



Research Article

“*Vaklang TWAH*”: Homosexuality in Honorio Bartolome de Dios’ Select Short Stories

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ABSTRACT.

This study contributes to the evolving understanding of homosexuality, shedding light to sociocultural and socioeconomic influences at play in the Philippines. To represent a literary perspective, three short stories were selected from Honorio Bartolome de Dios’ book “*Sa Labas ng Parlor*”, namely: *Atseng*, *Kas*, and *Nobena*. The qualitative discourse analyses on the theme, context, and characterization provide deeper insight on the queered realities of the Filipino gay, or exaggeratedly expressed as *vakla* (commonly *bakla*). Judith Butler’s *gender performativity* critiques how Filipinos depend on rigid heteronormative expressions to conform to the country’s expectations shaped by complex and dissonant remnants of Western and Eastern cultural amalgamation. Additionally, the homosexual experience presents an *intersectional* degree of discrimination and stigma—as Kimberle Crenshaw explains it—in which sociocultural and socioeconomic facets of Filipino life confer a significant impact. Further, these factors purport Eve Sedgwick’s concept of the *closet* where queer individuals struggle with cognitive dissonance in their identity and expression. Honorio Bartolome de Dios has a unique, yet largely relevant, method of storytelling Filipinos in their process of and acceptance of becoming; thus, the “*Vaklang TWAH*” model based on de Dios’ textual portrayal of homosexuality is outlined.

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INTRODUCTION

For decades, homosexuality has existed yet is perceived differently across cultures. It has evolved from being taboo and unlawful to being accepted and legal ever since the LGBTQ+ movement has risen in recent years (Kent & Poushter, 2020); and yet, many societies still uphold prejudices for homosexuality based on their culture, religion, or politics (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

At present, literature and media have had significant roles in the introduction of homosexuality with Western movies and novels depicting this universal human phenomena (Morris, 2023). Majority still perpetuate stereotypes or reduce these identities to cliché tropes (Dalton, 2016).

In the Philippines, homosexuality is complicated as Filipinos are shaped by its Catholic roots, Western influence, and native traditions that once embraced gender fluidity (Ildefonso, 2023). Nevertheless, Filipinos embrace homosexuality through its popular media figures despite the persistence of discrimination (De Guzman, 2022). Moreover, Philippine media portrays gay characters as comic relief or tragic figures defined by their sexuality (Mata, 2023).

Meanwhile, Philippine literature explores deeper, though such works remain underrepresented in the country. This shows the need for Filipino authors to write themes of homosexuality in Filipino culture. Honorio Bartolome de Dios' short stories provide a compelling lens to dive into these tensions as his works often probe these identities in Filipino societies.

In addition to this, analyzing de Dios' depictions of the Filipino gay, or hyperbolically *vakla* (or simply *bakla*), is important in understanding how Philippine literature contributes or challenges stereotypes on sexual orientation and gender identities. The themes in his stories may mirror societal contradictions while the sociohistorical context could reveal shifts in the perception towards homosexuality. Additionally, characterization may either subvert stereotypes or expose lingering biases. This analysis of de Dios' works may amplify marginalized voices in a nation where LGBTQ+ rights remain contested.

Furthermore, by utilizing global and local frameworks in the analysis of de Dios' works, this study bridges the gap between the LGBTQ+ experiences outside and inside the country. Finally, it contributes to the Sustainable Development Goal 5: *Gender Equality*.

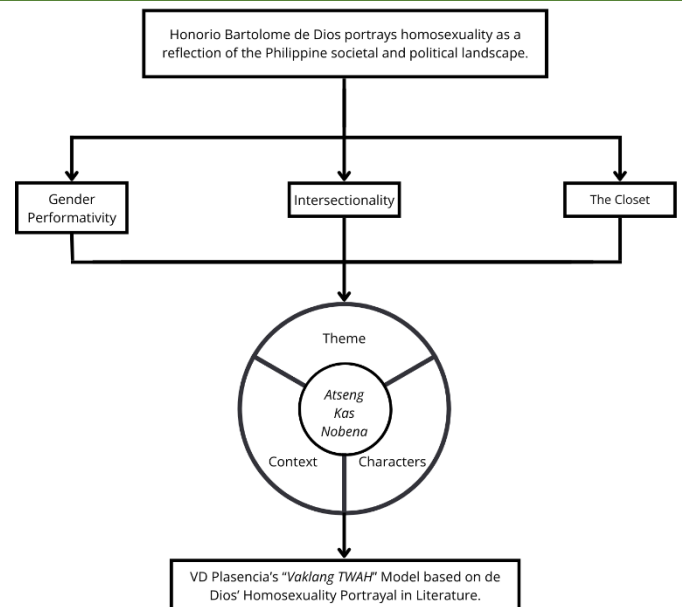


Figure 1. Schematic Diagram of the Study.

To aid in the analysis of the select short stories, the following lenses were used: *gender performativity*, *intersectionality*, and *the closet*.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, scholars such as Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Teresa de Lauretis developed Queer Theory—a field of the study of gender and sexuality (Miller, n.d.). De Lauretis was often credited with inventing the term, however, Butler's "*Gender Trouble*" became the foundation and introduced concepts like *gender performativity*—which posits that identity is not innate but enacted through repeated behaviors and language which destabilizes rigid binaries like heterosexual/homosexual.

Developed by Kimberle Crenshaw, *intersectionality* emphasizes how overlapping systems of oppression—such as race, class, and gender—contribute to marginalized experiences (Coaston, 2019). Applying this to Philippine contexts, the portrayal of gayness in de Dios' works can be analyzed through intersections of religion, colonialism, and poverty which shows how these forces amalgamate discrimination or complicate queer liberation in Filipino narratives.

The metaphor of the *closet*—from Eve Sedgwick's queer critique—symbolizes the tension between secrecy and disclosure in queer lives (Orrells, 2023). In de Dios' stories, characters struggling with hidden desires or societal shame may embody the psychological and social costs of the *closet*. This framework presents how Filipino cultural values—like familial piety or Catholic morality—enforce silence around homosexuality which positions

the *closet* as both a site of repression and potential resistance.

To supplement the concepts used, the following related literature and studies were reviewed.

Dennis Altman's *"Global Sex"* (2001) goes over how globalization reshaped sexual identities and argues that Western LGBTQ+ discourses often clash with local traditions which creates multiple queer experiences. Altman's analysis emphasizes the tension between universal human rights frameworks and culturally specific expressions of queerness—a dynamic mirrored in literature where gay characters negotiate identity amid globalized and traditional norms.

Garcia's book, *"Philippine Gay Culture: Binabae to Bakla, Silahis to MSM"* (2008), provides a comprehensive analysis of Philippine gay culture by tracing the historical and discursive development of male homosexuality and the *bakla* identity from the 1960s to the present. The study examines how colonial history introduced the Western homo/hetero binary which further marginalized the effeminate *bakla* identity in the Philippines. By exploring various literary and artistic works created by gay writers, Garcia presents themes of hybridity, appropriation, and postcolonial resistance that have shaped contemporary LGBTQ+ identities. His work contributes to the understanding of Philippine gay culture as a dynamic and evolving discussion that reflects both historical influences and modern struggles for visibility and acceptance.

Larry Gross's *"Up from Invisibility: Lesbians, Gay Men, and the Media in America"* (2001) dives on the evolving representation of gay men and lesbians in American media which presents both progress and persistent limitations. Gross argues that while the media has moved toward greater visibility, they often fail to capture the full complexity of gay identity, instead presenting sanitized or stereotypical portrayals. He goes over the significant events—such as the rise of *The Advocate* and the first televised lesbian kiss—to show how visibility does not always equate to genuine representation. His work presents the media's struggle to break free from heteronormative constraints which emphasizes the need for more nuanced and authentic portrayals of LGBTQ+ experiences.

A global study by Kent and Poushter (2020), *"Global divides on homosexuality persist"*, surveyed 34 countries to analyze cultural and legal attitudes toward LGBTQ+ communities. Using quantitative methods, the

study revealed stark regional disparities—with higher acceptance in Western nations and pervasive stigmatization in regions with strong religious or traditional norms. Notably, it presented how media and education systems in progressive societies correlate with increased visibility and tolerance. This study put in context the tension between universal LGBTQ+ advocacy and localized resistance which frames de Dios' narratives within a broader global discourse where Filipino cultural norms—shaped by colonialism and religion—may similarly conflict with modern queer identities.

The study by Bautista et al. (2021), *"Religion and social tolerance: Generation Z's views on exposure to homosexuality in the mass media"*, delves into the relationship between media exposure and social tolerance toward homosexuality among Generation Z in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat. The researchers present the media's role in creating attitudes—particularly among young individuals still forming their identities. They discuss how homosexuality has historically been misrepresented in mass media by often reinforcing stereotypes. By examining Generation Z's perceptions, the study reveals that media exposure does not significantly influence their views which led to a neutral stance on fully tolerating homosexuality in the community.

In *"Queer representation in Honorio Bartolome De Dios' Geyluy"*, Valenzuela (2024) looks into the portrayal of queer identities and relationships in Filipino literature through a qualitative textual analysis of *Geyluy*. The study goes over how the story's main characters navigate internal and external conflicts which includes societal stigma, gender stereotypes, and issues of masculinity. By emphasizing the complicatedness of queer relationships, the research presents the influence of LGBTQ+ literature on readers' perceptions which fosters greater awareness and acceptance. Valenzuela stresses the importance of authentic representation in literature to challenge heteronormative views and advocate for a more comprehensive understanding of queer experiences in Filipino culture.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a Qualitative Discourse analysis to look into the depiction of homosexuality in Honorio Bartolome de Dios' short stories found in his book *"Sa Labas ng Parlor"*. This book was first published in 1998 by the University of the Philippines Press. Through Simple Random sampling, the following short

stories were identified and used as the source of data: *Atseng*, *Kas*, and *Nobena*. The choice of said sampling method entailed the investigation of patterns evident in de Dios' writing style and textual portrayal of homosexuality. Among the literary elements, this study focused on exploring the theme, context, and characterization of each story for a clearer grasp of its main objective.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and its corresponding discussion, which then served as reference for the de Dios-based literary model in portraying homosexuality.

Table 1. Thematic Analysis

Short Stories	Theme
Atseng	Queer Identity and Cultural Struggles in Rural Philippine Context
Kas	Queer Identity, Memory, and the Burden of the Past
Nobena	Queer Identity, Social Expectations, and the Burden of Tradition

The short story *Atseng* thematizes masculinity and *gender performativity*, specifically how young boys navigate the expectations of manhood in society. Butler's (1990) theory of *gender performativity* argues that gender is not an inherent identity but rather is enacted through repeated behaviors and social norms. This can be seen in the manner in which Ato and his friends participate in hyper-masculine acts like playing outside the fields and boasting about physical characteristics, reinforcing the rigid expectations of manhood. Their talk regarding Dodong's girlfriends and the crude discussions about women at the cinema portrayed in the line "*E, di alam mo kung ano'ng palabas sa sine sa Concepcion... S'yempre, bomba,*" bring out how gender identity is constructed socially through discourse. These performative acts not only construct their masculinity but also reiterate the queerness marginalization, as evidenced in their mocking discussion about Atseng's life and tragic fate. Garcia (2008) adds that Philippine gay culture has been shaped by colonial history for a long time, where the effeminate *bakla* identity has been placed to being inferior to the heterosexual masculine ideal. The boys' labeling of Atseng as *malas* and inability to see beyond their sexuality reflect to this deeply rooted bias, reinforcing performative masculinity as a mechanism of self-survival within a stigmatizing society.

Moreover, the narrative also illustrates how *gender performativity* is manifested through the oppressive policing of queer identities and translates into violence as well as internalized repression. Ato's encounter with his cousin Dodong quietly highlights the blurred boundaries between acquired masculinity and coercion, as Dodong imposes a male sexual dominance expectation on him. Gross (2001) writes about how media portrayals tend not to represent LGBTQ+ lives in any meaningful way but rather reinforcing stereotypes of queer identities as hypersexualized or deviant. The story mirrors the ridicule of queerness as seen through boys making fun of Atseng and forceful imposition depicted in Dodong taking advantage of the vulnerability of Ato. And in its wider study across the world, Kent and Poushter (2020) also contextualize this struggle as part of a larger societal acceptability issue with most cultures still heavily influenced by religious and colonial remnants of stigma towards queerness. Ato's inner conflict—his silence, terror, and eventual participation in Dodong's coercion—reflects the debilitating effects of such rigid frameworks. His reluctance to engage in the phallic competition "*Kinabahan si Ato. Naalala niya ang naganap kahapon ng umaga,*" further exemplifies of the way that masculinity is not merely performed, but aggressively enforced, leaving very little room for error. In this way, the narrative presents masculinity as a limiting, sometimes toxic act, mirroring Butler's statement that gender is a script imposed upon people as opposed to being an inherent reality.

The short story *Kas* delves into the complexities of identity and self-acceptance in a strictly defined sociocultural environment, reflecting Judith Butler's (1990) concept of *gender performativity*. The protagonist's struggle with self-recognition mirrors Butler's assertion that gender and identity are performed rather than inherent, influenced by societal expectations and repeated behaviors. In the story, the protagonist's reluctance—"Mararahang katok ang kanina ko pa naririnig. Mga katok na wari'y pag-aalinlangan"—reflects not just an external act of waiting but an internal tension regarding his own identity. His fixation on the appearance of his apartment, the way he makes sure his reflection stays clear in the mirror, symbolizes a deeper preoccupation with the self he shows to the world. As Garcia (2008) argues in "*Philippine Gay Culture*" the *bakla* identity has already been marginalized due to Western colonial influences, further complicating the protagonist's internal conflict. The story subtly highlights how performativity functions as both a shield and a burden, compelling the protagonist to navigate between his true self and societal expectations.

The protagonist's openness to Tony afterwards—his first genuine listener—further reveals performativity's role in identity formation. His confession, "*Tony, nakakasawa din pala ang patuloy na pagtatago. Pakiramdam ko minsan, ako mismo, hindi ko na kilala ang sarili ko,*" summarizes the exhaustion of having to uphold an invented self. Altman (2001) discusses how globalized sexual identities often clash with local cultures, and this tension is evident in the protagonist's journey. He recognizes the pressure to conform, yet his increasing awareness of his own agency in making his own narrative aligns with the findings of Valenzuela (2024), who emphasizes the role of literature in promoting greater acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities. The story's themes resonate with the broader debate on queer representation, as analyzed by Gross (2001), who critiques the media's sanitized portrayals of LGBTQ+ individuals. Here, literature serves as a counterpoint, offering a nuanced depiction of the protagonist's struggle and eventual self-acceptance. In the end, the story challenges rigid binaries by illustrating that identity is not static but continuously negotiated through personal and social interactions.

Nobena revolves around the conflict between traditional family roles and personal identity, specifically in terms of gender and sexuality. This theme corresponds to Judith Butler's (1990) theory of *gender performativity*. The protagonist, Jun, challenges the rigid expectations of masculinity imposed by his father, who sees homosexuality as a deviation from the normative trajectory of manhood. This struggle is evident in lines such as, "*Pareho kaming bakla ni Butch, kung 'yun ang ibig mong sabihin,*" which assert Jun's resistance to societal and familial pressures. Jun's father, deeply entrenched in heteronormative beliefs, reacts violently, mirroring what Dennis Altman (2001) describes as the tension between global queer identities and local traditional frameworks. Jun's refusal to conform to his father's expectations illustrates how gender and sexuality are performative acts that do not necessarily coincide with conventional standards imposed by patriarchal and religious orthodoxy.

In addition, the narrative demonstrates the performativity of masculinity and power dynamics within a family setting. Jun's father embodies the stereotypical patriarchal figure who insists on strict gender roles, expecting his son to exhibit traditionally masculine traits. This is evident in his outburst: "*Hoy Jun, tigas-tigasan mo nga ang kilos mo. Para kang babae kung kumilos!*" This policing of gender expression aligns with the analysis of Philippine gay identity by Garcia (2008), who highlights how the effeminate *bakla* identity has historically been marginalized due to colonial and Western binary constructs. The father's inability to accept Jun's sexuality emphasizes the generational and ideological gap presented in studies such as Kent and Poushter (2020), where one sees diverse attitudes towards LGBTQ+ identities from culture to generation. Jun's claim of his truth—"Pinili ko ang buhay na ito. Puwes, baguhin mo. Why should I? Wala akong nakikitang dahilan"—shows the strength of queer identities against erasure by society. His statements emphasize the importance of self-acceptance and refute the idea that one must perform heteronormativity in order to be legitimized as part of the family. This echoes the argument of Valenzuela's (2024) on how the LGBTQ+ literature produces increased awareness and changes the worldview by presenting the internal and external conflicts faced by queer individuals in Filipino society.

Table 2. Contextual Analysis

Short Stories	Context
Atseng	Colonialism, Religion, Masculinity, Queer Marginalization, Patriarchy, Socioeconomic Status

Kas	Colonialism, Religion, Masculinity, Oppression, Identity Crisis, Social Stigma, Resistance, Queerness
Nobena	Colonial Influence, Religion, Family Expectations, Gender Identity, Social Stigma, Heteronormativity, Masculinity, Queer Resistance

The short story *Atseng* depicts rural Filipino sociocultural realities, marrying poverty, masculinity, and queerness as identities marginalized from social expectations. There is *intersectionality* present in the experience of Ato as a young boy forced to contend with societal demands on masculinity and presented with both tacit and open assumptions about queerness. Drawing from Crenshaw's (1989) theory, the interaction of religion, colonial history, and socioeconomic limitations plays a role in stigmatizing non-conforming identities. The story shows how queerness, in the form of *Atseng*, is demonized, with characters linking him Bato bad luck: "*Basta sabi ni Ama, malas ang bakla.*" This line captures how deeply rooted religious dogma entrenches discrimination, supporting Garcia's (2008) contention that the *bakla* identity has long been framed as an aberration under the Western homo/hetero binary imposed during colonial times. In addition, the narrative supports Dennis Altman's (2001) assertion that Western LGBTQ+ discourses tend to conflict with local customs, producing a fractured and conflicted queer identity in the Philippines.

Ato's experiences also highlight the power dynamics within patriarchal structures, as seen in his relationship with his cousin Dodong. The implicit coercion in their interaction—"Tinitigasan ka na ba? 'Lika rito"—demonstrates how masculinity is both policed and weaponized. This aligns with Valenzuela's (2024) discussion of queer representation in *Geylup*, where societal stigma enforces rigid gender roles, pushing young boys into heteronormative expectations. Ato's silence during times of abuse is a representation of the internalized fear and helplessness *intersectionality* creates—his youth, class, and gender all locating him in a vulnerable position where he cannot fight back. The tension in the story mirrors Kent and Poushter's (2020) study, which emphasizes how cultural perceptions of homosexuality differ globally, with the Philippines struggling with religious conservatism and growing modern influences. The portrayal of *Atseng*'s tragic fate—his murder—further cements the dangers of queer existence within a community that upholds rigid gender binaries. Thus, the short story serves as a microcosm of the overall struggles of queer Filipinos who exist at the intersection of colonial histories, religious conservatism, and patriarchal violence.

The short story *Kas* traces the sociocultural meaning of *intersectionality* by through how the protagonist navigates multiple layers of identity—queerness, masculinity, and sociopolitical activism. The conflict of the protagonist in embracing his sexual identity is shaped by colonial influences and religious norms, reflecting Garcia's (2008) assertion that Philippine gay culture is strongly influenced by Western binaries and local traditions. The presence of the Virgin Mary and crucifix in the protagonist's home is symbolic of the influence of Catholicism, solidifying the fact that religion dictates moral perceptions of queerness, creating an internal conflict for the protagonist. Crenshaw's (2019) *intersectionality* theory applies here as the protagonist experiences compounded marginalization—not only as a gay man but also as someone struggling with the pressures of heteronormativity. His hesitation to accept his identity is consistent with the research of Bautista et al. (2021), who argue that exposure to queerness in media does not always translate to acceptance, especially in deeply religious communities. The protagonist's reluctance is evident when he says, "*Pakiramdam ko minsan, ako mismo, hindi ko na kilala ang sarili ko.*" This line captures his internalized conflict and the societal forces that hinder his full self-acceptance.

Furthermore, the story critiques rigid masculinity through Tony's character, who represents political opposition but simultaneously embodies the expectations of traditional male roles. Dennis Altman's (2001) argument that globalization complicates local queer narratives is evident as the protagonist wrestles between Western notions of LGBTQ+ rights and the deeply embedded cultural stigmatization of effeminacy. His political and personal dilemmas intersect, affirming how sexual identity and activism are intertwined. Tony, despite his radicalism, also represents a heteronormative structure that challenges but does not fully validate the protagonist's queerness. The protagonist's line, "*Tony, nakakasawa din pala ang patuloy na pagtatago,*" signifies a moment of self-awareness, illustrating how he yearns for liberation beyond societal constraints. Valenzuela (2024) asserts that queer representation in Filipino literature promotes visibility and acceptance, yet the protagonist's journey reveals that genuine acceptance is still a long way to go. The story ultimately portrays *intersectionality* as a site of both struggle and potential resistance, emphasizing the need for nuanced representations of queer identities in Philippine literature.

Meanwhile, *Nobena* encapsulates the sociocultural conflicts of the protagonist, Jun, through showcasing the intersection of religion, colonialism, and family expectations in shaping his queer identity. Rooted in Kimberle Crenshaw's concept of *intersectionality*, Jun's experiences as a gay man in a conservative Filipino society highlight the overlapping oppressions he faces. His father's reaction to his sexuality—"Putang-ina mo!"—reflects the rigid heteronormativity imposed by patriarchal structures, further enhanced by colonial heritage that introduced the homo/hetero binary (Garcia, 2008). The church setting heightens the tension, emphasizing religion's role in reinforcing gender norms. "*Malungkot ang mukha ng Ina sa altar*" symbolically represents divine judgment and societal rejection. This aligns with Bautista et al. (2021), who found that religious institutions play a major role in influencing societal attitudes towards homosexuality. The insistence of the father that Jun adhere to traditional masculinity—"Hoy Jun, tigas-tigasan mo nga ang kilos mo"—also shows how gender performance dictates acceptance, a conflict exacerbated by machismo during the colonial period and male dominance expectations.

Furthermore, Jun's queerness exists in a liminal space, shaped by both Western LGBTQ+ discourse and localized Filipino traditions. Dennis Altman's (2001) argument that globalization complicates queer identity is evident in Jun's defiance against imposed norms: "*Masaya ako sa ganito*". His assertion of agency challenges the notion that queerness is merely a Western import, instead affirming its existence within indigenous and contemporary Filipino identities. The father's dismissal of Jun's love for Butch as *kagaguhan* (stupidity) reflects the societal delegitimization of same-sex relationships, a phenomenon also explored in Valenzuela's (2024) study on queer representation in Geylup. However, Jun's resistance against patriarchal and religious condemnation signifies a broader push toward visibility and self-acceptance, despite systemic barriers. As Kent and Poushter (2020) suggest, cultural and religious attitudes deeply influence queer acceptance, making Jun's narrative emblematic of a broader Filipino LGBTQ+ struggle. Thus, the story not only portrays personal conflict but also critiques the sociocultural forces that perpetuate exclusion, emphasizing the ongoing negotiation between identity, family, and faith.

Table 3. Characterization Analysis

Short Stories	Character	Representation
Atseng	Ato	Burdened by Shame and the Struggle for Identity
	Dodong	Defiance and the Fight for Queer Freedom
	Atseng	The Haunting Presence of Cultural and Religious Oppression
Kas	Rod	Caught Between Manhood and Self-Discovery
	Tony	The Outsider Navigating Queer Complexity
Nobena	Jun	Hidden Truths and the Fear of Exposure
	Jun's Father	Patriarchal Authority and Rigid Masculinity

In *Atseng*, Ato is the representation of the conflict between innocence and an emerging awareness of his own sexuality. His reactions, especially his discomfort and confusion, reflect the psychological cost of the *closet* as theorized by Sedgwick (Orrells, 2023). The *closet* metaphor manifests in his silent observations—his hesitation in confronting his desires and fears, especially in the presence of his cousin, Dodong. Ato's silence when questioned about arousal—"Tinitigasan ka na ba?"—mirrors the forced repression dictated by societal and familial expectations. His avoidance and internal turmoil highlight how young individuals are conditioned to suppress or remain unaware of their sexuality due to cultural taboos and religious morality (Garcia, 2008). The scene where he hesitates to urinate, fearing the reaction of his peers, represents how masculinity is both performed and policed, forcing boys like Ato into roles they may not fully understand or accept.

Dodong represents a predatory force shaped by both repressed desires and societal neglect. His character is deeply entwined with the *closet* metaphor, portraying the dangers of unresolved, hidden desires that manifest in harmful ways. Dodong's exploitation of Ato echoes the structural issues in Philippine LGBTQ+ narratives where queer experiences, particularly those deviating from heteronormativity, are either demonized or silenced (Valenzuela, 2024). The secretive and coercive nature of their interaction suggests the way patriarchal structures enforce silence, reflecting the global queer experiences discussed by Altman (2001). The collective mockery of Atseng's identity highlights the danger of societal

rejection, ultimately leading to their tragic fate. In a community where queer individuals like Atseng are seen as burdens or bad omens, the cycle of repression and violence within the *closet* continues, reinforcing Garcia's (2008) argument on postcolonial LGBTQ+ identity struggles. The metaphor of the storm throughout the story mirrors the tension—Ato, like the brewing storm, is on the verge of realizing his place in a world that refuses to acknowledge his unspoken truths.

In *Kas*, Rod's character is an exploration of the metaphorical *closet*—an enclosed space of secrecy and restraint. His hesitation in answering the door, his meticulous arrangement of his apartment, and his internal monologue all symbolize his attempt to maintain control over his carefully curated identity. As Eve Sedgwick (1990) posits, the closet is not just about secrecy but also about performance, and Rod's meticulous environment mirrors this performativity. The passage where he reflects on the well-maintained mirror—*"ang salamin na palagi kong nililinis upang manatiling malinaw ang repleksiyon ng sino mang haharap dito"*—serves as a metaphor for his struggle with self-perception and the societal gaze. His reluctance to fully embrace his queerness is further reinforced by the expectations set by Filipino familial and religious values, as discussed in Garcia's (2008) examination of Philippine gay culture. Rod's hesitance to fully engage with Tony and his radical ideals suggests his internalized fear of breaking free from the societal mold, reinforcing the notion that the *closet* is both a site of repression and a place of self-preservation.

In contrast, Tony embodies the queer other—his queerness is inseparable from his activism. He challenges not only heteronormative structures but also political oppression, as seen in his involvement in student protests. His character aligns with Altman's (2001) discussion on how globalization and activism influence queer identities, particularly in societies where traditional values and modern ideologies clash. The line, *"Tinanggihan ko siya. Hindi ako handa at hindi ko alam kung kailan ako magiging handa,"* highlights the contrast between Tony's openness and Rod's reluctance. Tony's willingness to embrace his identity and ideology forces Rod to confront his own insecurities, as reflected in his eventual admission: *"Tony, nakakasawa din pala ang patuloy na pagtatago."* Here, Tony acts as both a catalyst and a mirror, exposing Rod's internal conflict and offering him a glimpse of a life unrestrained by the *closet*. Through these characters, de Dios' narrative exemplifies the tension between repression and liberation, a struggle that remains central to queer representation in Philippine literature.

Meanwhile, in *Nobena*, Jun embodies the struggles of queer identity within a deeply conservative and patriarchal Filipino society. His journey is shaped by the *closet* metaphor, a space of both repression and self-awareness. His dialogue with his father reveals the tension between personal truth and societal expectations: *"Now, will you please get straight to the point. Alam rin ba niya ang relasyon ko kay Butch?"* This confrontation highlights Jun's courage in coming out, despite the looming presence of judgment. The concept of the *closet*, as discussed by Sedgwick (Orrells, 2023), reflects the oscillation between concealment and revelation—Jun, after years of silence, chooses disclosure as an act of defiance and liberation. His father's reaction—filled with expletives and demands for conformity—mirrors the cultural expectation that masculinity equates to heterosexuality. This aligns with Garcia's (2008) analysis of how colonial history introduced rigid gender binaries that marginalized *bakla* identities, reinforcing the idea that queerness must be hidden to preserve familial honor.

Conversely, Jun's father embodies patriarchal authority and the rigid enforcement of heteronormativity. His anger upon discovering Jun's sexuality—*"Totoo palang nakikipagbaklaan ka sa pamangkin ni Lope. Putang-ina mo!"*—demonstrates the violent rejection of queerness within traditional Filipino households. His character epitomizes the generational divide in perspectives on sexuality, where fathers enforce silence and compliance, much like the institutional forces described in Kent and Poushter's (2020) study on global attitudes toward homosexuality. His inability to accept Jun's identity also echoes Altman's (2001) argument that globalization clashes with local traditions, creating fractured experiences for LGBTQ+ individuals. Despite his outward dominance, Jun's father is also trapped—by cultural expectations, by his own failures, and by the burden of maintaining a rigid sense of masculinity. His demand for Jun to change—*"Tigilan mong kagaguhang 'yan'"*—represents the suffocating weight of the *closet*, wherein those outside its confines attempt to force others back into its darkness. However, Jun's refusal to conform highlights the potential for resistance within the *closet* metaphor, positioning queer identity as an act of defiance against oppressive cultural norms.

CONCLUSION

This study deeply delved into the intertextual underpinnings of Honorio Bartolome de Dios' lens of the Filipino gay or *vakla* (*bakla*) via a nuanced investigation of the theme, context, and characterization of his select short stories, namely: *Atseng*, *Kas*, and *Nobena*. The findings expose the intricacies of Filipino culture and norms—which complicatedly is a result of generational cognitive dissonance between Western and Eastern influences—and what it means to be gay. The theme of each story presents similarity in terms of the struggle between gender identity and expression where gender is seemingly only performed in conformity to heteronormative expectations and demands. This is also affected by the sociocultural and socioeconomic contexts where the characters and their queerness are subjected to varying forms of discrimination and stigma. Finally, these only widen and complicate the design of each character's *closet*, furthering them into deeper cognitive dissonance between their self-acceptance, self-expression, and self-awareness. It can be concluded that Honorio Bartolome de Dios was able to capture what it means to be homosexual in the Philippines in specific stages of life and social standing.

PATENTS (OUTPUT)

Upon concluding the results, the study proposes VD Plasencia's "Vaklang TWAH" model which introduces the intricate levels of homosexual storytelling established by de Dios in his book *"Sa Labas ng Parlor"*.

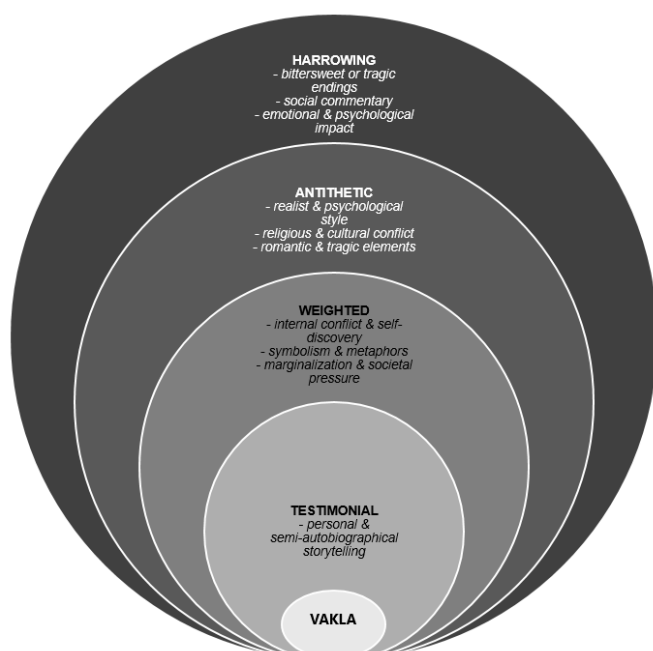


Figure 2. VD Plasencia's "Vaklang TWAH" model based on de Dios' Homosexuality Portrayal in Literature.

This model may be used as a guide describing the phenomenon of the Filipino gay or *vakla*. There are five layers in this spherical model where the *vakla* or simply *bakla* is at its core, setting their experience and perspective as the barometer for the literary elements to be used. From there, the remaining four layers—*testimonial*, *weighted*, *antithetic*, and *harrowing*—can be acronymed as *TWAH*, an exaggeration of the Filipino word "*ito*" (or *this* in English). This forms the gay expression "*vaklang twah*" (*baklang ito* or *this gay*) which particularizes a specific gay person.

The secondary layer, *testimonial*, introduces the identity of the *vakla* through personal and semi-autobiographical storytelling, establishing a ring of authenticity. De Dios' stories are frequently based on actual experiences, and they mirror his own observations and struggles. Through the use of both narrative and descriptive modes, queer identities are brought to life, enabling readers to walk in the shoes of characters before their struggle with their sexuality in a repressive society. For instance, prior to delving into Ato's (from *Atseng*) queer awakening, his socioeconomic life was described through the line "*Umaabon pa'y nasa gitna na sila ng bukid, namumulot ng kuhol. Idineklara sa radyong walang pasok sa eskuwela kaya hindi magkamayaw sa tuwa ang magkakalaro habang nagtatampisaw sa putika.*" This fundamental style is the backbone of de Dios' literary strategy, turning his tales not only into fictional stories but also into emotional testaments of lived reality.

The tertiary layer, *weighted*, is expounded further via the use of intricate literary elements, emphasizing the burdens of internal struggle and self-discovery as the characters grapple with their sexuality and fight religious and societal repression. Symbolism and metaphors, like changing seasons, religious ceremonies, and limited spaces, reinforce these conflicts by symbolizing emotional states and social constraints. This layer is subtly portrayed in *Kas* by analogizing hetero-conformity with political activism, "*Minsan, nakikisigaw na rin ako. Baka kasi mapagkamalan akong ahente kung hindi man lang ako nagsasalita sa loob ng mga hanay.*" Marginalization and social pressure further heighten the characters' experiences, frequently resulting in discrimination, isolation, and rejection, highlighting the brutal realities of LGBTQ+ people.

The quarternary layer, *antithetic* (oppositions), employs a realist and psychological approach that probes raw emotions and inner conflict. De Dios usually highlights religious and cultural tensions, particularly the clash between Catholic guilt, traditional norms, and personal identity, such as how Jun responds to his dad in *Nobena* when told nothing will come from gay relationships by saying, "*Isinusulat pa lang ang Bibliya, 'yan na ang sinasabi nila. Obsolete statement na 'yan, Dad.*" De Dios also critiques patriarchal dominance, heteronormativity, and systemic discrimination, exposing how these forces shape and constrain queer experiences. Much of his work revolves around romantic yet tragic love stories, where love is either unrequited or leads to heartbreak. These motifs emphasize the agonizing sacrifices queer individuals must endure—whether by conforming to societal expectations, facing familial rejection, or resisting oppressive structures that deny them their truth.

Finally, in the outer layer, *harrowing*, the narrative outcomes tend to end in bittersweet or tragic ways, where characters silence their identity or reap the aftermath of exposing it. Through social commentary, the tales provide insight into the oppression and hardships of queer people in a conservative world. In the end, de Dios' writings make an enduring emotional and psychological impact, encouraging empathy and self-reflection among readers. Showing the gritty, painful, and very human struggles of the LGBTQ+ population makes his writing a powerful tool in campaigning for representation and comprehension.

It is important to note that the "*Vaklang TWAH*" model serves to shed light unto the concept of the queer spectrum, showing that there is more than one way to be a Filipino gay. One story does not represent the entire vakla experience, but rather only a speck of an entire collective phenomenon.

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