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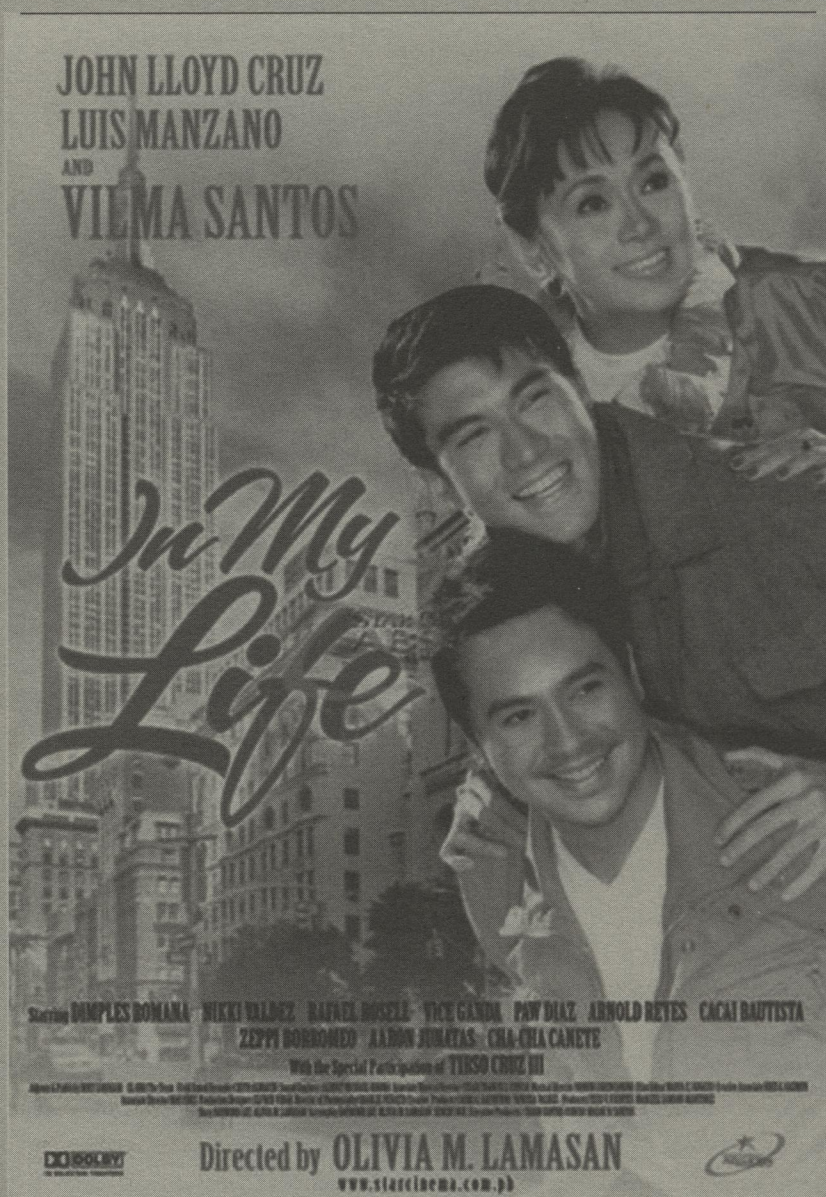
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LOUISE ABIGAIL PAYUYO

The Portrayal of Gays in Popular Filipino Films, 2000 to 2010

This article evaluates how gays are portrayed in popular gay-themed Filipino films from 2000 to 2010. It compares and analyzes different gay identities from five successful films: “Markova: Comfort Gay” (2000); “Aishite Imasu 1941: Mahal Kita” (2004); “Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros” (2005); “In My Life” (2009); and, “Petrang Kabayo” (2010). Two main stereotypes were identified in the portrayals: the parloristang bakla (beauty parlor gay) for the effeminate gay, and ‘Brokeback Mountain’ for the masculine gay. It argues that mainstream Philippine cinema in the past decade has favored the parloristangbakla stereotype while the masculine gay is a recent portrayal. Queer theory’s analysis of the incoherency in the non-normative alignments of sex, gender, and sexuality, particularly in the parloristangbakla stereotype, where characters appear more heterosexual than homosexual in sexual desire for ‘real’ men, is relevant to the study. The study concludes that despite the change in the portrayal of gays, institutions that sponsor heteronormativity will continue to prevent homosexuality from being seen as a naturally occurring form of sexuality.

Keywords: homosexuality, portrayal, cinema, heteronormativity, gender, sexuality



Poster for the film, "In My Life". (From Star Cinema)

From comedy bars to television, radio, and film, the pervasiveness and prominence of male homosexual personalities cannot be denied as they comprise a distinctive niche in Philippine show business. They have indeed become a staple in the local entertainment scene. A cursory look at the top-rating television programs such as GMA 7's "Eat Bulaga" and "Startalk TX," and ABS-CBN's "It's Showtime" and "The Buzz," reveals that gay actors and personalities have been enjoying a substantial share of the limelight. Well-known gay personalities like Boy Abunda, Ricky Lo and Vice Ganda currently endorse major corporate brands that spend millions on television, print, outdoor, and online advertising¹. Not to be missed is cinema, the medium that helped catapult to stardom the late comedian Rodolfo "Dolphy" Quizon, Roderick Paulate, Michael V, and Vice Ganda, all of whom have made their living out of making people laugh, and sometimes cry, by portraying funny gay characters.

This article focuses on Philippine cinema and seeks to evaluate the variety of ways by which the male homosexual is portrayed in popular gay-themed films from 2000 to 2010. The research presents a comparative analysis of different gay identities from five successful films, namely, "Markova: Comfort Gay," released in 2000; "Aishite Imasu 1941: Mahal Kita," released in 2004; "Ang Pagdadalaga ni

¹ Boy Abunda recently did advertisements for Procter and Gamble's global campaign dubbed, "Thank You Mom," which was promoted aggressively on television and also in the Internet. Ricky Lo is an endorser of House of Obagi Center for Dermatology, along with television personality PiaGuanio. Vice Ganda is the latest endorser for the Belo Medical Group, with huge billboards scattered in major thoroughfares sporting the headline, "Beauty is fun. Make Belo your Vice." The headline is a play on Vice Ganda's screen name that also leverages on his talent as one of the country's leading comedians.

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Maximo Oliveros,” released in 2005; “In My Life,” released in 2009; and, “Petrang Kabayo,” released in 2010. This paper inquires into how the gay characters’ gender and sexuality were configured in terms of personality traits, physical comportment and behavior, the types of people they desire, and the kinds of relationship they pursue and develop. The analysis also looks into sources of minoritization to know how homosexual abuse was presented in a largely heterosexual society.

The films were chosen based on the revenues they reportedly amassed at the box office, and, where applicable, the awards they received locally and abroad. Box office performance provides a sound gauge of audience reach, while distinctions indicate the quality or acceptability of the films to a set of authoritative jurors. Gay-themed films that were also shown during the specified time period but did not do well in terms of revenues and failed to receive any distinction were excluded based on the assumption that only those that met the criteria had the potential to achieve significant audience impact. Difficulty in gaining access to the films must also be noted given the lack of a repository with a robust inventory of Filipino movies for research purposes.

In a predominantly Catholic society like the Philippines, it would be of interest to know how the kinds of portrayal of the male homosexual have evolved in recent films, and how some aspects of the earlier popular culture remained the same. I argue that mainstream cinema for the past decade has favored the portrayal of the effeminate gay stereotype, and only recently did it portray the masculine gay. This shift is significant in the sense that it indicates an awareness of, or interest in, non-feminine forms of gayness. This may be indicative of the evolution in society’s awareness of gayness and its varied types of expression. As to whether that awareness indicates acceptance or tolerance is a matter beyond the parameters of this study.

METHODOLOGY

I used content analysis as the methodology for evaluating the films. As an approach and analytic strategy, content analysis enables a systematic examination of forms of communication to document patterns objectively (Marshall and Rossman 1995:85).

The paper cites as units of observation specific scenes that show actions, gestures, or symbols to determine, first, the gay character's gender identity, broken down into personality traits and physical comportment; second, their sexuality in terms of their sexual object choice and the kind of relationships they pursue and cultivate; lastly, the sources of marginalization to determine the kind of people that exert power and dominance over the gay characters in the films.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While doing research for this paper, it was surprising to find only a handful of studies that dealt with the portrayal of male homosexuals in mass media. Most of the theses that I found in the university libraries, which were done from 1988 to 2003, looked into gay portrayals in various aspects of mass media. Only two specifically dealt with male homosexual portrayal in cinema.

Zubia (1995) studied the attitudes of male respondents towards homosexuals as influenced by exposure to mass media and interpersonal channels and the respondents' personal values. Her study focused chiefly on the level of acceptance and discrimination of homosexuals. Survey results showed that there were no significant relationships between, first, the level of adherence to morality and attitude toward homosexuals; and second, the level of exposure to mass media and interpersonal channels and the respondents' attitude toward homosexuals.

Majority of the respondents stated that homosexuals should be accepted in society. Curiously, though, this view seems to be inconsistent with another finding that most of the male respondents admitted to being less receptive to homosexual acts and behavior. This inconsistency may imply tolerance for gays or ambivalence as to how they should be accepted.

Cruz (1996) conducted research to determine the relationship between the level of exposure to male homosexual characters on television and the attitude of high school students towards male homosexuals. Cruz also sought to know the attitude of the respondents toward television male homosexual characters as influenced by the

length and frequency of exposure. Survey results revealed that there was a significant relationship between the level of exposure of high school students to television male homosexual characters and their attitude towards male homosexuals. The study found that a significant relationship existed between the length and frequency of exposure and the respondents' attitude towards male homosexuals on television. Respondents with more exposure in terms of length and frequency tended to be more accepting of homosexuals.

Baldo and Verches (1999) sought to describe the portrayal of homosexuals on Philippine television. Their study showed that homosexuals were featured in stereotypical roles. Portrayal was also inadequate and inaccurate as television was unable to capture the different expressions of homosexuality in society and the complexity of a homosexual's life.

Rieza (2003) analyzed the effects of homosexual characters in advertising on consumer behavior, specifically, the efficacy of using homosexual endorsers in positively influencing consumer predisposition to purchase a product. Research findings revealed that the use of male homosexuals as product endorsers was considered an insignificant factor in the consumers' decision-making process for buying products. Worthy of note, however, is that brands which used homosexual endorsers were those associated with less serious concerns. The same is not true for products that required a high level of credibility or trustworthiness. Rieza (2003) concluded that while society appears to have slowly accepted homosexuals, such acceptance is limited since gays are still relegated to certain niches created for them by society.

There were only two studies that specifically tackled male homosexual portrayal in Philippine cinema. The first, by Lintag (1988), is a descriptive study on the awareness, perception, and attitudes of urban viewers towards the portrayal of male homosexuals in Philippine cinema. Lintag (1988) showed that viewers had a relatively low awareness of films that featured gay characters in local cinema. She also noted a disparity between the viewers' perceptions of the portrayal of gays on the big screen vis-à-vis their knowledge of how homosexuals

conduct themselves in real life. The study described viewers as being 'uncertain' of their disposition towards the presentation of gay characters in the films. Lintag linked such uncertainty to the low level of awareness of gay-themed films. Majority of the respondents strongly disagreed with the notion that the gay characters were realistically and justly depicted in the films.

Soler (1988) looked into the image of the Filipino male homosexual in local films released from 1986 to 1987, and the reactions of actual male homosexuals to such image. The film analysis portion of the research identified a flaw in the projection of the male homosexual. Many of the films depicted the '*palengkera – mujera*' type of homosexual, which the author also referred to as the '*screaming faggot*.' Soler noted that the image such films projected were, in her words, 'narrow, constricted and stereotypical,' one she considered as misleading. The filmmakers Soler interviewed explained that the said image was 'consciously formulated' despite obvious knowledge of the variety and complexity of male homosexual identity. The filmmakers also said that ultimately, they are in business and they need to make a profit to survive. Thus, their selection of movie themes is based on their perception of what the public would be interested to watch. Comparison of results from the survey, interviews, and film analysis revealed that while the film makers' intended image is well aligned to the image projected in the films, these were inconsistent with the actual Filipino male homosexual's perceptions of themselves. Soler further asserted that movie producers merely exploited the stereotypical identity of homosexuals in films and noted the tendency to satirize the portrayals, oftentimes to an extreme. Such a mindset makes impossible a realistic depiction of the variety of homosexual expressions in contemporary society.

From the findings of Baldo and Verches (1999), Lintag (1988), and Soler (1988), a palpable pattern emerges, one that points to a gulf between how male homosexuals in both the big and the small screens were depicted versus the respondents' perceptions of how homosexuals conduct themselves in real life.

SYNOPSIS OF THE FILMS

“Markova: Comfort Gay”

“Markova: Comfort Gay,” released in 2000 by RVQ Productions Inc., is a movie based on the life of Walter Dempster Jr., the last known surviving ‘comfort gay’ from World War II. Gil Portes directed the film. Veteran actor Dolphy plays the elderly Markova, while two of his sons, Eric Quizon and Jeffrey Quizon, portrayed the younger Markova in two different phases of his life. Jeffrey Quizon won Best Supporting Actor from the Filipino Academy Movie Arts and Sciences (FAMAS) Awards and also from the GawadUrian Awards². The film was nominated seven times in various award-giving bodies³. There was no available information on box office revenues.

After viewing a documentary about the deplorable story of women forced into prostitution during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines, Walter, otherwise known to his gay peers as Markova, finally musters up the courage and decides to divulge his own sordid tale of suffering to reporter Loren Legarda. He begins by telling how he survived frequent physical abuse from his older, homophobic brother, Robert, whose aim was to punish the young Walter for being gay. Walter’s ordeal did not stop when Robert mysteriously dies. He and his friends had the misfortune of languishing in the hands of Japanese soldiers who turned them into sex slaves.

While working as entertainers to the Japanese army, they attracted some high-ranking army officials. The army officials eventually brought Walter and his friends to the headquarters for sexual intercourse. Upon learning that Walter and his friends were not real women, the infuriated army official ordered their detention in the barracks. This is when the ill fortune of Walter and his friends took a turn for the worse, as hordes

² Taken from the Internet Movie Database, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0292097/awards>, retrieved on 19 December 2011.

³ IMDB website, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0292097/awards>, retrieved on 19 December 2011.

of soldiers started going to the barracks to sexually abuse them. Walter and his peers eventually escaped.

Walter and some of his friends survived the war and lived through the American occupation as ‘show girls’. Some of them had American service men as boyfriends.

In the latter part of the movie, Walter recounts the hardships he and his friends encountered as homosexuals in the twilight of their lives. Strong bonds of friendship remained as Walter visited his old gay friends who had fallen ill. Anita, one of Markova’s friends, died of Acquired Immunity Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) while Carmen died of a heart disease.

“Aishite Imasu 1941: Mahal Kita”

“Aishite Imasu 1941: Mahal Kita” is a film about love, betrayal, and honor during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines from 1941 to 1945. Joel Lamangan directed the film. It was Regal Films’ official entry to the 30th Metro Manila Film Festival in 2004. It received a total of twenty distinctions from various award-giving bodies⁴, and was also nominated eighteen times for different categories⁵. Information on box office performance is unavailable.

Inya (played by Judy Ann Santos) recounts events involving her husband, Edilberto (portrayed by Raymart Santiago), and their childhood friend Ignacio Basa (played by Dennis Trillo), a transsexual who had been in love with Edilberto since childhood.

The movie begins in 1941. Inya had just married Edilberto, her childhood sweetheart, and was looking forward to building a family together. The simple town of San Nicolas had no clue that war would soon be upon them.

⁴ Information only available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aishite_Imasu_1941:_Mahal_Kita#Awards, retrieved on 19 December 2011..

⁵ Information only available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aishite_Imasu_1941:_Mahal_Kita#Nominations, retrieved on 19 December 2011.

By some twist of fate, Ignacio, who could sing Kundiman beautifully, was compelled to perform in a town event, where Japanese army chief Ichiru Hamaguchi (played by Jay Manalo) sees him perform and gets smitten.

The arrival of the Japanese forces in San Nicolas brings much chaos and devastation to the town that was once so peaceful. The guerilla forces, led by Edilberto's kin, convinced Ignacio to become a spy by forcing him to continue masquerading as a woman. This was the only means for Ignacio to access information from the Japanese army that the rebels could use to plan their counterattacks.

Ichiru and Ignacio's relationship blossoms, but tension mounts as both the town and Ignacio dread the day that Ichiru discovers Ignacio's true identity.

The film takes on an interesting twist as Ichiru eventually admits, after several attempts to have sexual intercourse with Ignacio, that he knew the latter was a man the first time he saw him. His admission made their relationship stronger. This, however, heightens Ichiru's personal conflict as he becomes torn between his loyalty to his country and his feelings for Ignacio.

Edilberto eventually leads the guerilla forces and becomes known as Kumander Berto. He dies in battle, thus compelling his wife, Inya, to pursue his cause. Inya successfully leads the troops against the Japanese. The Japanese army soon discovers that Ichiru is a homosexual and was dismissed from the army. He is then forced to go into hiding with Ignacio.

The film concludes with positive portrayals of the two main homosexual characters: Ichiru commits hara-kiri while Ignacio remains loyal to Inya and his countrymen. He surrenders to the Japanese troops and was tortured almost to the point of death. Inya comes to his rescue, but Ignacio dies in the end after taking a bullet to save Inya.

“Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros” (The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros)

“Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros” (The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros) is a highly acclaimed digital film released in

2005 by Unitel Pictures. The film was also released in commercial cinemas. Aureus Solito directed the movie. It was the official entry of the Philippines to the 2007 Academy Awards. The film garnered 23 distinctions from award-giving institutions both here and abroad, and was also nominated in 23 categories⁶. There is no available information on box office revenues.

The story is about “Maxi,” a homosexual teen, who lives with his father and two brothers in the slums of Manila. His father and brothers make a living as petty thieves. The plot mainly revolves around Maxi’s conflict between his juvenile love for a handsome young police officer, Victor (played by J.R. Valentin), and his family’s illegal livelihood.

Maxi’s mother died when he was very young, so he assumed the feminine role in the household ever since. He gladly took on tasks such as cooking, tidying up the house, and mending his brother’s clothes. Wearing clips and bangles on his wrist and occasionally putting lipstick on, his family loves him dearly and never had any issues with his homosexuality.

One night, Maxi is accosted by two men who wanted to molest him. The plan gets foiled as Maxi is saved in the nick of time by Victor. For the first time, Maxi discovers that side of his sexuality as he finds himself strongly attracted to Victor. From then on, Victor became Maxi’s preoccupation. Maxi would go out of his way to see Victor and spend time with him. In one scene, Victor kindly rebuffs Maxi’s advances when the boy naughtily steals a kiss.

Their friendship turns sour after Victor’s boss kills Maxi’s father. Having been deeply affected by the loss of his father whom he loved very much, Maxi disregards Victor’s attempts to revive their friendship. The film ends on a positive note as Maxi’s two older brothers put him back to school so that he can have a much better future.

⁶ Information available from the Internet Movie Data Base (IMDB) website, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0479506/awards>, retrieved on 19 December 2011.

“In My Life”

“In My Life” is a multi-awarded, gay-themed film released by Star Cinema in 2009 starring Vilma Santos, John Lloyd Cruz, and Luis Manzano. Olivia Lamasan directed the film. The movie was filmed mainly in New York City, with some scenes shot in the Philippines. It received 26 distinctions from various local award-giving bodies⁷, and 29 nominations⁸. Star Cinema reported earnings amounting to PHP 137.5 million.⁹

Shirley Templo (played by Santos) is a control freak feared, not only by colleagues and students in the public school where she works as a librarian, but also by her own children. Her domineering, cold, and unrelenting stance in family matters have led her children to distance themselves emotionally from her.

When Shirley realizes that the power she once had over her family has diminished, she decides to fly to New York to visit Mark (played by Luis Manzano), her estranged homosexual son who was suffering from colon cancer. Shirley is unaware of her son’s illness.

Shirley had no idea that staying with Mark was going to be complicated, as she also had to live with Mark’s gay lover, Noel (played by John Lloyd Cruz), then an illegal immigrant.

Shirley knew of Mark’s homosexuality since he was in high school, but this was never discussed between them. Noel had to endure Shirley’s

⁷ Awards for *In My Life*, IMDB website, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1508291/awards>, retrieved on 19 December 2011.

⁸ Information only available from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/In_My_Life_\(film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/In_My_Life_(film)), retrieved on 19 December 2011.

⁹ Dimaculangan, Jocelyn. “PEP Exclusive: Star Cinema Reveals Box-office Gross of Its Films in 2009. <http://www.pep.ph/news/24389/-PEP-EXCLUSIVE:--Star-Cinema-reveals-box-office-gross-of-their-2009-films/PEP>, retrieved on 19 December 2011. Same amount is reflected at the National Statistical Coordination Board website, http://www.nscb.gov.ph/headlines/StatsSpeak/2012/021312_rav_mpg.asp, retrieved on 05 August 2012.

rudeness, aggravated by Mark's queer request for her to marry Noel as the solution to his illegal status in the United States.

Through time, Shirley learns to appreciate the kind of relationship that Noel and Mark shared. Noel assumed the feminine role in the relationship. Aside from being submissive and more emotionally expressive, Noel took charge of cooking and packing Mark's luggage, among other things.

A rift in the friendship between Shirley and Noel emerges when she discovers that Noel had been keeping Mark's illness a secret, upon Mark's request.

After Mark's successful operation, fate eventually took its final blow and Mark dies from a car accident. The tragic turn of events makes Shirley understand Mark's reasons for wanting her to know and accept Noel. She resolves her issues with Noel and decides to help him in the end by marrying him just as Mark had originally wanted.

"Petrang Kabayo"

"Petrang Kabayo" is a remake of the successful 1988 film *"Petrang Kabayo at ang Pilyang Kuting,"* with seasoned actor Roderick Paulate in the title role. Released in 2010, it was Viva Films' launching movie for Vice Ganda (Goldwin Trinidad in real life). Wenn V. Deramas directed the film. The film did not receive any awards, only two nominations for minor categories¹⁰. It achieved ticket sales of PHP 115.5 million¹¹.

Also playing homosexual characters in the movie are Eagle Riggs as 'Diobayo, ang Diyos ang mga Kabayo,' and Makisig Morales as the young Peter.

Peter Kasimsiman knew at a young age that he was gay. His homophobic father, Poldo (played by John Arcilla), a 'cuchero' or

¹⁰ The Internet Movie Database, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1743708/> awards, retrieved on 05 January 2010.

¹¹ National Statistical Coordination Board website, http://www.nscb.gov.ph/headlines/StatsSpeak/2012/021312_rav_mpg.asp, retrieved on 05 August 2012.

kalesa driver by profession, often physically and verbally abused him as punishment for his homosexuality. The maltreatment worsened when his mother died of a fatal illness. Poldo beat Peter severely after the latter lost his father's beloved horse, Brown Beauty. The animal escaped while Peter was playing with his gay friends. Poldo's brutality led Peter to run away from home. Emaciated after roaming the streets for days with hardly any nourishment, Peter collapses and is found unconscious on the street by a wealthy *haciendera*, Doña Biday (played by Eugene Domingo), who eventually decides to adopt him. His life begins to change as Doña Biday showers him with the love and attention his father never gave.

Doña Biday makes Peter the sole heir to the hacienda and her businesses in the event of her demise. Despite the guidance of the good-natured foster mother, Peter becomes heartless and notorious for his horrible temper. His abuse of the housemaids and employees worsened after Doña Biday passed away.

To teach Peter a lesson, Diobayo, the goddess of horses, bestows a curse upon him: Peter metamorphoses into Petra, the horse, whenever he displays anger or maltreats the people around him. The only antidote is if a man kisses Petra on the mouth as a sincere gesture of affection. Peter's love interest, Dickson (played by Luis Manzano), was his only hope.

The movie shows how Peter transforms for the better as he redeems himself in the end.

NON-EQUIVALENCE OF BAKLA AND HOMOSEXUAL

It is necessary at this point to briefly discuss the non-equivalence between the local construct of *bakla* and the Western construct of the homosexual before discussing the study's key findings. Garcia (1996), in his pioneering work, *Philippine Gay Culture: Binabae to Bakla, Silahis to MSM*, provides this much-needed clarification. The first point of difference is that *bakla* denotes the identity of the overtly effeminate and/or cross-dressing male, while homosexual refers exclusively to one's sexual object of choice and cuts across sexes. This means that the term homosexual can be used to describe males or females, while

bakla can only be applied to males (Garcia 1996:xxi). Second, *bakla* connotes a particular comportment, how one conducts himself in the same-sexual act in a way that renders him different from his masculine partner who is not considered *bakla*. In contrast, homosexual connotes a kind of orientation or preference or desire that both parties in a same-sexual experience engender and share (Garcia 1996:xxi-xxii). Lastly, one must bear in mind that *bakla* and homosexual come from two different knowledge systems imbued with their own cultural nuances and thus, can never be treated as one and the same.

Another significant point is the concept of 'homosexuality as inversion,' or the "psychosexual reversal of the homosexual person's genital gender" (Garcia 1996:xv-xvi). Garcia notes that in the Philippines, the concept of *kabaklaan* is often conflated with the Western notion of homosexuality. This confusion persists mainly because of the 'contiguity and equivalency' between the *bakla*'s model of gender crossing and the Western psychosexual inversion (Garcia 1996:xxii-xxiii). Garcia further asserts that this equivalency may have emerged due to the "continuing sexualization of the gender-crossing *bakla*, whose very being becomes construed and constructed by both popular and academic disciplines as a product of his same-sexual orientation" (Garcia 1996:xxiii).

The succeeding discussion on the typology of homosexual portrayals is based on the premises outlined above.

TWO BASIC TYPES OF MALE HOMOSEXUAL PORTRAYAL

Content analysis of the films reveals two basic stereotypes. The first, I have called the *parloristang bakla* (beauty parlor gay) portrayal for the effeminate gay. The second kind I will refer to as the 'Brokeback Mountain' portrayal for the masculine gay. This stereotypicality reflects what Garcia (1996:436) refers to as the 'gender divide' between the effeminate and masculine gays, a division that he considers 'analogous to a kind of class antagonism between the 'respectable' and the 'vulgar' ascriptions of the *bakla* and gay identity.'

The *parloristang bakla* may be considered as the local counterpart for the Western notion of the 'drag queen,' primarily on the aspect implied in the term pertaining to cross-dressing and comportment.

"Markova: Comfort Gay", "Aishite Imasu 1941: Mahal Kita", "Petrang Kabayo," and "Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros" all showed the *parloristang bakla* variety. Portrayal in said movies is comparable to those found in the films that Soler (1988) and Lintag (1988) included in their respective theses. What Soler called the '*palengkera-mujera*' stereotype is still visible in the movies mentioned above, and is clearly the favorite formula among filmmakers.

In 2005, Paramount Pictures released a critically acclaimed and controversial film titled "Brokeback Mountain" that became a phenomenal box office success worldwide. Directed by Ang Lee, the film's plot revolved around the love affair between two homosexual cowboys in the American West that took place from 1963 to 1983¹². The portrayal of the lead characters in said film jolted movie-goers the world over as it departed markedly from the formulaic depictions used in most gay-themed movies.

Of the five films chosen for this research, only one used an unorthodox portrayal of homosexuals -- Star Cinema's "In My Life." I therefore deemed it apt to name the second variety of male homosexual identity as the 'Brokeback Mountain' type. Gay portrayal in said film is similar to the depiction of gays in Ang Lee's film in a number of ways.

First, the lead characters are young, handsome, and straight-looking men. Second, their experiences are presented in a more sympathetic, open-minded, and non-judgmental way. In my view, this new kind of treatment was able to pique public interest. Such a depiction would not have fared well in a mainstream, commercial film before, because most, if not all, gay-themed films of recent years adhered somewhat mindlessly to the 'screaming faggot' stereotype. The fact that seasoned actors played the major roles also contributed to the film's success. Lastly, the lead characters in both movies are shown to be attracted only

¹² The Internet Movie Database, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0388795/synopsis>, retrieved on 05 August 2012.

to homosexual men who present themselves as normatively masculine in terms of appearance and comportment.

In Philippine gay culture, Garcia (1996:xxiv) spoke of the duality of selfhood in what he referred to as the ‘dichotomy of kalooban and panlabasnakatawan.’ This duality best accounts for the ‘Brokeback Mountain’ type of homosexuality. While the gay lead characters look normatively masculine on the outside (*panlabasnakatawan*), their *kalooban* makes them gravitate towards men of the same sexual orientation. This type of homosexual expression has long existed, but the force of heteronormativity continues to prevail.

Table 1. Visual Symbols Depicting Feminine Portrayals of Gayness

VISUAL CUES	“MARKOVA: COMFORT GAY”	“AISHITE IMASU 1941: MAHAL KITA”	“MAXIMO OLIVEROS”	“IN MY LIFE”	“PETRANG KABAYO”
Swaying of hips	x	x	x		
Wearing of make-up	x	x	x		x
Wearing women’s clothing	x	x	x		x
Wearing of women’s accessories (clips, bangles, earrings, necklaces)	x	x	x		x
Wearing of wig	x	x	*only in one scene		x
Using a flower to accessorize one’s hair		x	x		
Crossing of legs			x		

Interestingly, there are salient patterns that one can discern from the two distinct homosexual identities outlined above. A brief discussion of the prominent patterns is presented below.

Gay Lead Characters' Gender Identity

The gender identity of the gay lead characters can be described in terms of visual symbols and aural cues.

Only the film, "In My Life" showed the two main characters as masculine in terms of gender identity. The rest, having employed the *parloristang bakla* stereotype, can be considered as portraying the feminine type of gayness, given the visual cues outlined in Table 1.

The 'Brokeback Mountain' portrayal primarily used lead characters that were young, handsome, and physically fit. "In My Life" suggested that Mark was a professional and was well-educated. Widely considered as one of the country's top dramatic actors, John Lloyd Cruz also manifested said attributes.

Performance of 'Women's Work'

The gay characters in the films were shown doing the tasks that have customarily been regarded as 'women's work' such as doing household chores, entertainment of guests, and other tasks associated with the feminine role (see Table 2 below). Performance of such tasks can be taken as an indication of the person's subordination to the more powerful member/s of the household.

Voice Pitch as Gender Cue

A significant aural cue used by most of the *parloristang bakla* portrayals is the feminization of one's voice. This is noticeable in "Markova: Comfort Gay," "Aishite Imasu 1941: Mahal Kita," and "Petrang Kabayo." "Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros" is an exception as Maxi did not alter his voice in the film.

The pitch of a person's voice instantly reveals one's true gender, and it explains why many homosexuals take great pains to alter their voice in order to sound like a woman. There are even some websites

Table 2. List of Household Tasks Culturally Regarded as Women’s Work that the Homosexual Characters Performed in the Films

TASKS	INSTANCES WHERE PORTRAYAL WAS SHOWN
1. House Chores	
Cooking	Walter and his gay friends cooked their food during the Japanese Occupation. Maxi was the designated cook in the house. Noel cooked for Mark and knew how to prepare all of his favorite dishes.
Cleaning the house	Maxi always tidied up their house. Maxi also volunteered to clean Victor’s dusty fan in his house.
Washing clothes	Maxi also washed clothes for his family.
2. Entertainment of guests	
	Walter and his gay friends provided entertainment to the Japanese and American soldiers as showgirls. Ignacio was asked by the town mayor to sing in a public event where Ichiru first saw him. The mayor also interceded and asked Ignacio if he could accompany Ichiru around town, a role akin to a guest relations officer.
3. Other Feminine Tasks	
Serving food to the man/men of the house	Maxi always served food on his father’s plate. Noel also did the same for Mark.
Preparing partner’s luggage for a trip	Noel did this for Mark when the latter was preparing for his colon cancer operation.
Sewing	Ignacio was a skillful sewer and was Tiyang Melba’s asset in her dress shop. Maxi would mend his brother’s torn clothes.
Giving children a bath	Maxi gave the neighbor’s son a bath. The boy’s mom thanked him for the gesture.

like www.voicefeminization.com that offer voice feminization therapy for transgender women or transgender men who have undergone sex reassignment surgery. One online ad from www.voicefeminization.com had this in its headline:

Leading Speech Pathologist Reveals How to Use Your Voice to Pass
as a Woman in All Situations - Including on the Telephone!

There are also medical services advertised on the internet that offer ‘*feminization laryngoplasty*,’ or surgery for patients whose voice pitch is often construed as male, despite efforts to alter pitch through speech therapy and training¹³. One cannot simply gloss over the value of voice pitch in projecting a credible and desirable feminine image among the *parloristang bakla* variety.

Gay Lead Characters’ Sexuality

Lead characters that used the *parloristang bakla* stereotype were all shown as desiring heterosexual men. Walterina Markovahad an American service man for a fling while working as a ‘showgirl’ during the American occupation of the Philippines. He was also shown flirting with the straight men on the set of a movie while employed as a make-up artistfor the filmproduction outfit.

Ignacio had been deeply attracted to Edilberto ever since childhood. After letting go of Edilberto in his heart, he developed a deep affection for Ichiru, who was depicted as normatively masculine, given his role as head of the Japanese forces that invaded San Nicolas.

Maxi’s first taste of juvenile love was when he met Victor after the latter rescued him from would-be abusers. Victor was a handsome, muscular police officer with a congenial personality - brave, courageous, and morally upright.

Peter’s main love interest was Erickson, played by Luis Manzano. Peter was also shown as flirting with a heterosexual restaurant crew.

The desire for a normatively masculine man among the *parloristang bakla* type is also a key finding in the study by Rupp and Taylor (2003) titled *Drag Queens at 801 Cabaret* (as cited in Valocchi 2005). The drag queens in Rupp and Taylor’s ethnographic study said that they are not attracted to one another; gay men are not attracted to drag

13 See <http://www.voicedoctor.net/Surgery/Pitch/Feminization-Laryngoplasty>, last accessed on August 5, 2012.

queens, and they only desire normatively masculine men (Valocchi 2005:258).

The masculine gay portrayal of Mark and Noel in the movie, “In My Life,” depicts them as desiring only homosexuals who looked normatively masculine. Mark’s previous lover, an American, was also young, physically fit, and good-looking. The gay bar where Mark brought his mother, Shirley, was teeming with half-naked men who were also of a similar profile as Mark’s former boyfriend.

SOURCES OF MINORITIZATION

At this point, it would be good to highlight Garcia’s (1996:xxiii) observation that while the concepts of *kabaklaan* and inversion are inherently different from one another, they engender the same consequence for the persons who embody them: that of minoritization. Garcia (1996: xxiii-xxiv) further avers that ‘given the universal valorization that is accorded the normative heterosexual erotic bond, the Western invert and the Philippine *bakla* are both oppressed to the extent that they do not or are not inclined to enter it.’ The succeeding discussion cites specific portions in the films that show how the gay characters were marginalized in the local context.

Abuse of the Male Homosexual Characters

Homophobia expressed through verbal and physical abuse was a recurrent theme in four of the five films studied for this paper: “Markova: Comfort Gay,” “Aishitelmasu 1941: Mahal Kita,” “Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros,” and “Petrang Kabayo.” Homophobia is defined as ‘the socially endorsed, prejudiced hatred and persecution of gays and lesbians...because of their same-sexual orientation’ (Garcia 1996:6). Homophobia may be institutional, as in the case of the Japanese army and the Catholic Church, which will be tackled below; or personal, as in the case of the abuse perpetrated by homophobic males in the gay characters’ immediate environs (Garcia 1996).

In “Markova: Comfort Gay,” Robert, Walter’s elder brother, frequently inflicted physical and verbal abuse throughout Walter’s teen life. Truly sinister was when Robert connived with his macho male

friend to have Walter raped. The scene sequence shows Walter bringing a package to the house of Robert's friend. After some small talk, Robert's friend, fresh from the shower and clad only in a skimpy towel around his waist, tricks Walter into entering his bedroom, where he succeeds in giving the latter his first taste of anal penetration. He did so with the help of heaps of mayonnaise slathered onto a sandwich that he deceptively offered Walter while they were chatting.

The ordeal that Walter and his other gay friends (with whom he worked as entertainers) endured as sex slaves or 'comfort gays' of the Japanese army was another graphically gruesome depiction of homosexual oppression. Walter and his friends, then dressed as drag, were shown wailing in anger and pain as they were mercilessly and repeatedly raped by the soldiers.

Another scene was the humiliation and abuse of Carmen, one of Walter's gay friends, who the Japanese army accused as a thief. With bruises all over his body and disheveled hair, he was displayed in a public place with each hand tied to the top poles of an iron gate. A sign that says, "MAGNANAKAW," ("thief" in Filipino) was hung on his chest. Two Japanese soldiers approached Carmen. One spat on his face, while the other took his lit cigarette and extinguished it by pressing it violently against Carmen's chest.

The fathers of Ignacio in "Aishite Imasu 1941: Mahal Kita" and Peter in "Petrang Kabayo" also abused their sons while in their teens. For the three films cited above, the dominant homophobic males in their family were shown as the abusers.

Maxi in "Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros" would have been molested by the thugs in their neighborhood had his love interest, Victor, not arrived in the nick of time to save him.

Like Walter, Ignacio (in "Aishite Imasu 1941: Mahal Kita") also suffered severely in the hands of the Japanese soldiers. He almost died from the torture inflicted by the soldiers after his surrender to the Japanese forces following Ichiru's *shara-kiri*. Another instance of marginalization was Ichiru's expulsion from the army when the other Japanese officials discovered his homosexual love affair with Ignacio.

He was immediately sent to jail and was able to escape only through the sympathy of a few soldiers who remained loyal to him.

The Force of Hegemonic Masculinity

Connell (2005:78) forwards an important point that can account for the oppression of homosexuals, portrayed with much cinematic flare in “Markova: Comfort Gay,” “Aishite Imasu 1941: Mahal Kita,” and “Petrang Kabayo”:

Oppression positions homosexual masculinities at the bottom of a gender hierarchy among men. Gayness, in patriarchal ideology, is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity, the items ranging from fastidious taste in home decoration to receptive anal pleasure. Hence, from the point of view of hegemonic masculinity, gayness is easily assimilated to femininity. And hence – in the view of some gay theorists – the ferocity of homophobic attacks.

While one may notice that homosexuality is slowly being tolerated in Philippine society, the country remains patriarchal to a considerable extent. A great number of people still subscribe to notions of the macho man and the submissive woman as acceptable gender stereotypes.

It must be said that Filipino masculinities are manifested in varied ways. Angeles (2001:9) holds that ‘there are different expressions of Filipino masculinities within the various spheres of society and it would be inaccurate to speak of Filipino masculinity as a homogenous representation.’ Of the varied forms of masculinity, certain hegemonic forms still persist in our milieu, which are invariably imbued with notions of virility, machismo, aggression, and economic and political power. Connell (2005: 78) makes this point clear:

Hegemony relates to cultural dominance in a society as a whole. Within that overall framework, there are specific gender relations of dominance and subordination between groups of men.

The most important case in contemporary European/American society is the dominance of heterosexual men and the subordination of homosexual men. This is much more than a cultural stigmatization of homosexuality or gay identity. Gay men are subordinated to straight men by an array of quite material practices.

In sum, the violence against the gay characters in the films discussed is indeed telling of the active force of hegemonic masculinity long ingrained in the local psyche.

The Catholic Church as a Purveyor of Heteronormativity

The other minoritizing force against homosexuals is the Catholic Church. The predominance of the Catholic religion in the Philippines, currently estimated at 83 percent of 104 million Filipinos¹⁴, can help explain the prevalence of the homophobic view of homosexuality in the country. Scenes that showed homophobic attacks were often weaved into the film's plots for dramatic visual effect. Thio asserts "the notion of same-sex orientation as deviant is based on the Judeo-Christian scripture where homosexual practices are unequivocally condemned" (2007:249):

You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.
(Leviticus 18:22)

If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them. (Leviticus 20:13)

Thio (2007) explains that the view about same-sex orientation as an 'abomination' punishable by death can be traced to these biblical passages. This has been the basis of the moral ascendancy that

¹⁴ Central Intelligence Agency website, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rp.html>, retrieved on 16 February 2012.

many highly conservative Christians invoke when confronted with homosexual matters.

It is crucial to mention that homophobes consider same-sex orientation as deviating from what Thio refers to as the “reproductive norm” (2007:249). The reproductive norm, which comes from conventional understanding of the purpose of marriage, espouses sexual exclusivity and the creation and nurturing of offspring. Society often uses procreation or reproduction as the norm for looking at same-sex marriage and same-sex orientation as deviant (Thio 2007). Garcia (1996:130) shares the same view and adds that the “homosexual act is in and of itself ‘disordered,’ so one is made to believe that ‘the only sexual act that is in and of itself ordered is conjugal, procreative, and hopelessly heterosexual sex.”

Of note, however, is Garcia’s observation of a slight shift in the Church’s view on homosexuality. He claims that over the years, the Church has started to take cognizance of the existence of an ‘orientation that leads to a certain preference in sex and sexual partners¹⁵,’ referred to as:

the “homosexual condition,” something that cannot be blamed on the homosexual person, but that does not, by the mere fact of its existence, destroy imputability. While we have no control over our sexual orientation or preference itself, we have control over our sexual behavior which stems from it...the invert is free and deliberate in doing same-sex erotic activity (Garcia 1996: 130-131).

In my view, however, the Church’s recognition of the ‘homosexual condition’ does not make it any less a purveyor of heteronormativity, and it will never allow its moral ascendancy to be undermined.

¹⁵ Emerito Gonzales, “Homosexuality: An Ethical Appraisal,” *The Thomasian Philosopher*, 1991, 29. University of Santo Tomas, as quoted in J. Neil C. Garcia’s “Philippine Gay Culture: Binabae to Bakla, Silahis to MSM.”

A QUEER TAKE ON THE HOMOSEXUAL PORTRAYAL IN THE FILMS

Earlier, I argued that mainstream Philippine cinema in the past decade has stuck to the old formula and has preferred the *parloristang bakla* portrayal in popular gay-themed films. One then wonders why *In My Life*'s apparent departure from the formula did well at the box office, even reaping numerous distinctions from various award-giving bodies.

The use of queer theory can help illuminate this point of inquiry. There is often an assumption that "each person has one sex, one sexuality, and one gender, which are congruent and fixed for life... A woman is assumed to be a feminine female; a man a masculine male. Heterosexuality is the uninterrogated norm" (Lorber 1996 in Valocchi 2005:752). One is forewarned, however, that the recognition of the binaries of male/female, masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual, and the normative congruence across them, are more than ideological constructs, and the danger lies in that somehow, people are conditioned to see them as 'naturally occurring phenomena' (Valocchi 2005). Further, by treating these categories as givens, one is not able to see the ways that inequalities are created by the categories in the first place. These categories exercise power over individuals, especially for those who do not conform to their normative alignments (Valocchi 2005).

Queer theory provides a different kind of thinking about sex, gender, and sexuality. A queer perspective (for instance, Jagose 1996, Lorber 1996 in Valocchi 2005) sees the binaries as cultural constructions or ideological fictions and are therefore laden with incoherence and instability. Alternatively put, these binaries can, at best, offer an incomplete or imperfect representation of the broad spectrum of complex social processes surrounding the meaning of bodies, and the social cues, practices and subjectivities related to gender and sexuality (in Valocchi 2005). One of queer theory's contributions, then, is an acknowledgment of the gap between the ideological construct and the lived experience. Recognizing this gap will help us understand the typologies evident in the gay-themed films used in this study.

In applying a queer analysis to the films, one looks into the relationship between anatomical sex, gender, and sexuality, and determines where there is incoherence.

In the films that used the *parloristang bakla* portrayal, one can easily discern that while the main gay characters are anatomically male and their gender identity is feminine, an incoherency exists when one adds sexual object choice to the equation. They seem more heterosexual in their sexual desire than homosexual in that they desire someone who is differently gendered. The study of Rupp and Taylor (2003, in Valocchi 2005:258) affirms this finding, in which their drag queen respondents said that they get attracted only to normatively masculine men.

The non-alignment of sex, gender, and sexuality among those exhibiting the *parloristang bakla* variety, when viewed through the heteronormative prism, accounts for the marginalization they suffer from personal and institutional forces in order to maintain the status quo. Queer theorists define heteronormativity as 'the set of norms that make heterosexuality seem natural or right and that organize homosexuality as its binary opposite. This set of norms works to maintain the dominance of heterosexuality by preventing homosexuality from being a form of sexuality that can be taken for granted, go unmarked, or seem right in the way that heterosexuality can (see Valocchi 2005:756).

Earlier, it was noted that most of the studies done locally on gay portrayal in mass media revealed that respondents viewed the depictions as inaccurate, incomplete, unrealistic, and unjust. This observation speaks of the gulf between the stereotype of the 'screaming faggot' projected in the films versus lived experience, and how people perceive gays in real life. The gap, in large part, can be attributed to the filmmakers' preference for the *parloristang bakla* stereotype, consequently leaving little room for the portrayal of other types of homosexuality.

Having worked in an advertising agency, a huge private corporation, and now, a broadcast network, I have dealt, and continue to deal with, many gay men who present themselves as masculine. Some would feminize their voice and sway their hips. A few would wear make-up.

The *parloristang bakla* variety, I seldom meet on a normal day, except when I visit the beauty salon for a haircut and a manicure.

Queer theory holds that identities are historically constructed. The findings of Steven Seidman (2002, in Valocchi 2005) partly explains the success of “In My Life” in its departure from the old formula. Seidman(2002) analyzed Hollywood films from the 1960s to the 1990s to illustrate how the image of the homosexual has evolved from ‘the polluting gay’ to ‘the normal gay.’ He found that notions of gay and lesbian identities have shifted along with the change in the material and discursive power that shapes them (in Valocchi 2005:760). This view best explains why the depiction of Mark and Noel in the film, “In My Life” can be considered as more realistic - their portrayal resembles the ‘normal gay’ mold. Their masculine appearance and comportment make them gender conventional; their relationship is akin to being married; they were both shown as coming from conservative and morally upright families; and they were both engaged in some form of livelihood or profession.

Moreover, one must note that “In My Life” was shown at a particular point in time when Ang Lee’s film “Brokeback Mountain” had already paved the way for alternative homosexual depictions in mainstream cinema. With globalization, sexual liberalization, and the strong influence of Hollywood in Philippine culture in the light of our colonial past, the stage is slowly being set for the public to be more open to new types of gay portrayal that would have otherwise been branded as immoral or taboo. The early demise of “*Out!*”, the first lesbian and gay lifestyle TV show, is a case in point.

“*Out!*” aired for two months on GMA Channel 7, beginning in September 2004. The show’s hosts include a young lesbian and two gay men. Despite good ratings, the show was cancelled after only twelve episodes. Advertisers were said to have mysteriously pulled out their support for the show, perhaps after exhortation from the Manila Archbishop to do so. The requisite conditions for such a show to gain substantial following were not there yet. Again, we see an instance where the Catholic Church acts as a purveyor of heteronormativity.

It will certainly not allow a show like “*Out!*” to become part of the regular fare for millions of television viewers.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This article sought to analyze the variety of ways by which the male homosexual is portrayed in popular Philippine gay-themed films released from 2000 to 2010. Content analysis of the films revealed two main stereotypes reflective of the ‘gender divide’ between the feminine and masculine gay that Garcia (1996) identified. The first is the *parloristang bakla* (beauty parlor gay) type for the feminine gay, in which the lead characters are cross-dressing homosexuals who also exhibit an overtly feminine behavior, marked by actions and gestures such as swaying of hips, wearing of make-up, and speaking in a feminized voice. Gay characters of this variety were also shown to be attracted to normatively masculine men. Four of the five films studied in this paper depicted gays in this manner. Given the predominance of the *bakla* stereotype and the huge amount of resources poured into making and promoting the films, one can conclude that Philippine cinema, at least in the past decade, has preferred the portrayal of the feminine gay. One can safely predict that this stereotype will persist in the years to come. The old formula, while trite, is durable and difficult to beat.

The second is the ‘Brokeback Mountain’ type of portrayal for the masculine gay. The term ‘Brokeback Mountain’ is borrowed from the title of director Ang Lee’s highly acclaimed film about two homosexual cowboys and their forbidden love affair in the American West. In terms of personality traits and comportment, gay characters that portrayed this stereotype appeared as heterosexual men. It is their sexuality that makes them homosexual, because they desire only homosexual men who are similar to them.

After years of seeing mostly the *parloristang bakla* portrayal in mainstream cinema, the film, “In My Life,” departs from the formula and achieves success both in terms of ticket sales and distinctions from various award-giving institutions.

The duality of selfhood that Garcia (1996) referred to as the ‘dichotomy of *kalooban* and *panlabas na katawan*’ helps explain the

‘Brokeback Mountain’ type of homosexuality. While the gay lead characters look normatively masculine on the outside (*panlabas na katawan*), their *kalooban* causes them to gravitate towards men of the same sexual orientation.

A recurrent theme in the films that featured the *parloristang bakla* portrayal was the violence against the gay lead characters. The lead characters in “Markova: Comfort Gay,” “Aishite Imasu 1941: Mahal Kita,” and “Petrang Kabayo,” were all physically and verbally abused by the dominant, homophobic males in their immediate family. “Markova: Comfort Gay” and “Aishite Imasu 1941: Mahal Kita” graphically showed gay oppression by the Japanese soldiers. Walter and his gay friends were raped and beaten repeatedly; Ignacio was tortured almost to the point of death after his surrender to the army. We see the active force of hegemonic masculinity at work through the many depictions of homosexual abuse in the films. The influence of hegemonic forms of masculinity persists in our milieu, as social institutions such as the family, the Catholic Church, and mass media serve to propagate and maintain the dominance of the heterosexual ideal.

The use of queer analysis reveals an incoherency in the alignment of sex, gender, and sexuality in the *parloristang bakla* portrayal. While the main gay characters are anatomically male and their gender identity is feminine, there is incoherency with regards to their sexuality, as their sexual object of choice is a ‘real’ man. This makes them seem more heterosexual in their sexual desire than homosexual since they are attracted to someone who is differently gendered.

Queer theory also helps us understand the gulf between the ideology of the *parloristang bakla* in the films vis-à-vis lived experience - how people perceive gays in real life. The gap, in large part, can be attributed to the filmmakers’ preference for said stereotype, consequently leaving little room for the portrayal of other forms of homosexuality in Filipino society today.

Finally, the use of queer theory helps us understand why the departure from the old formula of gay portrayal employed in “In My Life” succeeded, particularly when taken in the context of identities as being historically constructed. “In My Life” came out at a time

when Ang Lee's "Brokeback Mountain" had already paved the way for alternative homosexual portrayals. Other important factors such as globalization and sexual liberalization have also come into play. As Valocchi (2005) notes, notions of gay and lesbian identities have shifted along with the change in the material and discursive power that shapes them.

Despite what appears to be a positive shift in the portrayal of homosexuals in Philippine cinema, heteronormativity will continue to hold sway as institutions such as the family, mass media, and the Catholic Church, continue to do everything within their power to preserve the dominance of heterosexuality and prevent its binary opposite from being a form of sexuality that can flourish.

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