

# A Glimpse Into the Asog Experience: A Historical Study on the Homosexual Experience in the Philippines

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In contemporary Philippine society, homosexuals are discriminated against and viewed as a comedic symbols. This is in contrast to the accounts of Philippine history which feature a wealth of tales and lore that depict homosexuals as an accepted part of the society. This paper introduces an anthropological and cultural study on the history of homosexuals from the precolonial to contemporary Philippines. It analyzes the influence of colonizers in the modern perception of homosexuals in the media today. The paper traces the early experiences and portrayals of homosexuals in the *confesionarios*, *diccionarios*, guidelines, and manuals of Spanish missionaries. These experiences and portrayals are compared to the contemporary guidelines set forth by the Movie and Television Classification and Review Board (MTRCB). In the end, this paper aims to eradicate the misconception about the modern *bakla* and present more of their richer traditions as *asog*, *bayoguin*, and *binabayi*.

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While it has been said that the role that homosexuals played in the nation's pre-colonial and colonial history is colorful, from the powerful *katalonan* and *babaylan* up to the baptized, cross-dressing natives, this experience is being erased from the records and narratologies of the nation. The experience and concepts of homosexuals are often set aside in favor of presenting the culture anointed by foreigners. In J. Neil Garcia's (2008) observation, there is a need for an empirical study of the local and national homosexual experience, especially since many people are unaware of its flow and source, as well as to give voice and room to homosexuals, something that is withheld by the country's colonial narrative.

Homosexuals have seemingly vanished like bubbles from the nation's traditions and history. Although there are buried remains of the homosexual experience, these need to be exhumed before we can form a valuation that is distinct from the meanings forced upon us by purely masculine or purely feminine experiences. There are no accounts of homosexual greatness and

honor that can serve as a well of images for its modern valuation to be found in history books. Foreign culture has dissolved the genuine and native experience and definition in the precolonial period of history, sought to render it uniform and compare it with Western models. In the nation's colonial discourse, the process of the natives' conversion can be regarded as the method with which various domains of the country have changed—territory, beliefs and culture. And above all these, is the transformation of even the natives' ideals and desires (Rafael, 1988). At this point, the transformation of the great and vibrant yearnings and imaginings of the *asog*, *bayoguin* and *binabayi*.

This paper seeks to sustain the ongoing studies on the experience and history of homosexuals in the Philippines. It will attempt to track the transformation of the ancient *asog*, *bayoguin* and *binabayi* into what is called today as the *bacla/bakla*. Records and narratives from the precolonial period of history serve as the sources for this study. Because these are precolonial, they are oral and unwritten, and thus we will examine their markers found throughout the body of books, regulations, diccionarios, manuals, and confesionarios that were published by Spanish missionaries during the colonial period. We will also examine the connections and resemblances between the records by Spanish foreigners and the prevalent conventions of popular culture, in particular the guidelines set by the Movie and Television Review and Classification Board (MTRCB). In this light, we will analyze the culture brought along by the colonizers that continue to echo and manifest in today's media. The native experience in and history of the Philippines provide a crucial link to this study. Lastly, this study will attempt to map the location of homosexuals today, a few hundred years after being baptized by a foreign culture.

This paper will limit the study to the *asog*, *bayoguin*, *binabayi*, and *bacla/bakla*. The term “homosexual” will also be used interchangeably with “bakla.”

## **THE ASOG, BAYOGUIN, AND BACLA**

Even though the Spanish missionaries in the Philippines made records on the traditions and existence of homosexuals who were then called “asug,” “asog,” “bayog,” “bayoguin,” and “binabayi,” these were buried by European traditions brought by the colonizers. In the books, confesionarios, diccionarios and manuals of the Spanish, it will be noted that even then there were already written records on the existence and way of life of homosexuals.

Take for example the words found in the *Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala* (1860) by Juan de Noceda and Pedro de Sanlucar, and the *Vocabulario*

*de la Lengua Bicol* (1865) by Marcos de Lisboa, that identify the personalities of men who dress in women's clothes and keep relations with fellow men. The word "asog" can be found in both the *Vocabulario* of the Tagalogs and Bicolanos. Noceda and Sanlucar (1860) list the "asog" as a name for persons who are *hermafrodito* and with two genders. According to De Lisboa (1865), on the other hand, "asog" pertains to a male who dresses, acts and thinks like a female. Aside from these, several words in the *Vocabulario* of Noceda and Sanlucar have definitions similar to "asog," such as the words "bayoguin" and "binabayi," both of which pertain to males who dress as females and are cowardly in action.

The *Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala* (1860) also notes that the word "bacla," which is widely used today as "bakla," had four distinct meanings. First, the "bakla" as an illusion to make a person appear beautiful and radiant; second, pertaining to a change in and fear of an object; third, the shift in interests to attain an object, and; fourth, the "bacla" as a part of the skin that one is scratching. If so, when did the *asog*, *bayoguin* and *binabayi* started being called "bacla" or "bakla"?

The reason why the *asog*, *bayoguin* and *binabayi* were called "bacla" or "bakla" might be attributed to the second definition of the word "bakla" in the *Vocabulario*, that is, the trait of being cowardly and timorous. In the *Mahal na Passion ni Jesu Christong Panginoon natin na Tola* (1990) by Gaspar Aquino de Belen, the word "bacla" is used several times to depict spinelessness:

673      Cun sila'y, nagpabaya na  
              budhi naboyo't, **nabac****la**  
              longmomang sangpalataya,  
              icao caya naman Ina'y,  
              gagagad magpalamara? (Emphasis is mine.)

Jesus Christ's dialogue in the above stanza from the *pasyon* hints at a particular change in plan. We can say that this refers to his disciples getting fearful of pushing through with their intent. We can infer that the word "bacla" was used in the *pasyon* as a synonym for cowardice. Thus the "bacla" is equivalent to "coward" which was commonly used by Spanish missionaries in describing the *asog*, *bayoguin* and *binabayi*. If we pursue the relationship of the concepts of cowardice and the *asog*, we can say that the males of ancient times could do things that the *asog*, *bayoguin* and *binabayi* could not accomplish. At this point, the Spanish missionaries could have supposed that this trait of the *asog* was a manifestation of cowardice.

The data collected by Francisco Alcina in the *Historia de las Islas e Indios de Bisayas* (2002) might be some of the first recorded images regarding the cowardice and being “bacla” of the *asog*, *bayoguin* and *binabayi*. The records make mention of the difference between *asog* and masculine standards. Alcina (2002) even adds that all Bisayan males were keen on getting tattooed (they were called the *pintados*) save for those who were called the *asog* (p. 141). We can say that Alcina used as basis and guideline what the *asog* did not do that all the other males did, such as having their bodies tattooed. This might have been Alcina’s rationale as to why he called the *asog*, *bayoguin* and *binabayi* as cowards and bacla.

Alcina (2002) also saw the divergence between the image and actions of the native male and the *asog*. In his appraisal, these were the traits of the so-called *asog*:

[They] considered themselves more like women than like men in their mode of life, relationships and even occupations. Some of them applied themselves to women’s tasks, such as weaving and cultivating, etc. In dress, although they did not wear petticoats (women in olden times did not either), they did wear some lambung, as they are called here. This is a kind of a long skirt down to the feet, so that they were recognized even by their manner of dress. (p. 155)

From this quick peek into the historical records made by Spanish missionaries like Alcina, we can suppose that the concept of being *bakla* has been existing in the Philippines since ancient times. Although demons and witches (*mangkukulam*) were deemed to exert a hold on the beliefs and behaviors of the *asog*, *bayoguin* and *binabayi*, their indigenous character in the country’s precolonial chapter cannot be ignored. In fact, there were parts of the community that set aside their genders in order to be of greater use to the responsibilities borne by the group.

In Zeus Salazar’s (1995) assessment of the ancient person’s duties to his/her community, particularly those of the *babaylan*, most of the people who carried out such duties were females while only a few were “neutrals” or feminine males. This goes against the eyewitness accounts of many Spanish missionaries that attest to the many *asog*, *bayoguin* and *binabayi* who fulfilled the role of the *babaylan*. In *The Manners, Customs, and Beliefs of the Philippine Inhabitants of Long Ago: Being Chapters of “A late 16th Century Manila Manuscript”* (1961) by Carlos Quirino and Mauro Garcia, several

historians seem to admit their difficulty in identifying who was truly female in a group of females, *asog*, *bayoguin* and *binabayi* whom they witnessed:

Ordinarily they dress as women, act like prudes and are so effeminate that one who does not know them would believe they are women. Almost all are impotent for the reproductive act, and thus they marry other males and sleep with them as man and wife and have carnal knowledge. (p. 430)

From this report on the natives, we can launch into speculation that several missionaries were confused by the *babaylans* they saw. We can also say that aside from the authentic females, many of the *babaylans* were actually *asog*, *bayoguin* and *binabayi* who had escaped the missionaries' notice because of their complete feminine garb. This cannot be separated from the statements of Alcina, San Antonio, and Placencia regarding the *asog*, *bayoguin* and *binabayi* whom they encountered, wherethey did not recognize them as male due to their extraordinary clothing, actions and mannerisms, which were similar to those of females. In the history of the concept of cross-dressing, this is what J. Neil Garcia (2008) said that the *asog*, *bayoguin* and *binabayi* already had a tradition of dressing as females since early times. In this light, it is also safe to say that the early missionaries' puzzlement over the differences between female and *asog* were manifestations of freedom, because the *asog* had liberty over their choice of wear, behavior, beliefs and way of living.

Meanwhile, we can also extract from Quirino and Garcia (1961) that the tradition of male marrying his fellow male was nothing out of the ordinary. It is readily apparent that the local concept of matrimony was not imprisoned into male-and-female only. While it is said that this kind of relationship has no use in increasing the population, it can be perceived that the natives accepted this as part of life.

Over time, the foreign culture imported from Europe would supplant the indigenous culture. Whereas several illuminations on the native meanings of life and culture could be found in the native experience, the colonizers erased these for supposedly being immoral, barbaric and inspired by the devil. The account of the evangelization of Antipolo, in which many locals participated, attests to this. One of the focal points of the conversion was the katalonan (a *bakla*), who supposedly turned his back on the native beliefs to embrace the colonizer's culture. In *Relacion de las Islas Filipinas* (1969), Pedro Chirino remarks:

This leader said that the father's anito (thus they style their deities) was greater than those of other men, and for that reason they recognized him as superior. This pagan priest, while offering his infamous sacrifices, was possessed by the Devil who caused him to make most ugly grimaces; and he braided his hair, which for his particular calling he wore long, like that of a woman. But he, beginning (like the Magdalene) with his hair, cut it off publicly, and with it the power of the Devil, who held him captive; and receiving baptism, constrained the others by his example to do the same, consigning his idols to the fire where they were consumed. (pp. 112-113)

The Antipolo event is an important segment in the history of homosexuals in the Philippines. It is a junction of many meanings that can serve as markers in today's examination of homosexuals. Like the *katalonan* who was said to have been possessed by the devil and thus needed exorcism, it is in this manner that we can describe the current treatment of homosexuals. The idea that gender only has two images, those of the male and female, has been fully promulgated. As part of so-called Hispanization, the doting image of the *asog*, *bayoguin* and *binabayibabaylans* has been forsaken. The names for these people have also been replaced by *bakla*, to mean males who cannot substantiate their masculinity.

## THE HOMOSEXUAL EXPERIENCE IN THE PERIOD OF COLONIALISM

Whereas the experiences of the *asog*, *bayoguin* and *binabayi* were very much alive in the native culture, this changed through time. Whereas gender was not relevant and did not merit severe scrutiny, the Spanish replaced this way of thinking. Assigning a gender to every object in the archipelago became significant, for this was a necessity in the Spanish language. It became easier for the Spanish to identify things when they began to use the anointed genders. For example, objects, persons, and professions ending in the letter o were assigned to the male, while those ending in the letter a were female. The indicator of gender in the Spanish language always rests in the word's last letter.

In the discourse of colonialism, the Spanish saw themselves as purifiers and harbingers of culture to the natives beholden to elemental spirits and demons. The devil's entry into a male's body can render him an *asog* or *bacla*.

On the other hand, the *babaylans* who opposed the views anointed by the friars were accused of being possessed by demons and spirits. There were occasions when the friars burned the belongings and clothes of the *babaylans* who were their rivals for power in the early communities in the country (Santiago, 2005).

But the total loss of berth for the *asog*, *bayoguin* and *binabayi* is readily evident. The right of men to wed their fellow men was suppressed, and the tradition of the *asog* wearing long skirts and feminine clothes vanished. More than these, men were banned from having sexual relations with fellow men for this ran contrary to the dominant religion anointed by the Spanish. The church had a corresponding punishment for the natives who violated this rule. All sinners had to go through the sanctity of confession, for confession was the spring that cleansed man's sins (Rafael, 1988).

For example, we look into the *Arte de la Lengua Tagala, y Manual Tagalog para Auxilio de los Religiosos* (1865) by Fray Sebastian de Totanes. The confession served to the natives regarding sinful behavior is detailed. In the *confesionario* manual, we can notice the emphasis and malice given by Totanes (1865) to sexual intercourse, which was previously seen as normal in indigenous beliefs and customs:

399. Bocor dito, opan naquipag biro ca naman sa ibang manga babaye? (cun napabiro ca caya sa ibang manga lalaqui?) Cun sa capwa mo lalaqui, cun babaye?
400. At doon sa inyong paglalaro, at pagbibiro, ano? Mahalai caya ang iyong buchang bibig, at tongcol sa calibugan?
401. Bucang bibig na lamang yaong inyong pag bibiroan, cun nagbibiroan naman cayo nang inyong manga camay?
402. At paano caya yaon? Nag aaglahian, at nag dorocotan ba cayo, at nag hihipoan caya, cun nagpaquitaan naman cayo doon sa inyong catouaan?
403. At nilabasan ca nang marumi? Cun pinalabasan mo caya ang manga cabiroan mo?
404. Ilan cayong nagbibiroan nang gayon? At ilan sa inyo ang may asua? At ilan ang ualang asua? At mey ibang manga caharap na nanonoor sa inyo?
405. At macailang nagbiro cayo nang gayon? (pp. 111-112)

If the line of the friars' questioning is to be followed, this implies the existence of such behavior and tradition of that historical period. In addition,



the normal customs and conduct of natives toward gender and coitus is being displaced. Behaviors were being transformed from the native to the debauched, sinful and evil. One of the questions in the instructional *confesionario* manual is about the “playful hands,” which means the masturbation of the genital organ. The next question asks how much did the native ejaculate. In the levels of native symbolisms, masturbation was treated as routine and part of everyday life. What comes out of the masturbation signifies the peak of ecstasy or copulation that forms and gives meaning to one’s personality. But it becomes a sin in the *confesionario* because playing with one’s own organ is prohibited. The sin was exacerbated if, in the course of playing with yourself, something filthy came out of your body.

At this point, the *confesionario* manual proves that the previously commonplace personal or sexual relations of homosexuals were expressly made illicit by the new culture. Anyone who violated the law or sinned against the friars’ code got into trouble and was meted out a corresponding penalty. This text can also be seen as a repression of the natives’ enjoyment in knowing themselves. To judge playing with one’s self as an iniquity is part of the colonial discourse of subjugation and enforcing laws based on foreign guidelines that push aside factors of the indigenous belief system.

Totanes’s *confesionario* is similar to the earlier instructional manual by Tomas Pinpin titled *Librong Pagaaralan ng mga Tagalog nang Ulicang Castila* (1910). Here, we can hear the voice of a friar giving instructions to a native:

May doon ca cayang salang ano anoman sa capoua mo lalaqui, at sa capoua mo babayi caya? Turan modin con anong asal nga calibugan ninyo, niyong catongo mo, con nagsisiping o con nagdaramahan cayo, at con nagbabayan cayo, at con ano,t, con ano: ycao na ang bahalang mabala? (p. 218)

Pinpin and Totanes are saying the same thing, that sexual intercourse, between fellow men, fellow women, or even with persons not your spouse, is sinful. Playing with one’s self is also sinful, especially the unclean ejaculation at the end. For the friar missionaries and ladinos (baptized natives), this sin is the aftermath of demons seducing the natives to return to their pagan, immoral and customary harsh way of living.

It can be said that the Spanish arrival and conquest of the country brought with it widespread repercussions throughout the archipelago. The colonizers interfered with local beliefs and customs in daily life, as well as with what went on in the locals’ private lives. Labels were assigned to many entities; for example,



there was a halving into “*diyos*” and “*diyosa*” (“god” and “goddess”), “*diyos*” for the male and “*diyosa*” for the female. The image of heroes and warriors in native epics, such as Agyu, Labaw Donggon, Humadapnon and Sandayo --who were all vigorous, gutsy and loved to war for their land --was superseded by the image of the gentle, peaceful, and holy face of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, the brave and warlike symbols in the epics of Alunsina, Nagmalitung Yawa, Mebuyan, Dagau and Matabagka were replaced by the weeping and serene symbol of the Virgin Mary (Lucero, 2007). Even the mountains did not escape Hispanization, for a massive division into genders beset them. Mount Makiling became female, with “Maria” affixed for it to become Mariang Makiling. The native *asog*, *bayoguin* and *binabayi*, on the other hand, were marked as wicked beings.

If this fractured picture was the result of the colonization of native culture, everything can be weaved together with a penitent’s monologue in the *Meditaciones cun manga mahal na pagninilay na sadia sa Sanctong pag exercisios* (1843) by Pedro de Herrera:

Cayo palang manga casalanan co ang manga caauay cong totoo, at dili mauala ang mga carouahaguinan co sa inyo ... pagdaramotan co cayo nang pagpapacain sa inyo, ang icabubuhay lamang ang ipacacain co, dili kayo mahihimbing nang pagtolog, aba dila cong mauicain, hahauacan co ang catalipandasan mo, pipiguilin cata,t, dili ngani sosondin ang calooban mo, cun di ang loob nang aqing Dios. (p. 64)

We can extract from this monologue a general picture of a native yielding him/herself to the commands of the new religion. It is undeniable that the natives used the foreign culture as their wellspring to differentiate right from wrong in their beliefs and concepts. The monologue in Pedro de Herrera’s *Meditaciones* is an important indicator, for it signifies a period in which the foreigners are succeeding in their goal to conquer not only the physical aspect of the country but even the inner selves of the locals.

## THE DISCOURSE OF THE CONFESIONARIO AND MANUALS IN POPULAR CULTURE

It cannot be refuted that the confesionarios, manuals and guidelines published by the Spanish missionaries exert a huge influence to this day. The fruits of the discourse of confesionarios and guidelines in Filipino culture and society are scattered. In Rosario Cruz-Lucero’s (2007) observation, the strong voice of the lessons imparted by the confesionarios and manuals permeates popular

culture. The most clarion of this resonance is the guidelines followed by the Movie and Television Classification and Review Board, or MTRCB.

The MTRCB is the board that reviews and examines movies screened in cinemas and programs shown on television. The existence of the board is mandated by the constitution based on Presidential Decree No. 1986. Here is a section of the regulations and guidelines set by the MTRCB since October 5, 1985 regarding films released in the nation:

The following scenes shall be considered immoral and indecent:

1. All explicit sexual acts, actual or simulated, such as but not limited to, sexual intercourse, masturbation, massaging, licking and fondling of sex organs;
2. Lewd frontal nudity and/or exhibition of private parts, such as but not limited to, female breast exposure and pubic hair exposure (naked or see-through clothing, such as lace bikinis, wet T-shirts and transparent negligee).
3. All sexual pumping scenes and movements, whether the subjects are clothed or unclothed;
4. Sexual exploitation and abuse of children, such as paedophilia and acts of incest;
5. **Perverted sexual acts, such as, homosexual and lesbian sexual acts, sodomy, necrophilia and ‘zoosteria’,** (Emphasis is mine.)
6. Deliberate panning of the camera to achieve a lewd and malicious close-up of sexual parts.

Following the MTRCB’s guidelines and regulations, we can say that these possess traces of the lessons found in the *confesionarios* and manuals. These are not dissimilar at all to those published earlier by the missionaries Totanes and Pinpin. Plainly, the MTRCB guidelines impose the numbing romanticism of foreign culture.

In the discourse of the bygone guidelines up to the regulations followed by the MTRCB, it is important to inspect the erasure of the quality of indigenous life. On the issue of homosexuals, the mark left by the foreign culture on the *asog*, *bayoguin* and *binabayi* as images of debauchery, immorality and sin linger. Take, for example, item number five in the MTRCB’s guidelines, “perverted sexual acts, such as, homosexual and lesbian sexual acts, sodomy, necrophilia and ‘zoosteria’”. Although it can be said that the MTRCB guidelines

state the prohibition of clear and depraved sexual imagery, it is important to emphasize the scenes in the category presented by the MTRCB as “perverted sexual acts.” Readily apparent is the fact that only sexual acts of homosexuals are mentioned here, without the sexual acts between female and male. At this point, a classification and general assumption is already being made that all homosexual behaviors are twisted and sinful. This becomes a staging point for the image of homosexuality as always being “sexual” and inappropriate to be shown in the movies and on television.

On the other hand, here are several parts of the newest set of rules and guidelines followed by the MTRCB in reviewing and examining films released in the nation since February 24, 2004:

A movie shall be disapproved for public viewing if, in the judgment of the BOARD:

1. The average person, applying contemporary standards, would find that the dominant theme of the work as a whole appeals to prurient interest and satisfies only the craving for gratuitous sex and/or violence.
2. The work depicts in a patently lewd, offensive, or demeaning manner, excretory functions and sexual conduct such as sexual intercourse, masturbation and exhibition of the genitals.
3. **The work clearly constitutes an attack against any race, creed or religion.** (Emphasis is mine.)
4. The work condones or encourages the use of illegal drugs and substances.
5. The work tends to undermine the faith and confidence of the people in their government and/or duly constituted authorities.
6. The work glorifies criminals or condones crimes.
7. The work is libelous or defamatory to the good name and reputation of any person, whether living or dead.
8. The work may constitute contempt of court or of a quasi-judicial tribunal, or may pertain to matters which are sub-judice in nature. (Emphasis is mine)

Although the previous 1998 classification of homosexuals' sexual acts as immoral and sinful have been removed, it will be observed that gender in the issue of a free and liberating discourse of homosexuality is still being set aside. Examined further, the new MTRCB guidelines continue to set aside the expression of the experiences and history of homosexuals.

Look into the third statement in the MTRCB's new guidelines regarding films that should never be shown in cinemas: the provision for films that "clearly constitute an attack against any race, creed or religion." In the aforementioned phrase, we can notice the omission of "gender" that is often mentioned in the same breath with "race, creed or religion" and which demands equal treatment and respect. In mapping the location of homosexuality in the nation, we can deduce from the MTRCB's guidelines that it remains downtrodden on the fringes of society. The image of homosexuals is being positioned into places where its voice of protest can be censored.

The implications of the MTRCB's new guidelines can be seen as a dialectic. First, that the guidelines' severance of gender from its echelon, which includes race, ethnicity and religion, can be seen as the state's dismissal of the existence of homosexuals. Gender's omission from its place among co-equals is also proof that the fascist state is in the process of extinguishing the experience of gays and lesbians from coming out and pulsing with life. Second, the omission of gender can be seen as a path toward inciting the persecution of homosexuality in order to promote the authentic genders according to the colonial mindset. Every form of media with a bias and inclination toward the trumpeted order manifests this. In movies, television, radio and print, there is a sustained assault on the image of homosexuals as being sick, abnormal and needing treatment. In the cradle of the state and with the support of colonial regulations, the disheveled status and view of homosexuals is maintained.

The parallelism between the powers of the church in the period of Spanish colonialism and today's MTRCB cannot be denied. Through the concepts of *hiya* (face) and *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude), the Spanish missionaries utilized confesionarios, manuals and guidelines toward the goal of transforming the native culture. If Jesus Christ did not hesitate to surrender himself to the whole of creation, it was only right that the natives would repay this by yielding their own selves (Rafael, 1988). This reality is not far from the MTRCB, because its guidelines need to be followed for they are mandated by various standards set by the church, government and society. In a chapter such as this, the room for the *asog*, *bayoguin* and *binabayi* continues to taper, shrivel, and eventually disappear.

## SUMMARY

In the Sulod epic *Hinilawod: Humadapnon*, the message regarding the characters' genders and sexualities is clear. Parts of the epic narrate Humadapnon's gallantry as the strongest and matchless buyung in the world. Humadapnon sets sail to meet the nymph Nagmalitung Yawa. Out at sea, he encounters the binukot women of Tarangban who subsequently seduce and imprison him inside a cave. It is here that he falls under an enchantment and loses his sanity, necessitating a rescue by Nagmalitung Yawa who shapeshifts into the person of Buyung Sunmasakay. The nymph pretends to be a man, and is a picture of a strong, smart woman worthy of her tribe's praise. In the last episode, Humadapnon returns to his mind and immediately professes his love for Nagmalitung Yawa / Buyung Sunmasakay. In the end, however, the epic suggests some frustration, as Nagmalitung Yawa flies away, alights on a huge rock, plants her feet, and then gazes toward the horizon.

The part where Nagmalitung Yawa pretends to be Buyung Sunmasakay (transformation from woman to man) can be interpreted as a depiction of the mythological characters' views that the equal relations between genders -- male to male, male to female, and female to female -- were commonplace in the life of the natives. This can be seen as a philosophical illumination on the belief that everybody is equal and the same. Sexuality and gender were not subjected to much scrutiny in the indigenous community, for excellence and goodness of heart in a person were more important. In the swift metamorphoses of Nagmalitung Yawa we can find that outward appearance, form and even gender are only created by humans per their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.

In the contemporary or present depiction of homosexuals, a "bakla" does not follow an image. The purity and splendor of the *asog*, *bayoguin* and *binabayi* has been erased, and this can be traced to the early stages of colonialism. In the history of homosexuality in the nation, the period of colonialism can be regarded as the commencement of the marginalization of gays and lesbians. Through the passage of time, native culture was never restored, and the persecution of native beliefs and practices, especially the treatment of the *asog*, *bayoguin* and *binabayi*, only intensified. From the confesionarios and manuals of proper conduct by the Spanish missionaries up to the guidelines implemented by the MTRCB, it can be said that the foreign culture as propagated by colonialism continues to reverberate strongly to this day.

At present, the struggle of homosexuals continues in a disordered manner, akin to the hodgepodge of tombs in a public cemetery. The image shown and portrayed in literature, media, and society remains hackneyed and formulaic. We have the image of the *bakla* imprisoned as a *parlorista* always wielding a

comb and make-up. We also have the recurring characters of *bakla* getting murdered and chasing after love. This is the sorrow of thousands of *asog*, *bayoguin* and *binabayi* who are locked up behind the modern valuation of homosexuals based on the stock points of view of society.

“Debauched, violent, amusing, a metaphor and distinct”—this is the image of the homosexual in modern times. There is a sustained effort to imprison the so-called *asog*, *bayoguin* and *binabayi* into boxed-in views of society. But, as with the pre-colonial chapter of the nation’s history, there will always be a gap for the hope that the age will return when males, females, lesbians, gays, *asog*, *bayoguin* and *binabayi* will all once again be equal.

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