, not only) a religious conviction although participants justify their presence and their actions in these terms.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> In Philippine mythology, man and woman emerged simultaneously from a piece of bamboo. Man is associated with the quality *lakás* (strength; power; efficacy; influence) and woman with *gandá* (beauty).

<sup>20</sup> Zialcita (1986) reaches similar conclusions in her analysis of *penitensiya* in the Philippines. According to Zialcita, Filipino flagellants that engage in *penitensiya* during Holy Week do so as a means of re-ordering their relations with their kin or as the fulfilment of a promise or vow made to God usually *vis-à-vis* the health of a relative (interestingly, such vows and promises are transferable between or among relatives). In other words, the motivations for engaging in these different practices are cultural rather than religious. As such, Zialcita argues that these rituals should be analysed not only in terms of their religious or symbolic content, but also in terms of their cultural context, particularly 'the social and moral orders of a society, the principles underlying a society's organisation, the kinds of corporate grouping available, and the norms and values inherent in structural relationships... Thus *utang na loob* or a moral debt of gratitude, concern for the welfare of the immediate family, and loyalty to the peer group are key organizing principles of lowland Philippine society. These are reenacted and indeed reinforced by the Lenten rituals' (1986:61).

Obtaining a ‘blessing’ from the Black Nazarene is an occasion for men to demonstrate their physical prowess through gaining proximity to power. The blessing itself secures a variety of things: it confers, for example, potency or virility, protection against illness and accidents, and confirms or raises the status of both individuals and fraternities competing for limited resources of symbolic power. Importantly, the aim of obtaining a blessing is to transcend a condition of weakness and vulnerability, and this point is perhaps especially salient given the youth of many of those involved in the ritual. Yet, in the newspaper articles and features that surfaced in the days and weeks after the procession, Quiapo was written about in purely religious terms. For example, the *Manila Bulletin* published a lengthy article describing the relationship of a local man to the Nazarene. What is interesting about this piece is its patronising tone and trite emotional economy:

The second time he took part in the procession, he was able to grasp for some exultant minutes one of the ropes from the *carroza* [the Nazarene’s carriage]. Next year, he hopes to achieve the supreme act, the rite of the towel touching the dark wood of the *Nazareno*. He has vowed to assist in the January rites for nine successive fiestas. He has seven more to go and is confident that the *Señor* of Quiapo will not deny fulfilment of his vow. One day, in the year devoted to consoling the *Nazareno* is, after all, small recompense for all the favours the Lord has bestowed on him. His children have survived their illnesses; his wife has found work as a casual worker in a textile factory; his jeepney, despite the numerous hazards of city streets, has suffered nothing more grievous than an occasional dented fender. Blessed are the simple of heart, for theirs are the ecstasies of the spirit in the Quiapo of the Eternal Galilean

(*Manila Bulletin* 19/01/03).

What is perhaps most remarkable (and most troubling) about this passage is how clearly religion emerges as consolation and compensation for the poor, such that Quiapo’s central function as part of an economy of illusory rewards for desperate bodies is actually celebrated.

### ***Invulnerable Bodies***

Materials relating to amulets and talismans of invulnerability were obtained in conversations with an amulet seller and healer and former gunman, and a former member of a group known as Haring Bakal (Iron King). This section consists of five parts: firstly, I recount the story or history—or perhaps mythology—of the Haring Bakal group; secondly, I describe a Haring Bakal initiation ceremony as it was described to me; thirdly, I relate a demonstration of invulnerability; fourthly, I review some of the popular and scholarly literature that examines beliefs and practices relating to the use of these kinds of amulets; and, fifthly, I supplement this literature with a brief analysis of tattoo art and a Tagalog movie that deals specifically with Filipino beliefs and practices relating to amulets and talismans or *anting-anting*, *agimat* and *mutyâ*.

Haring Bakal was founded during the 1970s during the martial law years when civilians were recruited into militia groups. The formation of civilian militias was part of a general process of militarisation that took place in rural areas across the country throughout the martial law period. They were used to counter the insurgency operations of communist and Muslim rebels (CPP-NPA or New People’s Army—the military wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines—and MNLF or Moro National Liberation Front), or as instruments of terror against suspected guerrillas and their supporters, depending on one’s point of view.

Haring Bakal was led by Feliciano Luces who went by the *nom-de-guerre* of Commander Toothpick. Luces came from Pikit near Cotabato in Mindanao, and originally fought for the MNLF. He had a reputation as a fearless fighter. However, after a lengthy gun battle with government troops in which he reputedly ran out of ammunition and resorted to hand-to-hand combat, he was eventually captured and taken to Camp Aguinaldo for interrogation. He was held there for seven months during which time his captors were allegedly unable to break him. He was then taken to Malacañang Palace



in Manila where he personally surrendered his gun to President Marcos. In return, Marcos gave him an amnesty. Luces was thus transformed from a guerrilla at the margins or periphery of the state into a military asset of the Marcos régime.

Haring Bakal was created with the specific intention of taking on the CPP-NPA in central-southern Luzón, and Luces was recruited as the group's leader. The military provided Haring Bakal members with money and weapons and other logistics, aiding them in their so-called counter-insurgency operations. Luces himself provided group members with a technology of the body that would enable them to go fearlessly into battle. Members undertook an initiation ceremony that involved the insertion of small shards of sacred rock known as *bato-ara* under the skin at specific locations on the body. (These are the forehead, either side of the neck, each breast, each elbow and each wrist). Once these fragments had been inserted under the skin of an initiate a prayer would be recited over his body. After the wounds healed, the initiate had his faith in the procedure tested. He would have to endure having his body struck twenty-one times by *bolos* (weapons or tools which resemble a machete). As long as his faith (*pananampalataya*) was strong, he would emerge unscathed.<sup>21</sup>

I was privileged to witness two demonstrations as to the efficacy of this practice of bodily transformation. The first involved my co-researcher laying his left arm flat along a table and taking several hefty swipes at it with his *bolo*. He certainly did not hold back, though he was striking himself at an angle which maximised the bludgeoning action of the weapon and which minimised its power to cut or slice. The skin on his left-arm survived unbroken.

The second involved the firing of a revolver at a sheet of A4 paper on which was drawn an image of the crucified Christ and a series of secret Latin or better, creolised Latin words of power. A single live round was loaded into the revolver and the gun was then pointed at the sheet of paper which had been pinned to the wall at the back of the yard. The trigger was pulled three times, but the weapon did not go off. I am no expert in fire-arms. It certainly appeared, however, that the chamber containing the bullet had been correctly aligned with the barrel before firing, although I was never invited to handle the weapon for myself.<sup>22</sup>

It was on a previous research trip to Mount Banahaw in the Philippines (1999–2000) that I first became interested in this type of amulet.<sup>23</sup> In April 2000, President Estrada launched a military offensive in Mindanao against Muslim rebels seeking to create an independent state. By July, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front's (MILF) bases had been overrun, but military and police operations continued and, in August that year, an encounter occurred between government soldiers and members of a Christian 'cult' in the area near Bukidnon in Mindanao. Twenty people were killed in this encounter, and newspapers and television carried photographs and brief footage of members of this peasant religious group—armed only with *anting-anting* and *bolos*—being gunned down quite ruthlessly by government soldiers. The reporting of this incident contextualised the existence of the Bukidnon group in terms of the formation of civilian militias that occurred during the martial law years, referenced the fact that the groups are known as *tad-tád* (chop-chop)—so-called for their alleged predilection for hacking their victims to death with *bolos*—and noted that they are widely believed to augment their martial prowess with tattoos, prayers and amulets. Indeed, one journalist claimed that members of the Bukidnon group mixed

Christianity with folk beliefs such as wearing T-shirts with Latin prayers scrawled upon them

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<sup>21</sup> I was also told that today, Haring Bakal has soldiers and police personnel among its ranks. The group still exists clandestinely, though civilian militia groups are no longer an official part of government policy in their counter-insurgency operations.

<sup>22</sup> Critically, these demonstrations were undertaken to prove that the condition of invulnerability is not symbolically true but is rather empirically true.

<sup>23</sup> Mount Banahaw is commonly believed by Filipinos to be site or repository of spiritual power and potency where powerful amulets and talismans can be found.

which they believe grant them magical powers including invulnerability to bullets and the ability to hypnotise their enemies. Some are known to use human kneecaps as magical amulets

(*The Manila Times* 14/07/00).<sup>24</sup>

The existence of this group, then, was explained in terms of two, quite separate and distinct discourses, whose convergence is critical in the representation—in the Philippines—of beliefs and practices relating to the use of amulets. The first refers to a culture of political violence during the Martial Law period and the formation of armed groups which, taken together, sees the countryside emerge as a site of disorder. The second focuses upon the irrationality and erroneous nature of the beliefs and practices allegedly common to these groups as a register of the failure of the state and its various agencies to successfully uplift, discipline, and civilise its people. The incredulous tones of the news items in both newspapers and on the television that covered the gunning down of *bolo*-wielding Filipino men wearing amulets by the Philippine armed forces was palpable. Accounts of the revolution of 1896 against Spain are full of vivid accounts of *bolo* men armed only with *anting-anting* to protect them from the bullets of enemy troops. It was as if the dead had returned, as if a spectral past had made its way back into the present. Certainly, this event seemed to belong to a quite different world to the one of malls and gated communities in Manila.

Scholarly explanations for the use of amulets tend to emphasise indigenous conceptions of power and spiritual potency and corollary bodily practices, the persistence of irrational beliefs and contexts of political violence within which such practices have high social resonance. The former kinds of accounts suggest that beliefs and practices relating to the use of amulets ‘conforms to the general pattern of Southeast Asian animism’ (McCoy 1982:355) or that they must be understood in terms of the confluence of animistic, Roman Catholic and American Protestant beliefs and practices (Covar 1980:77). Iletto, (1989) in his analysis of the 1896 Philippine revolution against Spanish rule and of various instances of insurgency by religio-nationalist groups and movements, elegantly analyses how Christianity was assimilated to aspects of lowland Philippine culture, but nevertheless ultimately resurrects cognitive-rationalist accounts of religion whereby a ‘traditional mind’ holding false beliefs is set up for correction (compare with Foronda Jnr 1961; Ramos 1971; Anderson 1972; Sturtevant 1969; and 1976; Cullamar 1986).

Analyses of contemporary usages of amulets and talismans of invulnerability and corollary beliefs and practices emphasise contexts of political violence within which such practices retain considerable resonance and where invulnerability points to resistance and the fear of violence and intimidation (Shoesmith 1978; Turton 1991). However, I would suggest that the analysis of beliefs and practices relating to the use of amulets and talismans of invulnerability must not only contextualise such beliefs and practices in terms of cosmological or religious conceptions and historical factors, but also in terms of the body and local notions of masculinity. In particular, I would suggest a connection between practices whereby, through ritualised acts, men are able to experience their bodies as invulnerable provides a point of linkage to the following discussion on male beauty contests, and to the previous discussion where the ritualised obtaining of a ‘blessing’ from the Black Nazarene constitutes the transcendence of vulnerability.

Beliefs and practices relating to the use of amulets and talismans are commonly accompanied by supplementary bodily practices such as tattooing. As such, I augmented my research with former members and associates of Haring Bakal with visits to a tattoo studio in San Pablo City. I also wanted to analyse contemporary attitudes towards the use of amulets through the medium of film—conveniently Ramon Revilla Jr.’s *Ang Agimat: Anting-anting ni Lolo* (‘The Amulet: Grandfather’s Talisman’) was released shortly before my period of field-research began.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> I was confidently told by one of my informants that the collection of knee-caps was quite unnecessary.

<sup>25</sup> For a general discussion of Philippine cinema see David (1995).

Tattoos associated with amulets and notions of spiritual power and potency commonly depict Saint Francis slaying the serpent, Jesus on the Cross, Masonic triangles with the all-seeing eye in the centre, and Latin words of power. These words of power are etched around the main design or in a square block as follows on the torso over the heart:

MAX MATAM

AMAM ITAM

HIRIHIRIGIT

AMARUM EGOSUM<sup>26</sup>

These kinds of tattoos are typically acquired by young men during the Lenten period. Both tattooing and the Haring Bakal initiation related above sanction penetration of the skin in order to render the subject invulnerable or impenetrable in the future. However, the tattoo artist in San Pablo City and his clients were not exclusively marking their bodies with religious symbols. The large piles of international tattoo art magazines around the studio suggested that Filipino tattoo artists also draw on standard international images of skulls, Celtic crosses, barbed wire, naked and semi-naked women, devils, and so forth that can be found on the bodies of men (and women) anywhere in the world. Thus the tattooed bodies of contemporary Filipino men are inscribed with images and words that are derived from quite different contexts and sources and which reference quite different sentiments and values. For example, a young man already tattooed with Latin words of power on his chest requested that the tattoo artist add a small red devil to his back. Where the former referred to local conceptions of power and potency, the latter referred to a stock of global images that have, in their de-coupling from any particular cultural context, primarily aesthetic resonances.

Like Philippine tattoo art, Philippine cinema reflects and negotiates with local and global pressures, antagonisms and values. The film *Agimat* begins with the deaths of various animals and then two schoolgirls. These deaths are blamed on the activities of a mythological creature known as a *manananggal*. A pale-skinned stranger then appears in the village apparently investigating the local church which appears to have been built on the site of an ancient temple. The strange goings on in the village and the school are as a result of this stranger's attempts to awaken the Queen who sleeps in the temple beneath the church. The Queen's body is covered in tattoos such that she resembles depictions of Filipinos prior to the Spanish conquest. The hero's amulet gives him the power to slay the *manananggal* and then enter the temple beneath the church and kill the Queen that the foolish and dangerous stranger has awoken. Interestingly, the build-up to the killing of the *manananggal* includes a lengthy and erotic depiction of a beautiful young woman oiling her body in preparation for her transformation into a viscera-sucking flying bat. The film concludes with the destruction of the amulet and the inscribing of the Catholic Church as the true source of power in the struggle against evil.

I want to suggest that the film's narrative fulfils a double function. Firstly, the presentation of beliefs about amulets and associated practices as entertainment and within the genre of fantasy essentially infantilises such beliefs and practices. Secondly, the narrative functions to cement acquiescence to Catholic norms and values. The film's young teenage boy hero, through learning to

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<sup>26</sup> There are numerous such formulæ or prayers of protection which may be tattooed directly onto the body and/or which may accompany different amulets as prayers. For example, 'ARAM, ACDAM, ACSADAM, REX OMNIPOTENT, MACMAMITAM ADONAI', 'ASAROG, ATALOG, ATAROG, REGNUM OMNIPOTENTE, MACMAMITAM ADONAY', 'MATA 3 PERSONA: ARAM, ACDAM, ACSADAM, ABISTE, ABITE, ABITEM'.

use the amulet's powers for 'good', comes to accept the debts of obligation and responsibility he has towards his mother, girlfriend, and the Church.

Also central to the film is the disciplining of female sexuality through the killing of the *manananggal* (Meñez 1999) and the dangers posed to community relations and norms by the entry of strangers whose intentions are unfathomable. Through these strategies the film is able to render beliefs and practices relating to amulets and talismans harmless and to recuperate them towards normative Catholic conceptions of male responsibility, filial obligation and fidelity through which masculinity and the male body is fixed *a priori* through being tied to a specific social role. At the Fourth World Meeting of Families—held in Manila during the period I was conducting field work—Church leaders reiterated their belief that gender roles and sexed bodies conform to an *a priori* order which privileges man as the head of the family but which also emphasises the responsibilities that accompany, for example, being a son or a father. The need, after over four centuries of Christianisation, to repeat this message suggests the continuing fear of other forms of bodily discipline that, despite their convenient and unofficial assimilation to the political centre during the Marcos period<sup>27</sup> nevertheless retain the potential to unhinge normative conceptions of the body.

### *Beautiful Bodies*

The materials on male beauty contests were largely derived from conversations with former and current contestants from Manila and San Pablo City, most of whom currently work as beauticians, manicurists, hairdressers and dressmakers—indeed as expert technicians of physical transformation—and through attending two such contests—one in San Pablo City, Laguna held the day after the annual Coconut Festival (January 16) and one in Lagalag, Tiaong, in Quezon (February 10). I also attended a beauty pageant for teenage school children at a high school in San Pablo for comparative purposes. All three contests or pageants followed the same basic structure. Contestants answered questions posed by the judges, showed off their 'talents'—typically singing, dancing, or performing a sketch—and took the catwalk in various attires. Both 'gay' beauty pageants attracted a large number of people, indicating, on one level, social acceptance of these men who dress and perform as women. The gossip among members of the audience was not always, however, flattering or polite. The pageants were held in the open air, unlike the school pageant which was held in the school hall and which was not open to the ordinary public. All three events were however graced with the presence of local politicians and dignitaries, who took the stage to give short speeches or sat as judges and who, furthermore, gave the contests public legitimacy.

There is a growing body of literature on beauty contests, and much of my research material supports the contours set by this, in particular the claims that beauty pageants are sites or occasions where local, national, and international values not only of beauty but of identity are mediated, contested, and negotiated (see Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994; Cohen, Wilk and Stoeltje 1996; Johnson 1996 and 1997; Cannell 1995b and 1999). For example, in all three contests I attended, the severe bodily and facial discipline of the catwalk was apparent, as was the importance of the question and answer sessions which required contestants not only to move fluently between different linguistic registers (Tagalog and English), but also engage with often complex questions about family, nation, citizenship and morality, the latter in light of the Catholic Church's public condemnations of homosexuality, condemnations reiterated at the Fourth World Meeting of Families held in Manila towards the end of January 2003. As such, 'by choosing an individual whose deportment, appearance, and style embodies the values and goals of a nation, locality, or group, beauty contests expose these same values and goals to interpretation and challenge' (Cohen, Wilk and Stoeltje 1996:2) and 'beauty contests are places

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<sup>27</sup> Marcos reputedly had an amulet in the form of a small shard of wood inserted into his back by the founder of the schismatic and nationalist *Iglesia Filipina Independiente*, Gregorio Aglipay (Hamilton-Paterson 1999).

where cultural meanings are produced, consumed, and rejected, where local and global, ethnic and national, national and international cultures and structures of power are engaged' (1996:8).

However, beauty pageants not only mediate local and national identities but also global images of beauty, celebrity, power, and success, such that contestants 'symbolically mediate for local communities the appropriation of a desirable yet potentially threatening global cultural other' (Johnson 1996:89). Cannell argues along similar lines, suggesting that trans-gendered and/or transvestite men in the Philippines mediate an 'American-derived notion of glamour which suggests the power and elite cultural codes of the Philippines' colonisers' (1999:225). In particular, Cannell suggests that 'mimicry'—frequently a pejorative term when used to characterise the lowland Philippines, signifying a lack of cultural authenticity and a 'colonial mentality'—constitutes 'a subtle and ironic exploration of the possibility of accessing the power of the imagined American world, through self-transformation' (1995b:228). Critically, then, beauty contests emerge from this growing literature as critical sites or occasions for confronting and mediating antagonisms, dislocations, and struggles at multiple levels.

In this analysis I want to concentrate on three areas: firstly, the fact that Philippine transvestite and trans-gendered men persist in representing themselves as Catholics in spite of the public condemnations of same-sex relations by the Catholic Church that were especially prominent and audible in the first few months of 2003;<sup>28</sup> secondly on the word or, more properly the term of abuse *baklâ* and implied notions of masculinity and its intersections with notions of weakness and vulnerability (*mahinà*) and strength and invulnerability (*malakàs*) and, thirdly, the importance of local conceptions of power and potency in legitimating male beauty pageants and those who participate in them.

The transvestite and trans-gendered men I got to know in Manila and in San Pablo City all represented themselves to me as Catholics, and although they of course expressed anger, hurt and disappointment at the ways their lifestyles were represented by the Church, their 'faith' in God remained undiminished. On stage appearing as Rica Peralejo, Assunta de Rossi or Kristine Hermosa—Tagalog movie stars who themselves have in the past aroused the ire of the Church for their 'bold' performances—they were subversive yet, as they performed their songs, sketches and monologues, what was expressed above all was a desire for acceptance and inclusion framed as a polite request for an end to discrimination. Many confided that their participation in communion or confession had fallen off. If they went to church at all, it was to sit at the back to say their own prayers in their own

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<sup>28</sup> At the Fourth World Meeting of Families (January 23-26, 2003, Manila), the Church reiterated its stance that the family and the roles of husband and wife were central both to Catholic teaching and the moral fabric of society as a whole. However, activists from gay, lesbian, and women's groups protested outside the congress, claiming that most Filipino families did not fit the 'traditional' model advocated by the Church. The Church model failed to account for phenomena such as domestic violence, family members working overseas, one-parent families, and same-sex partners with adopted children (*Philippine Daily Inquirer* 23/01/03). Church leaders responded to criticisms about the Church's attitudes towards gays and lesbians by saying that it did not condemn the sinner—only the sin (*Philippine Daily Inquirer* 18/01/03). Church leaders also talked about the need for re-evangelisation, the need for responsible parenting, and condemned what they called 'neo-paganism' (*Malaya* 24/01/093). The newspapers also reported a Catholic priest in Mati, Davao Oriental who had banned cross-dressers and skimpily clad parishioners from taking communion. Fr. Bronola was quoted as saying 'a woman who wears the clothes of man or a man who wears the clothes of a woman is hated by God' (*Philippine Daily Inquirer* 11/02/03). By contrast, an article in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (14/02/03) described how, within the ranks of the CPP-NPA, 'homosexual relationships', whether gay or lesbian, were 'subject to the same parameters and conditions set forth by the party on heterosexual relationships'. Gregorio Ka Roger Rosal, the CPP-NPA official spokesperson was quoted as saying that this decision was taken to erase 'macho and feudal' biases both within the party and the masses generally. These debates were heightened by President Macapagal-Arroyo's statements about links between population growth and poverty, links repudiated and questioned by the Church (*Malaya* 26/01/03).

way (compare with Garcia 1998:176-208). These pageants and contests provide a stage for transgendered and transvestite Filipino men to confront and negotiate issues of religious forms of discrimination (among others), and as such create an arena for popular theological criticism. While a Filipina feminism has found articulate expression from within the Church (Claussen 2001), gay criticism must do its work from the margins.

In the preceding analyses of Quiapo and amulets of invulnerability, I have attempted to demonstrate that these bodily rituals or social practices are occasions at which men are called upon to experience and perform their bodies. Critical to the two 'gay' beauty pageants was spectatorship. In essence, these performances operate as a form of instruction that teach the audience, particularly the young males in the audience, how to be invulnerable. As such, I want now to briefly attend to the word *baklâ*. *Baklâ* is a Tagalog word which functioned 'as an adjective to describe a significant albeit momentary state of confusion and fear' (Garcia 1998:113). The word has, however, more recently come to denote both 'effeminacy' and 'homosexuality' though as a verb (*bumaklâ*), it also means 'to amaze' and 'to perplex'.

*Baklâ* is the everyday label for describing 'anomalous' men. Those who the word is meant to describe resent it, preferring to represent themselves to others as *badíng*, while simultaneously reproducing the contours of the insult by also talking of themselves as 'girls trapped in male bodies' and as the 'third sex':<sup>29</sup>

The dominant local male homosexual identity, the *bakla*, is precisely trapped within the Christian-inspired discourse of essences: he is popularly perceived as (and perceives himself to be) *pusing-babae* or woman-hearted, a member of the Third Sex, and an invert whose 'spirit' (*loob*) does not conform to his 'flesh' (*labas*)

(Garcia 1998:118).

The apparent equivalence of the word homosexual with the words *baklâ* or *badíng* is misleading. In the West, the word homosexual commonly denotes men who pursue and cultivate (sexual) relations with other men. In the Philippines, this is not strictly the case. In the Philippines it denotes only those men who, in pursuing and cultivating (sexual) relations with other men, adopt a passive or 'effeminate' role particularly in relation to the sexual act itself. Thus, any man who takes the active role in a sex-act with another man is not gay, homosexual or *baklâ* or *badíng* because he is performing his body in the way the normative discourse of lowland Philippine masculinity says he should (compare with Sommer 2002). And this fact says something very powerful about masculinity in the lowland Philippines today: what is feared—hated, even—most of all is to be mistaken for a woman. The male body ought to be strong, invulnerable—impenetrable, even—and it is revealed as an anomalous body precisely at the moment where it appropriates to itself a social (sexual) role associated with vulnerability which in this case is the invitation to penetration. Thus, the frequent use of the word *baklâ* as a cat-call and insult at beauty pageants is the identification of those to whom it is directed as vulnerable and the implicit construction of the audience, or at least a segment thereof, as invulnerable and therefore as properly male. Sexual difference is produced precisely through such representational practices and processes of identification.

Finally, I want to refer very briefly to a complex of beliefs and practices relating to notions of (spiritual) power and potency—and which themselves criss-cross ideas about leadership, performance and the accumulation of followers—in relation to beauty contests. I have already noted at once the marginality of *badíng* men, the discourses lined up against them, and simultaneously the local popularity of male beauty pageants and the willingness of local dignitaries, politicians and members of the business community to attend these events and as such legitimate them. Some of the *badíng* men

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<sup>29</sup> Although these kind of remarks are made over and over by *badíng* men, few when asked declare any desire to have, were it ever to be made available to them, full gender re-assignment.

I know have gone into business, and there appears to be a correlation between success in pageants and contests and the securing of a reliable clientele in the various arms of the beauty industry. In short, just as political and religious leaders—through demonstrations of power and potency seek to acquire followers—so beauty queens seek to seduce their audiences through an efficacious demonstration of power as physical transformation (Johnson 1997:221).

### *Conclusions*

In the Philippines and elsewhere in Southeast Asia, power (*kapangyarihan*) is a substance or quality which exists in differing quantities in different bodies, but which can be augmented through undergoing particular practices. It is important to note that this substance or quality may also be depleted if it comes into contact with an entity, place or person bearing a significantly greater amount. Here, the body is not an unchangeable entity but an entity that can be modified or transformed through contact with or via the assimilation of other substances, whatever those might be—the touch of an object of great power such as a religious icon, shards of holy rock inserted under the skin, the repetition/adoption of gestures and words, or the wearing of clothes, and the bodily performance of styles and manners associated with the wealthy, glamorous, and powerful.

I have suggested that male bodies in the lowland Philippines constitute sites of struggle, dislocation and antagonism between competing sentiments and values, and I have also attempted to show that male bodies are frequently constituted negatively in everyday elite discourses as objects in need of disciplinary intervention and supervision, such as in discourses deployed to justify Estrada's ouster from Malacañang, news reports about beliefs and practices pertaining to amulets and talismans, and in pronouncements about the family, family roles, contraception, and homosexuality made by high-ranking Church officials during the World Meeting of Families.

Finally, in analysing three bodily ritual or socio-religious practices and their inflection by cultural and historical factors and elements, I have argued that these are occasions for lowland Filipino men to experience their bodies and that there is a common thread that runs between conceptions of weakness (*mahinà*) and strength (*malakás*): this thread is invulnerability, a quality or condition that has profound historical resonance in a country where much of the population is vulnerable to depredations of poverty and political violence.

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