

Book Review: More Tomboy, More Bakla Than We Admit: Insights Into Sexual and Gender Diversity in Philippine Culture, History, and Politics

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More Tomboy, More Bakla Than We Admit: Insights Into Sexual and Gender Diversity in Philippine Culture, History, and Politics (2021), edited by Mark Blasius and Richard T. Chu, is a 480-page anthology that delves into indigenous perspectives of queer experiences in the Philippines, with the aim of sparking more research and publications about the Philippine LGBTQ experience. Its multidisciplinary approach, going beyond the confines of LGBT psychology, enables a layered understanding of the complexities within the queer community. This book review aims to underscore the book's significance as a key document on Philippine queer culture while critically evaluating its strengths and limitations, particularly in contributing to the field of psychology, specifically LGBT psychology.

Editors Mark Blasius and Richard T. Chu aim to create a "state of the field" milestone serving as a jumping-off point for future LGBTQ studies around the Filipino experience, here and abroad. Blasius, a professor of political science at The City University of New York (CUNY), and Chu, an associate professor of history at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, focus on already-published works to build the collection and fill in gaps where commissioned work would have been necessary. The editors also acknowledge the initial involvement of Gaspar Vibal and Professor Eufracio Abaya of the UP Diliman Anthropology Department before Chu's introduction to the project.

The diverse contributors of the anthology come from various disciplines, reflecting the book's multidisciplinary approach. Hailing from fields such as creative writing, comparative literature, art studies, gender and sexuality studies, history, anthropology, sociology, development studies, mass communication, and psychology, the contributors offer a richness in perspective that shines through. There is a predominant representation in anthropology and history, and most contributors are Philippine-born Filipinos, with a small presence of diasporic voices. Important to note is that a shared thread unites these voices: all of the contributors are active members of the LGBT community, if not allies, who work closely with the community; therefore bringing authenticity and nuance to the exploration of queer experiences in the Philippines.

Structured thematically, the book features empirical studies from different researchers in the social sciences, drawing on multiple interdisciplinary frameworks. Personal accounts, statements, and

essays also contribute to the plethora of perspectives presented. With majority of the content being empirical work (i.e., about two-thirds of the articles featured), the inclusion of biographical accounts adds a personal touch to the collection.

The book, written in English, varies in tone and style across its many articles, which may present a challenge for some readers due to each author's distinct flow. However, its strength lies in the rich context that it offers and its use of footnotes, assisting non-Filipino readers in grasping the unique nuances of the Filipino LGBTQ experience. Published in 2021 and available in print, the anthology incorporates vibrant images that feature relevant figures within the LGBT community, giving the readers a glimpse into the narratives presented.

The anthology unfolds with an introduction from the editors that candidly reveals the triumphs gained and challenges faced in bringing the anthology to fruition, including unfinished essays, changes in framework, historical developments, and shifts in the editing team. "Theoretical and Historical Framings" is the first unit of the anthology, featuring essays from Garcia and Pineda. Garcia's "Philippine Gay Culture: An Update and a Postcolonial Autocritique" offers both a contemporary update on local gay culture's evolution and the author's insights into the impacts of globalization, Western influence, and local policies on the Filipino LGBT community. In contrast, Pineda's "Bridging Gaps, Marking a Struggle: The History of the Filipina Lesbian Struggle in the Philippines" presents a historical narrative of the lesbian movement's conception, emphasizing its transformation in the understanding of the needs and demands of the Filipina lesbian community.

The next unit, "Histories of Sexuality in Pre-colonial Philippines," includes articles from Brewer, Reyes, and Marquez. Brewer's "Baylan, Asog, Transvestism and Sodomy: Gender, Sexuality, and the Sacred in Early Colonial Philippines" delves into precolonial spirituality and its ties to the feminine, using accounts from Spanish historians to unravel the unique spiritual roles of women and the feminine in the Philippines. Brewer's work raises questions that invite curiosity and sheds light on indigenous gender and sexuality. Reyes's "Sodomy in Seventeenth-century Manila: The Luck of a Mandarin from Taiwan" examines the

application of sodomy laws in the past, focusing on the treatment of Chinese immigrants, while Marquez's "Pecado Nefando and the Chinese in Early Spanish Philippines: Hispano-Asian Encounters and Ethnosexual Discourses" delves into the relationship between sodomy laws, xenophobia against the Chinese community, and the influence of the Church and the State.

The unit on "Filipino Sexual and Gender Identities" features Tan, Baytan, and Josef. Tan's "From Bakla to Gay: Shifting Gender Identities and Sexual Behaviors in the Philippines" provides an ethnographic look at the MSM (men who have sex with men) community and its subcultures, offering insights into gender, sexuality, class, and expression. Baytan's "Crazy Planets: Notes on Filipino 'Bisexuals'" uses data from the gay dating site PlanetRomeo to explore nuances of the term *bi* within the Filipino gay male community. He dissects the concept of indigenization and the conflation of Western terminologies to fit a subculture's cultural realities. Josef's "Pinoy Tomboys, Lesbians, and Transgender: Their Gender and Sexual Identities and Activism in the Last 25 Years" narrates the building of the local LGT (lesbian, gay, and transgender) movement, examining the impact of global developments and the movement's historical trajectory. From the lens of a self-identified lesbian-feminist, the author identifies significant global events and how they have affected the movement in the Philippines.

Alcedo, Alburo, Tolentino, and Fajardo contribute to the unit on "Negotiating Sexual and Gender Diversity in Recent Philippine Culture." Alcedo's "Sacred Camp: Transgendering Faith in a Philippine Festival" uses an ethnographic approach to give an account of how the transgendering of a person from Aklan reconciles with existing heterosexist views of the Roman Catholic Church. Alburo's "Brothers, Lovers, and Revolution: Negotiating Military Masculinity and Homosexual Identity in a Revolutionary Movement in the Philippines" analyzes the evolution of the revolutionary man's image and its alignment with the now institutionalized recognition of same-sex marriage in the NPA (New People's Army). Tolentino's "Macho Dancing, the Feminization of Labor, and Neoliberalism in the Philippines" draws a fascinating connection between Marcos's regime, macho dancing, and the feminization of labor. Lastly, Fajardo's

“Transportation: Translating Filipino and Filipino American Tomboy Masculinities Through Global Migration and Seafaring” explores the existence of diverse masculinities in the realm of transportation, labor, and queer identities. It highlights the “invisibilization” of the tomboy, both within and outside of the community, leading to gaps in research on this unique experience of shared masculinity between cismen and tomboys.

Chu, Manalastas and Torre, and Ofreneo contribute to the unit “Interaction of the Personal and the Political.” Chu’s “Growing up Male, Chinese, and Catholic in the Philippines and the Son My Mother Wanted Me to Be” recounts the author’s experience of negotiating multiple identities, especially with how it connects with his personal relationship with his mother. Manalastas and Torre’s “LGBT Psychology in the Philippines” and Ofreneo’s “Towards an LGBT-Inclusive Psychology: Reflecting on a Social Change Agenda for Philippine Psychology” offer insights into LGBT psychology’s development in the Philippines, serving as a call to action to the reader for further exploration and advocacy.

As a whole, *More Tomboy, More Bakla* conducts a thorough analysis of historical and contemporary queer identity, the theoretical foundations of local queer studies, and the interplay of personal, cultural, and political experiences. Its underlying heart for social justice emphasizes the urgency of progress, providing a roadmap for greater understanding and acceptance. As I delved into its pages, I could not help but be deeply moved by the depth and richness of the experiences shared by queer Filipinos. As a transfemme nonbinary bakla clinical psychology graduate student, this anthology was a mirror, reflecting back aspects of my own personal queer journey. Moreover, it granted me the opportunity to step into the shoes of other members of my community that I had not previously had the chance to be familiar with.

I was particularly impressed by the book’s commitment to sharing mostly qualitative research and the utilization of a multidisciplinary approach. The emphasis on cultural context and the inclusion of various perspectives—from the historical to the ethnographic to the linguistic—resonated with my own beliefs about how important it is to consider these lenses in the study of queer identities. I have no doubt

that the book will inspire more research and collaboration among scholars and community members.

The book sets clear expectations about its subject matter and approach, highlighting a range of perspectives and lived experiences. However, it does leave noticeable gaps in its exploration of certain gender and sexual identities, particularly those of intersex and bisexual Filipinos. While it extensively delves into the experiences of gay men and the bakla, there remains a need for a more comprehensive exploration of other gender and sexual identities to offer a fuller portrayal of the queer Filipino landscape.

The geographical and contemporary indigenous representation within the anthology is another notable gap. Primarily centered in Luzon or Metro Manila, the studies chosen are unable to capture the intersectional experiences of LGBTQ Filipinos elsewhere. Questions arise such as: “What are the experiences of Moro LGBTQ Filipinos?”, “How do contemporary indigenous peoples conceptualize gender and sexuality?”, and the like. Additionally, for sustained relevance, the book would benefit from regular updates to resources and references, including colloquial terminologies and cultural references.

Nevertheless, the book manages to bridge current research and theoretical frameworks with the lived experiences of queer Filipinos, challenging existing paradigms and advocating for more intersectional and holistic perspectives in LGBT studies. Its implications extend to professionals and researchers, encouraging them to embrace the multifaceted nature of queer identities and to advocate for social change. For psychologists, *More Tomboy, More Bakla* can serve as a resource for deepening one’s knowledge on the lived experiences, challenges, and complexities of queer Filipinos, stemming from the interdisciplinary perspective of the book. Clinical psychologists and counselors could benefit from its contextual richness, aiding locally-informed formulations in client understanding (i.e., Sikolohiyang Pilipino).

In conclusion, by featuring papers on the past, present, and potential futures for Filipino LGBTQ individuals, the book stands as an expansive reference for budding LGBT research across different fields. While not a light read, it serves those interested in delving into the theoretical and conceptual aspects of Filipino LGBTQ experiences. The

book is highly recommended for use in LGBT studies classes at both undergraduate and graduate levels, providing a robust foundation for understanding existing research and identifying gaps to build on it. I too recommend *More Tomboy*, *More Bakla* to psychologists, whether you are already immersed in LGBT psychology or just beginning to get into it. This book provides a wealth of insights, advocates for a multidisciplinary approach, and underscores the importance of cultural context and indigenous perspectives in comprehending our queer identities.