The Filipino LGBTQI+ Community, Pride Marches, and Oplan *Bakla* (Gay): Gendered Resistance as Performance of Dissent and Deliberation in Leni Robredo's Presidential Campaign

Charles Erize P. Ladia
University of the Philippines Diliman
cpladia@up.edu.ph

Abstract

The 2022 presidential campaign of former Philippine Vice President Leni Robredo, the lone female candidate, revolved around resistance against strongman authorities - the influence of populist Rodrigo Duterte and the return of the Marcos family in Malacañang. Without a well-oiled political machinery, her pink campaign banked on support from grassroots volunteer groups including LGBTQ+ organizations. With them came repertoires of contention both familiar and novel to local campaign rhetoric in the past years. This paper inquires: How do gendered repertoires in the Leni Robredo presidential campaign reveal the strategy and struggles for dissent and deliberation of the LGBTQ+ community in the Philippines?

This study mapped actions employed and performed by LGBTQ+ volunteers in campaigning for Robredo. These ranged from offline traditional events like pride marches and drag performances, and ceremonial documents like covenants and manifestos to digital repertoires like curating and uploading viral videos. Traditional repertoires served as performances of solidarity and (in)visibility where volunteers converged in public spaces to garner public attention and support. Digital repertoires, on the other hand, transformed queer bodies into digital identities aiming to extend the reach of the campaign but also maximize these spaces for contention. In a country where LGBTQ+ rights are contested, these gendered repertoires aim not only to shape public opinion on Robredo but also, to assert spaces for their gendered advocacy and deliberation. These repertoires are performed and gendered as it introduced a new way of protesting, campaigning, and deliberating and of defying gendered expectations.

Keywords: Leni Robredo, LGBTQ+, repertoires of contention, gendered performances

> *Nagpapasalamat din ako in a very special way sa inyong lahat [LGBTQ+ community], kayo talaga yung nagbibigay kulay sa kampanyang ito. Anywhere I go, talagang kayo yung nagpapasimuno ng energy na binibigay sa kampanya.* (Hernaez 2022)
>
> [I am really grateful to everyone (LGBTQ+ community) because you give color to this campaign. Anywhere I go, you give the energy to this campaign.]
>
> **Leni Robredo**, signing of the covenant
> with the LGBTQ+ community
> 14 February 2022

Amidst being the opposition figure to macho populist president Rodrigo Duterte and competing against the well-oiled machinery of opponent Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos, Jr., media reports and analyses on Philippine Vice President Leni Robredo's presidential campaign centered on the overwhelming support to the "pink movement" coming from various civil society sectors who actively participated in the campaign (Diaz 2022; Lopez and Calonzo 2022). Her "public femininity"[1] (Diaz 2022) and inclusive rhetoric inspired "more than two million volunteers to go house-to-house and visit local markets to speak about her accomplishments and counter disinformation on social media" (Lopez & Calonzo, 2022). Every campaign rally witnessed teeming crowds with the *miting de avance* drawing more than 700,000 attendees, enough to close Ayala and other adjacent avenues for vehicles (Lalu, 2022a).

With her platform of an honest and responsive governance, the grassroots nature of her campaign inspired different sectors (e.g., university students, farmer groups, indigenous peoples, and senior citizens) to transform their voices and bodies into collective action. One of the earliest sectors to signify their support was the LGBTQ+ community. While they resist social and political discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression (SOGIE), they also helped campaign for Robredo even before she announced her bid for presidency (Lalu, 2021b). For them, her consistency in promoting the rights and

welfare of the community, advocating for pro-gender policies (e.g., SOGIE Equality bill), and being the voice of dissent against the misogynistic and discriminatory rhetoric and policies of Duterte against the community made her the perfect candidate (Lalu, 2021b; Antonio, 2022). To signify such alliance, Robredo even signed a covenant in the middle of the campaign with several LGBTQ+ organizations which contained action plans on important areas for the community like meaningful participation in governance, anti-discrimination legislation, and protection of their sexual, physical, and mental health (Antonio, 2022). As she noted, the covenant promised a government that will listen to everyone, including non-allies (Garcia, 2022). In return, the community actively joined and even spearheaded many collective actions promoting her candidacy bringing with them their unique repertoires of contention.

The emerging collective action sponsored by civil society organizations plays a crucial role in sustaining political mobilizations like campaigns (Acconcia, Perego, & Perini, 2022). The relationship between elections and collective actions have been studied with the interest on how they benefit each other. Tichenor (1999) noted how the women's suffragist movement and the labor movement relied heavily on their partnership with former United States leaders. Barack Obama’s campaign inspired many young supporters to build online communities of people in different digital platforms who can influence their cohorts to vote for him (i.e., tell-a-friend tactic) (Takaragawa & Carty 2012). On the contrary, the election results where Donald Trump won led to negative emotions and sustained collective actions against the president, his policies, and his programs (Bilali, Godfrey, & Freel 2020).

Similar to these, we see how a presidential campaign inspired collective actions from the Filipino people in the early part of 2022. In particular, LGBTQ+ organizations contributed their resources to the Robredo campaign including the repertoires they use for their own advocacy. Repertoires of contention, as Charles Tilly coined, are “the collection of

strategies and tactics a given contextually rooted social movement both knows how to do, and chooses to deploy at a moment in time" (McCurdy, Feigenbaum, & Frenzel, 2016, p. 98). They are embodied by symbols, language, ideologies, timing, and discourses shaped by the actors' relationship with political and social structures and institutions (Tilly, 2005; Wei, 2015) and are used to shape public opinion on their advocacy (Wei, 2015). In contemporary politics, traditional repertoires like protests, strikes, and sit-ins have been innovated by digital affordances like social media which extend the impact of these actions in online, less ephemeral spaces (Fuentes, 2019).

Since every action is constrained in its sociopolitical and cultural contexts, these repertoires, just like their theatrical counterpart, can be considered claim-making performances and public displays of power, agency, and influence which collective actions use to assert the message of their campaigns against antagonists (Taylor et al., 2009; Wei, 2015). For performance studies scholars, these repertoires are part of the 'theater of life' as they reflect social conflict, solidarity, and resistance to existing systems of power (Fuentes, 2019) and reveal the creative range of activists as artists (Luhtakallio, 2013). As political and ritualistic performances, repertoires also manifest the persuasive potential of collective actions in order to win the hearts of their supporters (Taylor, Rupp, & Gamson 2005). But repertoires are not only sensitive to their context, but also in the identity of those who perform them (Ladia, 2022).

Hence, repertoires are not only performative but can also be gendered (Luhtakallio, 2013). Since gender, and I extend this to sexuality, serves as the primary category of attaining political, social, and cultural rights (Yaka, 2019), it structures how citizens perceive the world, build social relations, and process sociopolitical events and crises (Yaka, 2019). Eventually, it informs the spatial, bodily, and visual performances activists use to communicate our grievances and resistance and ultimately, to legitimize collective action

(Luhtakallio, 2013; Yaka, 2019). Thus, this paper argues that the protest actions performed by LGBTQ+ organizations during the presidential campaign of Robredo are not only political but also gendered and performative. I explored the types of repertoires chosen, strategized, and performed by the community during the campaign period (February to May 2022). Analyzing using a performance lens, I ask: How do gendered repertoires in the Leni Robredo presidential campaign reveal the strategy and struggles for dissent and deliberation of the LGBTQ+ community in the Philippines?

In this meso level analysis of collective actions (Kuumba 2001), I pay attention to the curation of repertoires as gendered performances which reveals not only the persuasive intention of the political actors to win votes but also the contexts where these repertoires were devised in. I approached these using the protest event analysis which maps the features of protest actions across time and space (Hutter, 2014). This study includes all protest events - or “the collective public displays used by challenging groups to make claims against opponents, authorities, and other groups" (Taylor, Rupp, & Gamson, 2005, p. 106) - performed by LGBTQ+ organizations within the timeframe and vicinity of the Robredo campaign. This includes digital archives (i.e., posts) of these repertoires available in the official Facebook and Twitter accounts of LGBTQIA+ for Leni and other news articles which reported about these repertoires. The social media platforms existed as early as August 2021 used to encourage the presidential run of Robredo. For Hutter (2014), mass media contents provide rich content for protest event analysis. This paper contributes to knowledge producing on gendering collective actions which remains to be an underexplored field especially in the Philippines. It also manifests how the LGBTQ+ sector asserts itself in relevant political spaces not only to affect election results but forward their long-fought advocacy.

Repertoires as Gendered Performances

> "Gender is a coercive performance: even if the scale of representations of femininity and masculinity, women and men, is a constantly changing one, gender remains a structuring principle for representations of humans, one that dictates rules concerning normality, acceptability, beauty, desirability, and credibility" (Luhtakallio 2013, 46).

We see the entanglements between gender and sexuality, and performance especially in collective actions which are based on grievances pertaining to structures or systems existing in gendered terrains (Kuumba, 2001). Yaka added how gender shapes the lived realities or how men and women perceive their political environment and their efficacy in participating in it (2019). Hence, repertoires are created to respond to these systems (Tilly, 2005). We see traces of the contexts where these actions are inspired from and how they were used and developed through time (Taylor et al., 2009). Further, as Butler mentioned, demonstrations are also acts of 'doing gender' (Luhtakallio, 2013). Identity politics, indeed, play a big role in designing and strategizing repertoires. Beyond gender and sexuality, other marginalized sectors (e.g., farmers, Indigenous peoples, and the urban poor) ensure that their advocacies and identities are reflected in their choice of actions (Joshi, 2022). Cultural forms of repertoires like music, comedy, ritual, art, theater, and spectacles become forms of protests bearing with them the identity of the actors in the movement (Taylor, Rupp, & Gamson 2005).

Extending this argument, repertoires as political performances also have an impact both on the collective action and the gendered identities of the actors (Luhtakallio 2013). Since most collective actions are considered boundary-disruptive, gendered repertoires are performed "to highlight the social basis of gender and sexuality and to contest dominant heterosexual gender codes" (Taylor, Rupp, & Gamson, 2005, p. 111). Gendered repertoires and actions were witnessed being performed in both naturally gendered terrains (e.g.,

same-sex marriage [Taylor et al., 2009], sexual harassment and violence [Wei, 2015]), and other sociopolitical issues which are not necessarily gendered (e.g., land-grabbing [Joshi, 2022], authoritarian regimes [Acconcia, Perego, & Perini 2022]).

When we put gender at the core of collective action analysis, we acknowledge the emergent discussions on unequal gender relations and other discriminative structures. Aside from the historical-spatial configurations revealed by examining gendered repertoires, they may also manifest the "gendered status quo" (Joshi, 2022) - or the power that maintains the structure and who gains from it. This status quo may also be cultural since different countries may have different reception of genders (Kuumba, 2001). These discussions allow us to examine the political agency of these actors within the society and the collective action which they participate in (Joshi, 2022).

These gendered differences, expectations, and roles are also evident in mixed-gender collective actions. Historically, women activists were assigned with movement organizing while men were given more frontline and prestigious jobs within the collective action (Dodson, 2015). In particular, tasks connected to the main repertoire were delegated to men while 'kitchen' tasks were given to women. In terms of preference, women are more likely to choose polite, non-confrontational repertoires (e.g., petition signing, boycotting) while their counterpart chose confrontational activities. Even cultural orientation impacts these differences, Dodson noted that gendered activism is high in countries where gender ideology takes a more traditional orientation (e.g., Australia, Japan, and US) (2015). Further, in a more egalitarian environment (where women's participation in politics is accepted), women participate more both in non-confrontational and confrontational protest actions (Dodson, 2015).

These preliminary discussions prove that gendered repertoires are also performances of marginalized identities, power structure, political ideologies, and gender status quo and differences. But zeroing in on repertoires as gendered performance, certain actions are affiliated or more common in gendered collective actions too. Masculine figures and images, for instance, often overwhelm persuasive images and advertisements of protest actions (Luhtakallio, 2013). Observing periods of contention in Europe, most images shared to the public were male figures marching together and female figures framed with "nonthreatening joyfulness". This framing of male figures and their affinity to violent actions and the lack of women representation in these visuals reveal the gendered preference of how collective actions would also want to be perceived by the public (Luhtakallio, 2013). When compared to women's or LGBTQ+ movements, male-dominated movements are only a few. One example of how gendered preference impacts performance of repertoires was the Pittston Coal Strike conducted by the United Mine Workers of America which was a predominantly male group (Beckwith, 2001). Their preferred repertoires involved picketing, walking out, sit ins, and strikes. Because of the failure of these traditional confrontational repertoires, they shifted to nonviolent civil obedience which transformed their relationship with the mining company and with the movement itself. For Beckwith, this transformation from a male, violent repertoire to a non-violent one reflected "an active process that creates and recreates gender linking the ways men create and sustain gendered selves with the ways that gender influences power relations" (2001, p. 308). This 'masculine' approach to collective action evidenced the gendered nature of these repertoires and how they are continuously being performed and transformed during contention.

This gender bending and breaking performances as reflected in the repertoires were also present in some women's actions. Recently, Cambodian women resisted land dispossession in their homeland by being at the prominence of struggle, which put their

traditional roles as homemakers behind (Joshi, 2022). These performances also shape their relationship with the spaces surrounding them. In China, the 'behavioral art' performed on streets provided a novel repertoire for feminist collective actions to denounce issues that they face (Wei, 2015). Being done in public spaces made the repertoires more attention-grabbing and thus, disruptive and unconventional. One repertoire that represents these street behavioral arts was the 'Bloody Brides' where young ladies were dressed as the name suggests and walked down the streets in Beijing as they were giving fliers on anti-violence to passersby. The creative form and performance allow the group to inject novelty and surprise which gives them vitality as a group too (Wei, 2015).

Although the primary concerns of LGBTQ+ collective actions are anti-discrimination and gender equality, these sociopolitical issues spread across different sectors like employment and education, domestic violence, urban safety, privacy, and sexual harassment. Throughout history and across continents, gendered performances were used as repertoires to resist against the aforementioned issues. Taylor, Rupp, and Gamson stated that drag performances "are public performative resistance deployed by the modern gay and lesbian movement" (2005, p. 109) in "challenging dominant constructions of masculinity and femininity, homophobia, and the primacy of the gendered heterosexual family" (p. 120). It has evolved into a political and personal form of rebellion against gendered structures and expectations. This cultural expression combines music, comedy, ritual, art, theater, and spectacles in order to stage political resistance by destabilizing gender norms and practices (Taylor, Rupp, & Gamson, 2005).

Aside from drag performances, pride marches have been a staple repertoires for LGBTQ+ actions (Wei 2015). This may range from simple marches in the streets to festive carnivalesque performances showcasing gender diversity and calling for equality. For Bruce (2013), pride marches serve as a powerful cultural statement especially for LGBTQ+

members in small cities. She extended her analysis of pride marches by stating that these unashamed performances of gender aim to claim public spaces and challenge the dominant public attitude in the community. Being 'out and proud' allows the community to claim and contest power and share a 'collective effervescence' with the community (Bruce, 2013). This public display of gendered performances invites discourse on human rights, safety and security, and sexual and minority rights for the members of the community (Payne, 2021) and ultimately change their relationships with officials, publics, and spaces surrounding them.

Another issue that plagues the LGBTQ+ community is same-sex marriage. Going against traditional legislation prohibiting such, repertoires employed include ceremonial public marriages between members of the community. By using the symbolic cultural, and religious weights of marriage, these performances impact public consciousness on the said issue (Wei, 2015). In 2004, more than 4,000 couples performed same-sex weddings in a month in order to demand marriage rights and challenge the heteronormative limits of the law (Taylor et al. 2009). This gendered performance shows cultural borrowing "wherein rituals and practices typically used to create moral attachment to the social order are, instead, mobilized in the interest of protest" (Taylor et al., 2009, p. 868). This results in a collective identity, solidarity, and oppositional awareness for members of the action. In more repressive states where members of the LGBTQ+ are targeted by state actors, actions were geared towards advocating for legal reforms against homophobia which called for creating alliances with other sectors especially with human rights groups (Acconcia, Perego, & Perini 2022). To keep members safe, LGBTQ+ activists in Egypt perform an 'activism from the closet' strategy where they do not disclose their gender identity and sexual preferences as "they framed LGBTQ rights as part of a broader range of issues that concerned every citizen, for instance, human rights and freedom" (Acconcia, Perego, & Perini, 2022, p. 5). In countries

like Turkey and Tunisia, since public spaces were deemed unsafe, cafés and universities serve as safe spaces. Conversations on medical rights and conservative policies happened in these spaces. Moreover, online spaces become sites of contention for (in)visibility - as an information platform and a space for resistance against gendered expectations and increasing repression (Acconcia, Perego, and Perini 2022).

While the aforementioned gendered repertoires are already established ones, LGBTQ+ activists continuously devise new performances. In 2011, to garner attention and resist against popular antigay political figures and hate speech, activists perform 'glitter bombing' for almost a year. This action involves "throwing glitter at, on, and around their targets, glitter bombers would yell short phrases to communicate their purpose before security staff removed them from the room" (Galli, 2016, 267). While this tactic was novel which made it popular in terms of media reporting and social media presence, it lost its 'sparkle' due to its lack of radicality and the identification of organization members on its long term impact for the community (Galli, 2016).

Analyzing these repertoires as gendered performances, Joshi (2022) found four themes: repertoires as performance of strategic positioning, of anti-politics, of self-sacrifice, and solidarity. First, she validated existing literature that male figures often become affiliated with violent confrontations but she argued that performances of women's weakness and non-violence are not natural but are "deployed strategically" (2022). Posturing males into more violent repertoires and females into more pacifist ones reveals strategic positioning in gendered repertoires. Second, women activists often frame their actions as non-political so they invite supporters and not dissuade them from voicing their grievances. They connect their struggles as a fight for their family and their livelihood (Joshi, 2022) as they distance themselves to the corruption associated with politics. Third, gendered repertoires were seen as performances of self-sacrifice. The continuous struggle of women because of the

intimidation and violence by the state become ‘idealized images’ of sacrifice for their families and communities. Their virtuosity at home is now performed in these collective actions (Joshi 2022). Finally, these gendered repertoires exhibit performance of solidarity. Collective actions on gender issues are not only representative of the community but also reveal “diffused, submerged networks that share symbols, rituals, values, and goals – that create new networks and coalitions” (Joshi, 2022, p. 214). These networks of solidarity allow for the actions to be dispersed in similar interest groups.

Repertoires as gendered performances enable activists not only to resist the sociopolitical structures but also to link themselves with other, probably larger, groups (Taylor, Rupp, and Gamson 2005). They rely on the symbols, identities, and discourse connected to these repertoires in order for them to identify with the public. The consciousness of these actors to employ these repertoires also reveal the intentionality of their actions. This manifests in how they use their gender and sexuality for ‘strategic disruptions’. These collective actions, ultimately, create a collective identity for LGBTQ+ activists bonded by their common interest and same understanding of their environments (Taylor, Rupp, and Gamson 2005). More than this, the publicness of these performances reveal the awareness of these political actors in using their gendered voices and bodies as part of contention - making these repertoires unquestionably performative.

LGBTQ+ for Leni: Performing gendered repertoires

By looking at repertoires of contention as gendered and performed through protest event analysis, I untangle the relationships between and among these acts as performances, the sites as a stage of contention, and the actors as strategic activists but also as a product of the environment where they perform these actions. Interestingly, collective actions within a campaign aim not only to win the electorate but also to resist the power dynamics which

were the primary reasons of their existence (Taylor, Rupp, & Gamson, 2005). In this case, as we try to map the gendered repertoires of the LGBTQ+ community within the presidential bid of Robredo, we also examine how these actions turn into performances which manifest not only public spectacles but also the on-going struggles and aspirations of the community.

Repertoires as Performances of Solidarity and (In)Visibility

While provincial streets and city walks were teeming with people wearing pink, members of LGBTQ+ groups donning different colors carried big and small rainbow flags and placards, sang chants, and performed dances together with live bands. This scene is common in pride marches across the globe which provides not only a cultural statement from advocates but also a festivity "characterized by the joyous and unashamed public declaration of gay and lesbian identity" (Bruce, 2013, p. 613). While these marches usually happen in June as the Pride Month, the marches within the Robredo sorties happened throughout the campaign and served not only as a venue to invite voters but also a site for their performance of solidarity and (in)visibility.

Most of these pride marches were part of the bigger crowds supporting Robredo. LGBTQ+ activists joined the campaign wherever they were, especially that the campaign was national in scope. The LGBTQIA+ for Leni Facebook page shared photos of the sector as part of different sorties (e.g., CAMANAVA, Tarlac, Nueva Ecija, Pasig, and Quezon). While these marches existed within the campaign, organizers tended to announce meetups before they blended in with the crowd. In several instances, the march happened independent of the Robredo campaign but was still used to persuade audiences to vote for her. Last 14 February 2022, members of the LGBTQ+ community marched from the Commission on Human Rights all the way to the Leni-Kiko Volunteer Center in Katipunan Avenue, Quezon

City to celebrate the ceremonial signing of the National LGBTQIA+ Agenda by Robredo, her running mate Francis 'Kiko' Pangilinan, and select senators under her slate. The covenant signing was a ritualistic performance for the community as it secured the commitment of Robredo to the ideals of the LGBTQ+ organizations. The document included support to anti-discrimination policies, sexual, physical, and mental health of LGBTQ+ citizens, and their meaningful participation governance. The event witnessed performances from members of the community too (e.g., songs, dance numbers, and drag performances).



Figure 1. Martsa Para sa Pag-ibig, National LGBTQIA+ Covenant Signing last 14 February 2022. (*The author is currently seeking permission from the campaign team to use the attached photo.*)

Aside from the covenant, the LGBTQ+ for Leni group published three statements within the campaign period in a rhetorical move to broaden coalitions but draw the line for those who were not part of it. The first was a manifesto of support not only to Robredo but also to other candidates (i.e., vice president, senators, and partylists) who they believed were allies in their gender equality campaign. In the other two statements, the group disassociated themselves with Marcos, Jr. and his vice presidential candidate Sara Duterte, daughter of

president Duterte. These statements argued that Marcos, Jr. will never be an equality champion until he acknowledged the human rights violations of his family; further, they reprimanded Duterte's statement that she is an LGBTQ+ noting how she was sensationalizing their identity. While the goal of LGBTQ+ groups is usually to build a bigger and stronger community of allies (Acconcia, Perego, & Perini, 2022), we see how they were also sensitive in the nature of participation, especially when deemed tokenistic or only for personal gains.

In these pride marches, drag performances were also present which happened in the streets or even, on stage as part of the campaign program. Drag artists lent their talents and spaces to the campaign aiming not only to promote Robredo but also send a message of inclusion and resistance (Antonio, 2022). Even in their own platforms, performers inject a political message to drag performances which identifies to the historical significance and purpose of the repertoires (Taylor, Rupp, & Gamson 2005). This, for these artists, was their contribution to the campaign (Antonio, 2022) but also a way to call attention to the performativity of gender and its political aspects (Taylor, Rupp, & Gamson, 2005). As they performed drag in the streets and in the stages of the Robredo campaign, they have successfully "deploy sexuality itself for strategic disruptions" as they captured audience attention.



Figure 2. Robredo-Pangilinan Miting de Avance last 7 May 2022 at Ayala Avenue, Makati City. (*The author is currently seeking permission from the campaign team to use the attached photo.*)

The pride marches, ceremonial events, and drag performances present convergences of activists' bodies who identified with the cause of the LGBTQ+ community and signify a space for performances of identities and communities within the Robredo crowd. These repertoires, in spaces where LGBTQ+ should be silent about their gender because of a heteronormative society (Bruce, 2013), served as "a choreography of defiance of spatial protocols" (Fuentes, 2019, p. 36) in two ways. First, these gendered performances manifest solidarity as the characteristic of the community but also, their goal for the Robredo campaign. These bodies present in the streets celebrating their gender and sexuality did not only send messages of why the Robredo presidency was necessary but also claimed these spaces as theirs for that moment. Same with the observation of Joshi (2022) that collective actions were sites of socialization for organizations, the feelings of "collective effervescence" (Bruce, 2013) were not only unique to the LGBTQ+ campaign but also with other attendees too. These gendered repertoires signify a campaign where everyone was welcome and where alliances were necessary for the election win.

Aside from solidarity, these repertoires also challenge the invisibility of the sector because of heteronormative preferences even in collective actions. When cisgender gender males are usually at the forefront of actions (Luhtakallio, 2013), pride marches and drag performances become repertoires that break these expectations and put queer bodies at the front and center of the campaign. These performances not only challenge and claim public spaces but also aim to resist the dominant attitude of invisibility and silence towards being queer (Bruce, 2013). Ultimately, pride marches, ceremonial events, and drag performances served as repertoires of strategic positioning (Joshi, 2022). We see how they strategically

deploy their gendered bodies in the center of public and media attention - that within these campaign sorties, they were protected by Robredo's supporters as their allies. These gendered repertoires also temporarily produce a safe space where LGBTQ+ groups change the attitude and behavioral norm of the public through dissemination of cultural messages co-opted by the bigger goals of the campaign.

Repertoires as Performances of Communal and Digital Bodies

Repertoires of contention show how activists respond to their environment and opponents but also, the resources and creativity they harbor within their groups. While pride marches, covenant signings, and drag performances are already established repertoires, the LGBTQ+ volunteers within the Robredo campaign devised novel actions in order disrupt consciousness of both supporters and dissenters, and sustain the interest of the public and the movement of the campaign.

In February 2022, the Commission on Elections implemented Oplan Baklas and took down tarpaulins and other campaign paraphernalia, most from Robredo's slate, since these broke rules on allowed dimensions (Abad, 2022). Her supporters filed a case in the Supreme Court noting that the election agency did not consider that the site of the posters were owned by private citizens and supporters of the presidential candidate. Although public spaces and streets were usual sites of contention (Payne), when collective actions perform repertoires and use their bodies to assert their advocacy in private spaces, they start politicizing these personal spaces. To resist these repressive policies, the LGBTQ+ volunteers launched Oplan Bakla where they walked in streets, knocked on houses, and talked to private individuals in their personal spaces to campaign for Robredo. This was in parallel to her call of a "*Tao sa Tao, Puso sa Puso*" [Person to Person, Heart to Heart] campaign strategy. It started with

smaller groups of volunteers explaining the platform and credentials of Robredo to market sellers in their stands, public utility drivers and their passengers, and people in their homes.

I argue that *Oplan Bakla* [Gay Plan] is a gendered repertoire which uses the body of the LGBTQ+ volunteers as a vessel of communication and makes their claim, specifically the platforms of Robredo, a communal and personal concern of the audience. Since there is often division of labor in collective actions (Dodson, 2015), members of the community tasked themselves to talk to individuals albeit concerns about their safety too. The affordability of this repertoire together with the accessibility to their main target audience allowed the action to diffuse in many areas in the country. The Facebook and Twitter accounts of the group posted several invites to various locations. *Oplan Bakla* did not only manifest the creativity of volunteers, but also the timing needed to execute the performance. Of course, the name itself was an allusion against the discrimination they received from Oplan Baklas. Further, new repertoires emerge during periods of increased contention (Galli, 2016). The whole campaign acknowledged that the gap between Marcos, Jr. and Robredo was still wide thus, maintaining the traction of the big campaign sorties but also, employing a more direct, targeted, and conversational approach. This reveals the awareness of activists that their actions were constrained in both time and space elements and improvising was a must.



Figure 3. Invitation to Oplan Bakla. (*The author is currently seeking permission from the campaign team to use the attached photo.*)

Moreover, by directly conversing with the public, they represent not only the Robredo campaign but also their community together with their advocacy which might not be easily accepted by the public. Thus, this increases the possibility of conflict and dramatizes their bodies as agents and sites of conflict as well. This confrontational repertoire is also opposite to Joshi's observation that alienated and marginalized sectors tend to perform repertoires of anti-politics wherein activists distance themselves from the corruption and negative perception about politics. In the case of the LGBTQ+ volunteers, publicizing themselves in these local communities whose residents were also marginalized made politics personal for their community and those who they talked too. Indeed, for these activists as performers and the voters as audience, their votes make these personal political.

Aside from turning bodies into vessels of communication in local communities, the LGBTQ+ volunteers also transformed themselves into digital bodies in order to perform

resistance and persuasion in online spaces. As Fuentes argued, collective actions learned how to adapt to the growing contribution of social media to content ephemerality of actions and reach more supporters (2019). These platforms also provided a space for repertoires to be innovated since the performance concepts of self-presentation, aliveness, and affective transmission are different in digital sites (Fuentes, 2019). In August 2021, the group started with the hashtag #KeriniLeni [Leni can] which was used to state the reasons why Robredo should run for president and her accomplishments supporting this. Initially, the group also used the hashtag to invite people to share, through a video, why they think Robredo fits the presidency.

During the campaign, one evident repertoire was the production of multimedia materials like videos where famous queer content creators share their platform and popularity to the Robredo campaign. Maximizing their millions of followers, several videos were produced, some citing the credentials of Robredo while a few threw tirades on her opponent. For instance, the video '*Pusong Babae*' featured several content creators (e.g., Sassa Gurl, Pipay, Krissy Achino, Mimiyuuuh, Ate Dick, and Kaladkaren, among others). It addressed Robredo detractors who mentioned her weakness as a female candidate. The video contained reasons why pink - as Robredo's campaign color - should not be discounted as weak just like the character of their endorsed president. The viral material - with 985,000 Facebook views as of writing - did not only allude to Robredo's issues but connected these discriminatory remarks to the perception of weakness of the LGBTQ+ community. In an interview with Antonio (2022), content creators underscored that this was a significant move more so for them who also experienced discrimination in their environment.



Figure 4. Pusong Babae. Uploaded 1 May 2022. (*The author is currently seeking permission from the campaign team to use the attached photo.*)

In a more controversial content, *'Sweet for Leni'* with 2.8 million views as of writing, queer artists led by John Lapus enacted an audience watching a beauty pageant. They were giving comments on the answers of the pageant candidates which, obviously, alluded to Marcos, Jr. and Robredo named as Candidates 7 and 10, their designated number in the ballots. They were discussing the reasons why Candidate 7 should not win (e.g., incoherent answers, history of corruption, and no cited platforms). The video ended with Candidate 10 delivering her answer and winning the pageant and with the statement "*Huwag kang magpapabudol"* [Do not get fooled!].

These were only two samples from the video contents produced by members of the LGBTQ+ groups for the Robredo campaign. The acknowledgement of the volunteers of the expanding sites of campaigns and contentions and the many possibilities afforded by technopolitics to collective action shifted the paradigm of campaigning in the past decade (Fuentes, 2019). Acconcia, Perego, and Perini (2022) explained that civil society sectors, in general, and LGBTQ+ organizations, in particular, play within these digital sites in order to

assert visibility, build communities, and conduct safer encounters. This turned queer artists and their bodies into digital bodies which aim to insert itself in personal spaces of citizens online and advocate for public causes (e.g., elections and gender equality).

The contents of these videos reflected not only the creativity of these artists but also the "tactical frivolity" (Galli, 2016) used to engage with online audiences and to identify with their concerns. While the aim was overly political, the approach was humorous and engaging which can be viral and can sustain collective actions' digital presence (Wei, 2015; Galli, 2016). As compared to traditional repertoires in the streets during the campaign where altercations among opponents can be low, performances in digital sites tend to be more confrontational. As content creator Pipay Kipay noted, the performing these repertoires online gain them both admiration and bashers. For one, while many were supportive that they expressed their political leanings, some called out their being 'political' which according to Pipay reflected that queer artists were expected to fit the mold as comedic entertainers but defiance to such expectations received discriminatory remarks from online users (Antonio, 2022). As Fuentes (2019) suggested, relying on digital bodies to perform these repertoires also open the possibility to hybrid presence of audiences who may contest such platforms especially in highly contested elections. We see, through both Oplan Bakla and digital repertoires of contention, that LGBTQ+ activists continue to (re)design their performances and subject their queer bodies to transformation in personal, communal, and digital spaces.

Conclusion

The pink presidential campaign of Leni Robredo witnessed different repertoires of LGBTQ+ organizations which contained symbols, ideologies, and discourses performed in the eyes of Filipino voters weighing on her candidacy. These performances did not only aim to win votes but also, assert in public spaces the gender advocacy that they have long fought

for. We see how the election and the campaign served as a site for contention between and among LGBTQ+ volunteers and historical-spatial configurations of political structures and heteronormative expectations as their repertoires revealed threshing out issues relevant to their organizations as well. Indeed, as they campaigned for Robredo with millions of audiences, it became an important opportunity to locate gender equality as a campaign issue.

Similar to Galli's (2016) observation that collective actions just adapt previous repertoires deemed effective, we see both traditional and digital repertoires performed by LGBTQ+ volunteers for the Robredo campaign. While familiar, there were innovations introduced specifically on merging pride marches in usual campaign rallies, using drag performances and video contents as both entertainment and political messaging, and using subtle rhetoric in statements and manifestos. These reflect the 'learned conventions' (Taylor, Rupp, and Gamson 2004) from previous contentions but also their creativity, resourcefulness, and timing, making these repertoires more engaging to and less ephemeral for spectators (Fuentes 2019).

Finally, these repertoires were manifestations of performances of gender, including the struggles and agencies these LGBTQ+ volunteers experience and have in this country. As Ladia noted, contemporary activists prefer repertoires which are individualized, personalized and micro (2022). Thus, these performative transgressions - of being together and visible in public spaces and in using their queer bodies and issues to send messages - are performances of gender too trying to resist against the heteronormative gender codes and change their relationship with public opinion and ultimately, banking on Robredo for her commitment.

While Robredo did not win, these collective actions might have transformed people's perception of the community or the gender issues they represent. The dialectic potential of repertoires of contention, as Kuumba argued (2004), changed the actors, the audiences, and

spaces through its repetitive performances. The learnings from this campaign will be applied in the next period of contention. In the words of Fuentes, collective actions continue to develop different repertoires of ‘being against’ and ‘being together’ but also, as LGBTQ+ organizations continue to resist in these available stages, they continue to explore repertoires of ‘being queer’ and ‘being Filipinos’.

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