

Comedy, Affect, and Ideology: A P-MCDA of *Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy*

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Abstract

This study examines the film *Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy* as a site where gender, family, and diaspora are negotiated through comedy rather than resolved. Departing from representational readings of queer visibility, the article employs Psychoanalytic Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (P-MCDA) to analyze how ideology operates through visual form, performance, narrative structure, and affect. Findings show that the film sustains a fantasy of family unity by redistributing contradiction across its four protagonists, with queer characters—particularly the *bakla*—absorbing emotional excess, resentment, and bodily sacrifice to stabilize the family as a symbolic whole. Comedy emerges not as a neutralizing force but as an ideological technology that transforms structural inequalities into manageable experiences of enjoyment. Diasporic privilege and local precarity are displaced into interpersonal rivalry and medicalized sacrifice, allowing reconciliation without confronting the conditions that produced familial rupture. The article operationalizes fantasy and enjoyment alongside multimodal coding to read ideological attachment as a textual effect, not only as a representational pattern. By foregrounding fantasy, affect, and sacrifice, the article contributes to Philippine film studies, Global South queer theory, and psychoanalytic media analysis, offering a framework for reading Southeast Asian popular cinema beyond visibility politics.

Keywords: P-MCDA, Psychoanalysis, Critical discourse studies, Philippine pop culture, Comedy and ideology, Diaspora and migration, Ideological enjoyment, Global South media studies

Introduction

Situating *Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy* in Philippine popular cinema

Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy (Deramas, 2013) occupies a distinctive position in Philippine popular cinema as a commercially successful comedy that organizes its narrative around highly recognizable gender categories: *girl*, *boy*, *bakla* (gay), and *tomboy* (lesbian). These categories function not merely as character descriptors but as structuring devices that guide narrative development, humor, and moral resolution. Directed by Wenn V. Deramas—whose work is closely associated with mainstream Filipino comedy—the film exemplifies how popular cinema mobilizes humor to negotiate social tensions surrounding gender, family, class, and mobility.

Comedy has long served as a dominant mode in Philippine cinema for rendering social contradictions

intelligible and affectively manageable. As Tolentino (2012) observes, mainstream films often domesticate broader structural anxieties by situating them within familiar familial and gendered frameworks. In this context, humor becomes a cultural mechanism that allows audiences to engage with sensitive issues—such as non-normative gender identities, economic disparity, and fragmented kinship—without confrontation. From a media culture perspective, popular films operate as ideological sites where pleasure and politics intersect, enabling dominant values to circulate through entertainment rather than explicit persuasion (Kellner, 2020).

Rather than dismissing *Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy* as mere slapstick or stereotype-driven fare, this study approaches the film as a cultural text that stages ideological contradictions through humor and excess.

Philippine comedy films frequently function as spaces where socially charged issues are rendered tolerable through laughter, making them particularly productive objects for ideological analysis (Diaz, 2015; Garcia, 2008).

Narrative structure of the film

At the narrative level, *Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy* follows four siblings who are revealed to be biological quadruplets separated after their parents' estrangement. Two of the siblings—Girlie and Peter—are raised in the United States by their father, while the other two—Mark and Panying—grow up in the Philippines with their mother. Their eventual reunion is precipitated by Peter's serious medical condition, which necessitates a return to the Philippines and compels cooperation among siblings whose lives have been shaped by markedly different social and cultural environments.

The film's narrative structure is organized around mirrored character pairings. Girlie (*girl*) and Mark (*bakla*) function as the elder, femme-presenting figures, while Peter (*boy*) and Panying (*tomboy*) occupy the roles of younger, masculine-presenting siblings. These dyads anchor the film's comedic conflicts, emotional tensions, and ethical resolutions. Illness operates as a central narrative catalyst, transforming bodily vulnerability into a moral demand for sacrifice and reconciliation. Repeated motifs of caregiving, bodily donation, and emotional endurance propel the story toward a fantasy of familial wholeness.

Crucially, the film does not simply present a harmonious family reunion. Instead, it stages tensions between diasporic privilege and local precarity, Western and Filipino sensibilities, and normative and non-normative gender expressions. These tensions, however, are rarely resolved through confrontation. Rather, they are displaced, softened, or neutralized through comedy, allowing contradictions to persist beneath a surface narrative of unity.

Gender typologies and queer excess as narrative motors

Central to the film's ideological logic is its reliance on categorical gender labels—*girl*, *boy*, *bakla*, and *tomboy*. These labels do not merely describe identity but operate as social scripts that regulate behavior, responsibility, and affective labor within the

family. Each character's gendered positioning determines how they are expected to care, sacrifice, endure, or reconcile conflict, thereby shaping the moral economy of the narrative.

Feminist and queer critiques of Philippine cinema have consistently noted how *bakla* and *tomboy* figures are positioned as emotional mediators, caregivers, or sacrificial subjects within family-centered stories (Diaz, 2015; Garcia, 2008; Velasco, 2022). In *Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy*, these characters absorb familial tensions while providing comic relief, often at the cost of their own emotional or bodily well-being. Their exaggerated performances—marked by emotional excess, flamboyance, or restraint—are central to the film's humor, yet they also expose deeper ideological investments in gendered responsibility and moral worth.

This dynamic suggests that gender representation in the film cannot be reduced to questions of visibility or stereotype. Instead, gender operates as an affective mechanism through which ideology is sustained, distributing emotional labor and sacrifice unevenly across bodies.

Comedy, fantasy, and ideological management

Comedy functions in *Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy* as a key ideological technology. Drawing from Žižek's (2008, 2009) conception of ideology as fantasy, humor can be understood as a mechanism that allows contradictions—between equality and hierarchy, inclusion and marginalization—to coexist without demanding resolution. Laughter operates as a form of affective release, transforming structural tensions into emotionally manageable experiences (McGowan, 2017).

From the perspective of spectatorship, enjoyment plays a central role in ideological attachment. Chouliaraki (2006) emphasizes that mediated affect shapes how audiences relate to social suffering and moral narratives, while Kellner (2020) highlights pleasure as a critical component of the media's ideological power. In *Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy*, comedy preserves the fantasy of family unity and reconciliation, even as underlying inequalities remain unresolved. Humor thus sustains ideological coherence rather than subverting it.

Research problem, analytical orientation, and contribution

Against this backdrop, this study asks: How does *Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy* mobilize multimodal and comedic strategies to sustain ideological fantasies of gender, family, and belonging amid diasporic and postcolonial tensions? Addressing this question requires an approach capable of examining not only representation but also affect, contradiction, and unconscious investment.

This article employs Psychoanalytic Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (P-MCDA) as its analytical framework. The framework is particularly suited to analyzing how ideology operates through multimodal form, fantasy, and enjoyment, as demonstrated in a previous application to contemporary Asian audiovisual texts (Quilantang & Quilantang, 2025).

This study addresses a specific gap at the intersection of Philippine queer film scholarship and multimodal discourse analysis. Existing critical work on the *bakla* in popular cinema has tracked representational hierarchies and the conditional terms of queer visibility (Diaz, 2015; Garcia, 2008; Manalansan, 2003; Velasco, 2022), while critical discourse studies of media texts have systematized the analysis of how images and language structure social relations (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021; Machin & Mayr, 2023). Neither tradition, however, has yet developed an operational vocabulary for the question this article asks: why do audiences enjoy ideological structures that marginalize the figures the films appear to celebrate? The contribution is to integrate the psychoanalytic theorization of ideological enjoyment with the procedural rigor of multimodal critical discourse analysis, applied to a single Filipino comedy whose commercial success depends on precisely this affective transaction. Rather than expanding the catalog of visible queer representations, the article specifies the affective conditions under which such visibility persists.

By applying this framework to *Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy*, the article moves beyond visibility-based readings—which have cataloged the unequal terms on which the *bakla* appears in popular cinema (Diaz, 2015; Garcia, 2008)—toward an account of how comedic pleasure binds audiences to those very terms.

Review of related literature

Queer representation in Philippine cinema

Scholarship on queer representation in Philippine cinema has consistently emphasized the centrality of the *bakla* figure as both a site of visibility and a locus of ideological tension. Garcia (2008) traces the *bakla* across precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial registers, arguing that the figure cannot be flattened into a Western homosexual identity but must be read as a culturally specific assemblage of effeminacy, gendered labor, and class location. Historically, the *bakla* has been positioned as comic excess—marked by flamboyance, emotional expressivity, and exaggerated femininity—serving as a reliable source of humor in mainstream films. This excess, however, is rarely neutral. Instead, it is tied to the *bakla*'s narrative function as an affective buffer who absorbs social and familial tensions while deflecting them through laughter (Diaz, 2015; Garcia, 2008).

Feminist and queer critiques have noted that contemporary representations, particularly in the Vice Ganda era of Philippine cinema, reproduce a paradoxical logic of inclusion and containment. On one hand, the *bakla* is hyper-visible, occupying central narrative space and commanding audience affection. On the other hand, this visibility is conditional: it is sustained through self-sacrifice, ridicule, and emotional labor that ultimately reinforces heteronormative and patriarchal structures (Diaz, 2015). The *bakla* becomes the figure who “holds the family together,” often at the expense of personal fulfillment or narrative agency.

Diasporic queer scholarship complicates this picture. Manalansan (2003) shows that Filipino gay men in the diaspora navigate competing cultural scripts of *bakla* effeminacy and US-style gay identity, producing forms of selfhood that resist easy translation between the two registers. Sociological work on queer life in urban Philippine contexts further extends these observations. Collins (2005) demonstrates that while queer subjects may experience increased mobility and visibility in metropolitan spaces, such visibility does not translate into structural equality. Instead, queer presence is often tolerated insofar as it remains entertaining, non-threatening, and emotionally helpful to dominant social arrangements. This tension between visibility and vulnerability is mirrored in cinematic narratives, where

queer characters are embraced as cultural fixtures yet denied transformative power.

Recent diasporic queer scholarship extends these critiques by foregrounding how narrative expectations of sacrifice and care similarly constrain *tomboy* and transmasculine figures. Velasco (2022) argues that Filipinx transmasculine subjects are frequently positioned as stabilizing figures who reconcile familial and cultural contradictions without destabilizing the family itself. Taken together, these studies reveal the limits of liberal visibility politics: representation alone does not dismantle the ideological structures that assign queer subjects disproportionate affective labor. This literature provides a critical backdrop for examining how *Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy* mobilizes queer excess not as disruption, but as narrative glue.

Diaspora, mobility, and the Filipino family

Studies of the Filipino diaspora have long challenged celebratory narratives of migration as an unambiguous opportunity. San Juan (2001) frames diaspora as a condition structured by historical inequality, colonial legacies, and uneven global capitalism, where mobility is often accompanied by exploitation, loss, and moral obligation. Migration, in this sense, is not merely spatial movement but a reconfiguration of familial responsibility and affective debt.

Ethnographic and historical accounts further underscore how migration produces a moral economy of guilt and obligation within Filipino families. Rafael's (1988) work on translation and colonial mediation highlights how familial bonds are shaped by asymmetrical power relations, a dynamic that persists in contemporary diasporic contexts. Parreñas (2005) extends this through ethnographic accounts of transnational families, showing that migrant mothers and absent fathers reorganize kinship around remittance, distance, and gendered labor; the household becomes a site where global inequality is lived as intimate emotional asymmetry. Migrants are frequently positioned as benefactors whose economic mobility generates expectations of sacrifice, remittance, and emotional availability. Seemann, Fischer, and Wahlers (2015) similarly argue that Filipino migration oscillates between the promise of the "American dream" and

conditions of precarity that reproduce dependency rather than autonomy.

Recent migration theory reinforces this critique by emphasizing the affective and psychological dimensions of mobility. Safi (2023) contends that migration is increasingly experienced as a site of discrimination, ambivalence, and identity fracture rather than seamless assimilation. Diaspora thus emerges as a psychic rupture that destabilizes belonging, producing contradictory attachments to home, family, and nation. Quilantang's (2025) reading of Vilma Santos in *Pinay, American Style* demonstrates how Philippine diasporic cinema rehearses identity-in-transit not as smooth assimilation but as contested moral negotiation, in which the migrant subject must repeatedly perform belonging across asymmetric national grammars. These contradictions are not evenly distributed: American-raised subjects often embody relative privilege, while those who remain in the Philippines experience local precarity and immobility.

Within family-centered narratives, these asymmetries are frequently displaced onto intimate relations rather than addressed structurally. Literature on diaspora and family consistently shows how global inequalities are refracted through sibling dynamics, caregiving roles, and bodily sacrifice (Parreñas, 2005; San Juan, 2001; Seemann et al., 2015). This body of work is crucial for understanding how *Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy* stages diasporic tension not as a political critique but as a moral drama resolved through familial reconciliation.

Žižekian psychoanalysis in film and cultural studies

Žižekian psychoanalysis has become an influential framework in film and cultural studies for analyzing ideology beyond representational content. Central to Žižek's theory is the concept of fantasy as the structure that organizes social reality, enabling subjects to navigate contradictions without confronting them directly (Žižek, 2008). Fantasy does not conceal reality; instead, it provides the coordinates through which reality becomes livable.

In film studies, this approach has been particularly productive in examining how narratives sustain ideological coherence through enjoyment (*jouissance*). McGowan (2007, 2015, 2017) argues that cinema offers

spectators a privileged site for confronting—and simultaneously disavowing—ideological contradictions. Enjoyment emerges precisely where repression operates, binding subjects affectively to narratives that reproduce social hierarchies.

Scholars have also noted that comedy plays a crucial role within this psychoanalytic framework. Flisfeder (2011) and Dumas (2011) contend that humor functions as an ideological safety valve, allowing contradictions to surface momentarily before being neutralized through laughter. McGowan (2017) develops this argument at length, contending that the comic structure does not undermine ideology but renders ideological contradiction enjoyable—the joke is the moment when subjects encounter the antagonism at the heart of their social world and choose to laugh rather than to act. Comedy thus does not undermine ideology; it strengthens it by making contradictions pleasurable rather than disruptive. Žižek's (2009) analysis of fantasy further suggests that laughter enables subjects to “know very well” that contradictions exist while continuing to act as if they do not.

Within cultural studies, Žižekian psychoanalysis has been mobilized to critique post-political narratives that replace structural critique with affective resolution (Hanlon & Žižek, 2001). This tradition provides the theoretical grounding for examining *Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy* not as a story of reconciliation, but as a fantasy that manages ideological tension through comedy and enjoyment.

Selecting Žižek as the psychoanalytic theorist for this integration is a deliberate methodological commitment, not an exclusive theoretical preference. Other psychoanalytic traditions illuminate adjacent questions and reward distinct kinds of inquiry: Kristeva's (1982) account of abjection theorizes the expulsion of what threatens identity and is well-suited to analyses of body horror, the maternal, and primal repression; Laplanche's (1999) work on the enigmatic signifier addresses traumatic transmission and the unconscious as the residue of an other's message; Anzieu's (1989) skin-ego theorizes the body as a psychic surface and is generative for analyses of touch, containment, and bodily inscription. Each, however, emerges from a distinct psychoanalytic lineage with its own analytical idiom and ontological commitments. Pluralizing the apparatus across three incommensurable

schools risks producing eclectic readings rather than coherent analytical procedure—a hazard endemic to psychoanalytic film studies and one of the principal reasons it has been characterized, even by sympathetic critics, as hermeneutically free-roaming. Žižek's apparatus, by contrast, systematizes Lacanian categories—fantasy, symptom, surplus enjoyment, interpassivity, ideological suture—into operationalizable concepts whose analytical functions can be traced consistently across texts. Žižek is also a major psychoanalytic theorist with a developed account of enjoyment as a political category, an argument McGowan (2017) extends to the joke as an ideological mechanism, which is precisely what an analysis of comedy and ideology requires. The selection is fit for purpose; alternative apparatuses are reserved for research questions to which they are better suited.

Multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA)

Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) extends traditional discourse analysis by attending to meaning-making across multiple semiotic modes, including language, visuals, gesture, sound, and spatial organization (Machin, 2013; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). Rather than privileging verbal text, MCDA recognizes that ideology is communicated through the orchestration of diverse semiotic resources.

Within Critical Discourse Studies, MCDA has proven valuable for analyzing media texts where meaning is distributed across image, performance, and narrative form (van Dijk, 1993; Machin & Mayr, 2023). However, scholars have also noted its limitations. While MCDA excels at identifying patterns of representation and power, it often stops short of explaining why audiences remain affectively invested in ideologically contradictory texts.

This gap points to the need for psychoanalytic supplementation. Without a theory of fantasy and enjoyment, multimodal analysis risks reducing ideology to surface patterns rather than affective attachment. Integrating psychoanalysis enables discourse analysis to account for unconscious investment, contradiction, and pleasure—dimensions central to popular cinema. This limitation provides the conceptual opening for the framework employed in this study.

Theoretical and methodological framework

This study is grounded in Psychoanalytic Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (P-MCDA), an integrated theoretical and methodological framework that combines Žižekian psychoanalysis with multimodal critical discourse analysis. Rather than separating theory from method, the framework treats analysis as a reflexive process in which theoretical assumptions actively guide what is examined, how meaning is interpreted, and why certain ideological formations persist.

The framework is particularly suited to the analysis of popular cinema, where meaning is not conveyed solely through dialogue or narrative but through the orchestration of visual form, performance, sound, and affect. In *Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy* (Deramas, 2013), ideology is not simply represented but felt, managed, and enjoyed. The framework, therefore, allows the study to move beyond representational critique toward an analysis of fantasy, repression, and affective investment.

Theoretical foundations

At the theoretical core is Žižekian psychoanalysis, which conceptualizes ideology not as false consciousness but as a fantasy structure that organizes social reality (Žižek, 2008, 2009). Subjects are not deceived by ideology; instead, they actively participate in it because ideology provides a framework through which contradiction becomes livable. Central to this process is the constitutive absence that prevents the subject from achieving wholeness. Fantasy emerges as the narrative that promises to cover over this lack, offering coherence where none is structurally possible (Nicol, 2001).

Within family-centered narratives, fantasy often takes the form of unity, reconciliation, and completeness. The family becomes an ideological figure that promises emotional wholeness despite internal conflict and structural inequality. Žižek (2009) argues that such fantasies persist not because they are convincing but because they are necessary for sustaining social coherence. In popular cinema, this fantasy is frequently mobilized through melodrama and comedy, genres that allow contradiction to surface while simultaneously neutralizing its disruptive potential (McGowan, 2017).

Repression plays a crucial role in this dynamic. Ideological fantasy does not eliminate contradiction; it displaces it. In narratives of family and belonging, repression is often projected onto marginalized figures who absorb conflict on behalf of the social whole. Pfaller's (2012) notion of interpassivity is helpful here: enjoyment is outsourced to specific figures who "feel" on behalf of others, allowing the collective to maintain ideological comfort. In Philippine cinema, queer bodies—particularly the *bakla*—are repeatedly positioned as sites where excess emotion, sacrifice, and enjoyment are concentrated, enabling the fantasy of family unity to persist without structural change.

While psychoanalysis explains why ideological fantasies persist, multimodal critical discourse analysis explains how they are materially produced. MCDA recognizes that meaning is communicated across multiple semiotic modes, including visual composition, gesture, costume, sound, and spatial arrangement (Machin, 2013; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). In audiovisual texts, ideology is rarely articulated explicitly; it is embedded in form. Visual grammar plays a central role: camera framing, color, bodily presentation, and spatial positioning contribute to the construction of social relations and moral hierarchies. Performance and gesture communicate affective orientation, while costume and bodily exaggeration signal normative or deviant identities. In comedy, exaggeration functions as a signifying practice that intensifies meaning while masking its ideological stakes.

Integrated framework

The framework integrates Žižekian psychoanalysis and MCDA into a single analytical apparatus, allowing ideology to be examined as both semiotically constructed and affectively sustained. It builds on Critical Discourse Studies while extending it toward the unconscious dimensions of meaning-making, responding to calls for decolonizing discourse studies by centering Global South contexts and refusing universalized Western identity models (de Melo Resende, 2018).

Methodologically, the framework reconfigures Fairclough's three-stage model—description, interpretation, and explanation—into an explicitly psychoanalytic and multimodal process. First,

multimodal description identifies the semiotic resources through which meaning is produced. Second, psychoanalytic interpretation examines how these resources sustain fantasy, manage repression, and generate enjoyment. Third, contextual explanation situates these findings within broader postcolonial, diasporic, and socio-historical conditions.

The framework has been previously operationalized in analyses of Asian audiovisual texts—including a psychoanalytic reading of *Attack on Titan* (Quilantang, Guevarra, & Valenzuela, 2025) and a multimodal-psychoanalytic reading of *The 8 Show* (Quilantang & Quilantang, 2025)—demonstrating its capacity to reveal ideological dynamics that exceed representational critique. These prior applications establish the framework not as an ad hoc interpretive strategy but as a coherent methodological approach with replicable analytic stages.

Research design and corpus

Guided by P-MCDA, this study adopts a qualitative interpretive research design. *Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy* is analyzed as a multimodal communicative text in which ideology operates through narrative structure, visual form, performance, and affect. The primary data consist of the complete cinematic text of the film (Deramas, 2013).

The film runs approximately 97 minutes and is organized in three acts: the diasporic separation and the eventual sibling reunion (Act I); the disclosure of Peter's hepatitis-C diagnosis and the ethical search for a compatible donor (Act II); and the liver donation, recovery, and reconciliation (Act III). Principal comedic set-pieces are organized around mistaken-identity scenarios, sibling rivalries (especially the Girlie–Mark axis), and rapid-fire *bakla* repartee anchored in Mark's punchline-driven dialogue. The analysis foregrounds five anchor scenes: (a) the title sequence and character introduction; (b) the reunion and first sibling encounter; (c) the disclosure of Peter's diagnosis; (d) the donor-search and liver donation sequence; and (e) the closing reconciliation.

Units of analysis extend beyond dialogue and plot to include visual composition, costume, bodily performance, sound design, spatial arrangement, and character pairing. Particular attention is given to

mirrored character dyads—Girlie/Mark and Peter/Panying—as well as recurring motifs of illness, sacrifice, and family unity. These elements are treated as multimodal signifiers through which ideological meaning is communicated and emotionally stabilized (Machin, 2013; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021).

Analytical procedure

The analysis proceeds through three integrated stages, conceived as a single explicit pipeline:

Stage 1 — Multimodal description. The analyst systematically maps the semiotic resources through which meaning is constructed in each anchor scene: shot type and framing, gaze and bodily orientation, gesture and movement, costume and styling, dialogue and code-switching, and music and sound design. The output of this stage is a coding matrix that disaggregates the scene into its constituent semiotic features.

Stage 2 — Psychoanalytic interpretation. The coded features are read against Žižekian categories—fantasy, symptom, surplus enjoyment, interpassivity, ideological suture (Žižek, 2008, 2009; McGowan, 2007, 2015, 2017)—to identify where the scene's contradictions are displaced, who is positioned to absorb them, and how comedic timing is mobilized to render contradiction enjoyable rather than disruptive.

Stage 3 — Contextual synthesis. Stage 2's interpretive findings are situated within Philippine socio-cultural and postcolonial contexts (Garcia, 2008; Manalansan, 2003; Rafael, 1988; San Juan, 2001), tracing how fantasies of family and sacrifice intersect with histories of colonialism, migration, and uneven mobility. Context is not background but constitutive of how ideology is lived and felt.

To illustrate the operation of Stage 1 and its articulation with Stage 2, the first sibling encounter is offered as a worked example. In this scene (35:28–36:50), Mark and Panying are waiting at their mother's house when Girlie and Peter arrive with their father. The four siblings see each other for the first time and begin circling one another in a choreographed sequence reminiscent of a “trip to Jerusalem” game, scrutinizing how they look alike and different at the same time. Table 1 disaggregates the scene into its multimodal features; the brief commentary that follows shows how the descriptive coding feeds psychoanalytic interpretation.

Table 1 Worked coding example: first sibling encounter at the mother’s house.

Modality	Descriptive observation (Stage 1)	Interpretive cue (Stage 2)
Framing	Medium-wide interior shot of the mother’s house; the four siblings circle one another in a “trip to Jerusalem” choreography, the camera tracking their orbit in a slow lateral pan that keeps all four in frame.	The circular blocking stages sameness and difference simultaneously: the siblings are held in a single frame yet kept moving, visually enacting the mirroring that the narrative will exploit—the domestic interior signals that a reunion happens on local ground, not neutral territory.
Costume	American-raised pair arrive in travel-ready branded clothing, light palette; Philippine-raised pair are dressed in everyday domestic wear, denser and locally legible. The contrast is sharpened by the circling, which places the outfits side by side for comparison.	Costume codes mobility/leisure vs. necessity; class difference is visible before anyone speaks. The domestic setting makes the American siblings’ attire read as conspicuously out of place.
Language/code-switching	Girlie/Peter opens in English with US intonation; Mark replies in Filipino-dominant <i>swardspeak</i> ; Panying speaks Filipino plainly.	Language indexes mobility and entitlement; <i>swardspeak</i> marks Mark’s comedic register and her structural position as affective mediator.
Gesture/performance	All four siblings eye each other as they circle, sizing up physical similarities and differences; Mark’s reactions are the most exaggerated—raised eyebrows, theatrical double-takes, hands on hips—while Girlie mirrors the scrutiny with a cooler, appraising look. Peter and Panying participate more quietly.	Affective excess is concentrated in the <i>bakla</i> body even in the first seconds of contact; Mark’s hyperbolic reactions establish her structural position as the figure who will metabolize the encounter’s tensions through comedy.
Music/sound	Light, comic scoring underscores the circling choreography, treating the encounter as a comedic set-piece rather than an emotional reunion; a brief sentimental cue surfaces when the parents watch from the doorway.	The score frames the first meeting as comedy, conditioning the audience to process the encounter through laughter rather than through the gravity of a family separated for decades.

Stage 3 then synthesizes these cues into a contextual reading: the first encounter is staged as comic spectacle—four bodies circling one another in the mother’s house, performing likeness and difference as a game—but the multimodal architecture has already encoded the diasporic asymmetry that the rest of the film must “solve.” The *bakla* body is positioned, even before any plot has occurred, as the figure tasked with absorbing the affective consequences of that asymmetry.

Reflexivity and analytical rigor

Consistent with the framework’s reflexive orientation, the analysis acknowledges the researcher’s theoretical commitments and positionality. The psychoanalytic focus on fantasy and contradiction constitutes a deliberate methodological bias aligned with Critical Discourse Studies’ normative stance toward exposing ideology (van Dijk, 1993). Analytical rigor is ensured through systematic multimodal grounding, consistency across analytic stages, and

transparency in theoretical application, following procedures established in earlier work (Quilantang & Quilantang, 2025).

Analysis and findings

Before turning to the mirrored dyads, it is useful to characterize each sibling's verbal register, since the analysis returns repeatedly to dialogue and code-switching as multimodal evidence. Girlie speaks in English-dominant, US-inflected register, with vocal mannerisms that read as cosmopolitan irritation; Mark speaks in *swardspeak* and Filipino-dominant comedic register, with hyperbolic affect and rapid-fire punchlines that compress feeling into joke; Peter speaks in clipped English, restrained and ironising, marked by long pauses and economy of phrase; Panying speaks in Filipino, blunt and unaffected, with the conversational simplicity that the film codes as moral clarity. These four registers do most of the ideological work of the film's linguistic mode: they index class, mobility, and gendered moral position before any plot decision is taken.

Mirrored queer subjectivities: Girlie and mark

The film's most explicitly staged "mirror" is the rivalry between Girlie (the American-raised *girl*) and Mark (the Philippine-raised *bakla*). In multimodal terms, the film encodes its parallelism through exaggerated femininity: both are rendered as flamboyant, expressive, and emotionally volatile, yet this shared "femme" position is distributed unevenly across class and geography. Girlie's femininity is stylized through the visual grammar of privilege—blonde curls, flashy clothing, high heels, and an exaggerated bust that signals a camp caricature of Western femininity. Mark's femininity, by contrast, is framed through a locally recognizable *bakla* repertoire: vibrant clothing, stylized hair with a colored highlight, and a performance mode that turns feeling into punchlines. What matters is not simply that both perform excess, but that the film makes excess readable in two registers: Girlie's as "spoiled entitlement," Mark's as "comic survivability."

This is where ideological work begins. Following Diaz (2015) and Garcia (2008), the *bakla* in mainstream Philippine cinema often becomes a figure whose hyper-visibility is purchased through humiliation, service, and emotional labor. Mark exemplifies this bargain. The

analysis identifies Mark as a family scapegoat and "sacrificial lamb," positioned as both the blood donor for Panying and the compatible liver donor for Peter. The film's humor does not simply accompany this sacrificial logic—it helps legitimize it. Mark "masks her feelings as punchlines," converting injury into entertainment, and thereby making sacrifice socially digestible. In Žižekian terms, this is ideology functioning at the level of enjoyment: the audience can "enjoy" the *bakla*'s excess while the narrative quietly assigns the *bakla* the ethical burden of holding the family together (Žižek, 2009; McGowan, 2017).

Girlie's rivalry with Mark is similarly ideological, but in a different key. Their clashes repeatedly displace what the film cannot address directly: asymmetrical privilege and class resentment. Mark's grievances are consistently framed as personal hostility toward Girlie rather than as a critique of diasporic inequality. The analysis notes that Mark "often mentions their poor situation ever since her father left them" and "often projects all her grudges towards Girlie." In other words, resentment is redirected from structural conditions (mobility, class, abandonment) onto a single rival figure. This displaced hostility is precisely what allows the film to preserve a fantasy of reconciliation without naming the fundamental antagonism.

A representative scene of this displacement occurs in an extended sibling confrontation, in which Girlie and Mark argue over household finances, and Mark accuses Girlie of having abandoned the family with their father. Multimodally, the scene is built on shot/reverse-shot symmetry that places the two characters in visually equivalent compositions while encoding asymmetric affective burden. Girlie's lines are delivered in clipped English at a contained volume, her body angled away from Mark's; Mark's lines escalate in pitch and tempo, her hands flying upward in characteristic *bakla* gesture, her *swardspeak* carrying both the comedic weight and the substantive accusation. The scene's comedic timing places the laugh-line at the moment of greatest grievance: as Mark articulates the deepest structural complaint—abandonment—the score punctures the moment with a stinger and the framing cuts to a comic reaction shot. The audience laughs, and the substantive grievance is metabolized before it can lodge as a critique. This is the precise moment where the multimodal procedure intersects with the

psychoanalytic interpretation: comedy here is not a release valve external to ideology; it is the formal mechanism by which ideology absorbs its own contradictions.

Girlie is also rendered as an eldest-sibling protector who “deeply cares for Peter” despite her avoidant and self-assured demeanor. However, her care is narratively “earned” through comedic humiliation and moral softening. The film thus produces a double movement: Girlie’s privilege is mocked to make it

tolerable, while Mark’s sacrifice is played for laughs to make it acceptable. Mark becomes the emotional shock absorber—absorbing conflict, deflecting it through comedy, and eventually offering bodily repair to restore family unity (Diaz, 2015; Žižek, 2009). The mirror, therefore, is not symmetrical. It is a mirrored structure of inequality: the same femininity is allowed different moral meanings depending on whether it is attached to privilege (Girlie) or precarity (Mark).

Table 2 Multimodal mapping of the Girlie/Mark mirroring

Feature	Girlie	Mark
Costume/styling	Branded Western clothing; blonde curls; high heels; camp-Western femininity.	Vibrant local fashion; colored highlight; <i>bakla</i> stylization.
Verbal register	English-dominant, US-inflected, contained.	Filipino-dominant <i>swardspeak</i> ; punchline-driven; affect-as-joke.
Coded ideological position	“Spoiled entitlement.”	“Comic survivability.”
Narrative function	Privilege softened through humiliation and care.	Sacrificial mediator and emotional shock absorber.

Mark as subject, not only as a function

The reading offered above privileges Mark’s structural function—as scapegoat, donor, mediator—over her subjective complexity. This is a methodological feature of the framework rather than an oversight: a Žižekian-multimodal reading is built to identify how a character is positioned within the narrative’s ideological economy, not to reconstruct the character’s phenomenological interiority. However, this asymmetry is itself a finding. The film analyses the family’s fantasy in detail, but the *bakla*’s fantasy—what Mark wants for herself outside the function he serves—remains a black box. Brief moments puncture the structural reading: a held shot of Mark alone after a comedic exchange, in which the smile fades and the score thins; a costume detail (a quieter outfit in a domestic scene) that reads against the public flamboyance; an unanswered glance toward a love interest that the film does not develop. These moments do not constitute a counter-reading of Mark’s subjectivity, but they mark the limit of what the framework can see. The article reports this asymmetry

as part of the finding rather than as a flaw to repair: a structural reading necessarily privileges function over phenomenology, and recognizing this is one of the framework’s reflexive obligations.

Soft masculinity and illness: Peter and Panying

If Girlie and Mark embody the film’s flamboyant, conflict-generating excess, Peter and Panying are framed as the quiet stabilizers—mirrored again through masculinity and illness. Peter is rendered as “calmer, nonchalant and more logical,” associated with trendy, expensive fashion and leisure activities (e.g., car drifting), while also marked by Hepatitis-C. Panying, meanwhile, is described as timid, understanding, optimistic, and musically inclined, dressed in simple shirts and shorts, and marked by anemia. The film’s moral architecture hinges on this configuration: illness becomes the narrative justification for ethical demands, and soft masculinity becomes the preferred mode for meeting them.

In psychoanalytic film terms, illness often functions as a “Real” intrusion—a bodily limit that forces narrative reorganization and demands symbolic repair (McGowan, 2007, 2017). Here, illness is not merely a plot device; it is the ethical engine that compels sacrifice and, crucially, makes sacrifice appear necessary rather than ideological. Peter’s sickness is explicitly positioned as “the sole reason” the American siblings return to the Philippines. This return triggers the family’s confrontation with abandonment, inequality, and fractured kinship, yet the film quickly channels that confrontation into the manageable moral language of medical need. A structural rupture becomes a biomedical emergency—easier to solve through donation than through political reckoning.

Panying’s illness, meanwhile, is tied to the family’s internal economy of care. He is the “glue of the siblings,” intentionally wanting to bring the family together, while functioning as the anchor who calms Mark’s punchline-masking. His “soft masculinity” is coded through demureness and avoidance of conflict—traits that position him as morally pure and deserving of protection. In cultural terms, masculinity here is stripped of dominance and re-coded as care: the masculine-presenting characters are valued not for control but for emotional regulation and conciliatory rationality. This framing aligns with the film’s broader ideological project: the family can only be restored if masculinity is de-aggressed into caregiving.

Hair and styling intensify this moral coding. Peter’s “dark brushed-up hair” and trendy long sleeves signal cosmopolitan masculine polish, while Panying’s short fringe and butch styling signal local masculine legibility. The visual grammar of hair and fashion becomes a shorthand for two worlds—global mobility versus local constraint—while illness makes both bodies vulnerable, equalizing them at the level of suffering. Sherrow (2006) reminds us that hair and appearance operate as cultural codes rather than neutral aesthetics; in the film, these codes help produce sympathy and hierarchy simultaneously. Peter’s illness softens privilege; Panying’s illness sanctifies precarity. Together, they authorize the narrative’s moral demand: someone must sacrifice for family unity, and the film makes that demand feel natural.

The liver donation sequence in Act III deserves close reading because it is where the film’s ideological

architecture is most concentrated. Multimodally, the sequence is structured around a sustained alternation of clinical close-ups (the medical apparatus, a gloved hand, a screen displaying vitals) and intimate medium shots (the siblings’ faces, Mark’s expression as anesthesia begins). The score thins to a single sustained tone in the moments before the procedure, then swells with strings as Mark loses consciousness. The framing is significant: Mark is positioned in the lower third of the frame, supine and dwarfed by the equipment, while Peter (still pre-transplant) is framed in the upper third, conscious and centered. The visual hierarchy is unmistakable—the diasporic sick body retains spatial dominance even as the local *bakla* body offers itself for cutting. Psychoanalytically, this is the moment of suture in its most literal form: the family’s symbolic wholeness is purchased at the cost of a queer body’s opening. Comedy briefly returns in the post-procedure scenes—Mark cracking jokes from the hospital bed, the siblings laughing at the bedside—and this return is what allows the audience to file the donation as a moment of love rather than as a moment of structural violence. The ideological work of the scene is not in the cut itself; it is in the laughter that follows it.

Diasporic privilege vs. local precarity

The film’s diaspora tension is not delivered as an explicit critique; it is embedded multimodally in language, fashion, and bodily ease. The American-raised siblings are “financially well-off,” dressed in Western styles, and speak mainly English. In contrast, the Philippine-raised siblings are “not as financially stable,” dress simply, and speak mainly Filipino. This contrast stages what San Juan (2001) describes as diaspora’s uneven distribution of opportunity and vulnerability: mobility may promise improvement, but it also reorganizes kinship through asymmetrical access to resources and social capital (Manalansan, 2003; Parreñas, 2005).

Language becomes an index of comfort and hierarchy. English functions as the default mode of ease for Girlie and Peter, while Filipino anchors Mark and Panying’s intimacy and struggle. Importantly, the film does not treat English as simply “foreign”; it becomes the sonic marker of entitlement and distance, while Filipino becomes the marker of authenticity and obligation. However, the film’s ideology depends on

making these linguistic hierarchies reconcilable under the fantasy of family: the siblings can reunite, the narrative implies, if they can translate each other emotionally—even if structural inequality remains.

Fashion and bodily comportment carry the same message. The American-raised characters are described as having expensive clothes and “trendy male fashion,” while the Philippine-raised siblings are framed through “humility and simplicity.” This is not just costume design; it is a visual economy of mobility. The body that moves globally is styled as light, leisure-capable, and choice-rich. The body that remains local is styled as burdened, practical, and necessity-driven. Safi (2023) notes that migration is not reducible to assimilation; it is structured by discrimination and inequality that persist as psychic and social fractures. Quilantang (2025) makes a complementary argument from within Philippine cinema studies: the diasporic Filipino body on screen is repeatedly asked to perform belonging across asymmetric national grammars, and that

performance is itself the labor of identity-in-transit. In the film, that fracture emerges as resentment without articulation: Mark voices deprivation (“barely have access to delicious food and health needs”) while the American siblings can “fly back to the Philippines just for Peter to have the liver transplant.” However, this resentment is redirected into sibling rivalry rather than recognized as a critique of global inequality.

The narrative’s clever ideological move is to convert the diaspora’s structural violence into interpersonal drama. The film stages local precarity as emotional complaint and diasporic privilege as comedic entitlement, then resolves both through sacrifice and reconciliation. This resolution is affectively satisfying, but politically anesthetizing: the audience experiences relief (family restored) without confronting the systemic conditions that made the fracture inevitable. In this sense, diaspora in the film becomes less a political condition than a moral test—who will sacrifice, who will soften, who will forgive.

Table 3 Multimodal mapping of the soft masculinity/illness dyad (Peter / Panying)

Feature	Peter	Panying
Bodily condition	Hepatitis-C, framed as a “Real” intrusion that compels return.	Anemia is framed as a quiet, persistent vulnerability.
Costume/styling	Tailored, expensive, cosmopolitan polish.	Simple, locally legible, practical.
Affective register	Calm, ironizing, avoidant.	Demure, conciliatory, sentimental.
Narrative function	Illness softens privilege.	Illness sanctifies precarity; “glue” of the siblings.

Table 4 Multimodal mapping of diasporic privilege vs. local precarity

Feature	American-raised (Girlie, Peter)	Philippine-raised (Mark, Panying)
Language	English-dominant; index of entitlement and distance.	Filipino-dominant; index of authenticity and obligation.
Costume	Branded, leisure-capable, choice-rich.	Simple, practical, necessity-driven.
Bodily ease	Light, mobile, frictionless.	Burdened, fixed, friction-bearing.
Narrative function	Privilege softened through illness.	Precarity sanctified through sacrifice.

Comedy as ideological fantasy

The film's comedic texture is not decorative; it is the infrastructure of its ideological fantasy. Žižek (2008) argues that ideology is sustained not by ignorance but by fantasy—stories we enact to make social contradictions livable. McGowan (2017) develops the corollary that comedy is the genre in which subjects encounter the contradiction at the heart of their social world and choose to laugh rather than act on it. In *Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy*, comedy performs this function precisely: it enables the co-presence of incompatible truths—queer inclusion and queer marginalization, family unity and family abandonment, diaspora privilege and local deprivation—without demanding structural resolution. Laughter becomes repression management.

This management operates through repeated cycles: tension is introduced (resentment, rivalry, insult), then released through comedic excess (overreactions, camp performance, humiliating reversals), and finally stabilized through sentimental reaffirmation (care, sacrifice, reconciliation). Mark's emotional masking—turning feelings into punchlines—captures the heart of this mechanism. The *bakla* becomes a technology of laughter that prevents pain from becoming critique. The audience laughs, the family “moves on,” and the contradiction survives.

Chouliaraki's (2006) work on spectatorship is helpful here: affect organizes moral engagement, shaping what audiences feel authorized to care about and what they can ignore. Comedy directs affect away from structural suffering and toward interpersonal sympathy. Even illness—potentially a site of tragedy—is framed through comedic beats that prevent despair from rupturing the narrative's optimistic fantasy. The result is not cynicism but a very Filipino form of ideological comfort: hardship is real, but love and humor can “solve” it.

The culminating fantasy is reconciliation: the family becomes whole, identities become tolerable, and sacrifice is framed as love rather than as the cost of inequality. However, this wholeness is ideological precisely because it requires displacement. The film restores unity by assigning queer bodies the heaviest burden of emotional and bodily labor (Mark as donor, mediator, comic shield), while allowing privileged bodies to be morally rehabilitated through suffering

(Peter's illness) and humiliation (Girlie's caricatured femininity). The family survives contradiction not by resolving it, but by laughing through it.

Excess, camp, and the limits of suture

It would be incomplete to read the film's comedic operation as a closed ideological circuit. The argument advanced above identifies a tendency: the film's formal apparatus channels comedic pleasure toward ideological reconciliation rather than disruption. However, spectatorship is heterogeneous, and the same multimodal features that enable suture can produce surplus that the frame does not fully recuperate (Newton, 1972; Berlant & Ngai, 2017). Mark's most hyperbolic costume gags, her most rococo *swardspeak* digressions, and certain meta-comic asides that break the diegetic frame generate camp excess in the sense Newton (1972) theorizes: an aesthetic intensification that exceeds the narrative's moral demand. Some viewers will laugh *with* the film's ideological tendency; others will laugh *at* its operations, recognizing the absurdity of the sacrifice it asks the *bakla* to perform. The article, therefore, reads ideology here as the film's tendency rather than as its only possible reception, and registers the limits of the structural reading: a multimodal-psychoanalytic procedure can identify what the formal apparatus tends to do. However, it cannot foreclose what spectators do with it.

Discussion

Three reflexive limits of this analysis are worth naming explicitly before its broader implications can be drawn. First, the theoretical apparatus mobilized here—Žižekian psychoanalysis combined with multimodal critical discourse analysis—remains substantially Western in provenance, even as it is applied to a Philippine cultural text. The article makes use of regional voices (Garcia, 2008; Manalansan, 2003; Quilantang, 2025; Tolentino, 2012) but does not generate its analytical procedure from a Philippine-grown framework; the limits of this asymmetry are real and acknowledged. Second, the framework privileges narrative function over phenomenological interiority, with the consequence that the family's fantasy is analyzed in detail. In contrast, the *bakla*'s own fantasy—what Mark wants for himself outside the function he serves—remains a black box. This

asymmetry is itself a finding rather than a flaw, but it bounds what the framework can claim. Third, spectatorship is heterogeneous: the article identifies the film's ideological tendency, not the totality of its reception. Some viewers will laugh *with* the film, and

some will laugh *at* it; the framework can identify the tendency the formal apparatus enables, but not foreclose what audiences do with it (Newton, 1972; Berlant & Ngai, 2017). With these limits in view, the broader implications of the analysis can be set out.

Table 5 Integrative summary of P-MCDA findings across analytical foci

Analytical focus	Key multimodal features	Psychoanalytic reading	Ideological implication
Mirrored queer subjectivities (Girlie / Mark)	Excessive femininity; flamboyant gestures; stylized clothing; verbal overreaction; comedic rivalry.	Femininity as ideological performance; rivalry displaces structural inequality; Mark absorbs affective excess through humor (Žižek, 2009; Diaz, 2015; Garcia, 2008).	Queer visibility sustained through sacrifice; class resentment redirected as sibling rivalry.
The bakla as an emotional shock absorber (Mark)	Punchline-driven dialogue; exaggerated affect; bodily donation; constant mediation.	Repression displaced onto the queer body; enjoyment outsourced to the bakla figure (Pfaller, 2012; Žižek, 2009; McGowan, 2017).	Family unity depends on queer self-sacrifice; inequality appears ethical rather than ideological.
Soft masculinity and illness (Peter / Panyang)	Calm demeanor; conflict avoidance; medicalized bodies; subdued performance.	Illness as Real intrusion compelling moral obligation; masculinity recoded from dominance to care (McGowan, 2007, 2017).	Family rupture is reframed as a medical problem solvable through sacrifice.
Diasporic privilege vs. local precarity	English vs. Filipino; Western vs. simple costume; bodily ease vs. constraint.	Diaspora produces asymmetrical positions masked as personality differences (San Juan, 2001; Safi, 2023; Manalansan, 2003; Parreñas, 2005).	Global inequality translated into moral drama; privilege softened through humor and illness.
Comedy as ideological technology	Slapstick timing; camp exaggeration; emotional reversals; sentimental closure.	Comedy manages repression by making contradiction enjoyable; laughter as ideological release (Žižek, 2008; McGowan, 2017).	Tensions are not resolved but rendered livable; fantasy survives intact.
Excess, camp, and the limits of suture	Hyperbolic costume; rococo swardspick; meta-comic asides; bodily intensification beyond narrative demand.	Camp surplus exceeds ideological recuperation; spectatorship is heterogeneous (Newton, 1972; Berlant & Ngai, 2017).	Ideology is the film's tendency, not its only possible reception.

This study has argued that *Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy* does not merely present four differentiated characters but stages the quadruplets as fragmented embodiments of a split Filipino subject—a subject stretched across gender norms, class positions, and diasporic trajectories. Read through the framework, the film’s mirrored character dyads emerge as ideological devices that distribute contradiction rather than resolve it. Girlie and Mark carry the burden of excess femininity and affective labor, while Peter and Panying embody softened masculinities mediated through illness and care. Together, they function less as psychologically complete individuals than as partial figures tasked with holding together an unstable fantasy of family unity.

This fragmentation resonates with broader accounts of Filipino subjectivity shaped by colonial history, migration, and uneven mobility (Manalansan, 2003; Parreñas, 2005; Rafael, 1988; San Juan, 2001). Rather than articulating these tensions directly, the film disperses them across bodies, performances, and relationships. Each sibling becomes responsible for managing a specific contradiction: privilege versus precarity, normativity versus queerness, autonomy versus obligation. The “complete family” that the narrative ultimately restores is therefore not a resolution of these tensions but their symbolic suturing. In Žižekian terms, the family operates as an ideological fantasy that promises wholeness precisely where structural lack persists (Žižek, 2009).

Within this configuration, queer characters—particularly Mark as *bakla*—function as primary carriers of ideological repair. As shown in the analysis, Mark absorbs emotional volatility, converts resentment into humor, and ultimately offers bodily sacrifice to stabilize the family. This positioning aligns with feminist and queer critiques of Philippine popular cinema, which note that *bakla* visibility is often purchased through humiliation, service, and moral labor (Diaz, 2015; Garcia, 2008). What the framework adds to this critique is an account of why such representations endure: they are not simply representational failures but affective solutions. By assigning queer bodies the task of managing contradiction, the film preserves the fantasy of inclusivity without challenging the structures that necessitate sacrifice.

This finding complicates liberal queer readings that celebrate visibility as inherently progressive. Visibility here does not dismantle hierarchy; it reorganizes it. The queer figure becomes indispensable precisely because they are positioned as infinitely resilient and emotionally available. Drawing on Žižek (2009) and McGowan (2017), this can be understood as ideology operating through enjoyment: the audience enjoys the *bakla*’s excess and generosity while remaining shielded from the discomfort of structural critique. The film thus sustains an ethical economy in which queer sacrifice appears natural, even loving, rather than imposed.

Migration, meanwhile, emerges not as an opportunity but as psychic violence masked by humor. Diasporic privilege is visually and linguistically marked—through English language use, fashion, and bodily ease—yet it is narratively softened through illness and comedic humiliation. The film displaces the violence of separation, abandonment, and unequal mobility into interpersonal drama, allowing resentment to surface only as sibling rivalry rather than political critique. This displacement echoes Kellner’s (2020) observation that media culture often transforms structural contradictions into individualized narratives that can be emotionally managed. Humor becomes central to this management, converting the pain of migration into a series of laughable misunderstandings and sentimental reconciliations.

The framework proves particularly effective in making this process visible. Unlike approaches that focus solely on representation, it foregrounds ideological enjoyment—how pleasure, laughter, and affect bind audiences to narratives that reproduce inequality. By integrating psychoanalysis with multimodal analysis, the framework shows how ideology operates not only through what is shown but through how it feels to watch.

Conclusion

What this reading of *Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy* ultimately yields is an account of how a single Filipino comedy organizes the affective conditions of its own ideological persistence. The film does not sustain the fantasy of family unity by resolving its contradictions; it sustains the fantasy by redistributing those

contradictions across gendered and sexualized bodies. Mark, as *bakla*, absorbs emotional excess, social resentment, and bodily risk so that the family can appear whole; Peter and Panying's soft masculinities convert structural rupture into manageable medical demand; Girlie's caricatured Western femininity makes diasporic privilege available for comedic humiliation rather than political critique. Unity is achieved not through equality or justice but through sacrifice that is rendered lovable, humorous, and morally legible. What appears as reconciliation is more accurately characterized as ideological repair.

Comedy is the formal mechanism that makes this repair affectively bearable. Rather than neutralizing ideology, humor functions as its lubricant: laughter allows incompatible truths—diasporic privilege and local precarity, inclusion and marginalization, care and exploitation—to coexist without demanding structural transformation. Following Žižek (2008, 2009) and McGowan (2017), comedy enables audiences to “know very well” that inequality persists while continuing to enjoy narratives that affirm moral closure. In this film, comedic excess converts pain into pleasure and sacrifice into love. Comedy does not undermine ideology; it secures attachment to it.

The implications for Philippine film studies are substantive. Popular comedies should not be dismissed as ideologically naïve or merely commercial; it is precisely within comedy and melodrama that ideological contradictions are most actively negotiated. For queer theory in Global South contexts, the analysis cautions against celebratory readings of visibility that overlook the unequal distribution of emotional and bodily labor. Queer presence in this film is inseparable from responsibility, endurance, and disposability—a configuration that demands critical interrogation rather than affirmation. And for Philippine cultural studies more broadly, the reading suggests that the family-as-fantasy will continue to do its ideological work as long as the figures who absorb its contradictions remain available, visible, and willing to be laughed at.

The methodological contribution—Psychoanalytic Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis—is offered as the procedural means by which this argument is reached, not as the argument itself. The framework integrates Žižekian psychoanalysis with multimodal discourse analysis to operationalize the

question of ideological enjoyment. It is offered to other researchers working on Southeast Asian popular cinema and adjacent contexts as a procedure that can be replicated and refined. The film, however, is the object that ultimately matters: *Girl, Boy, Bakla, Tomboy* continues to draw audiences because the affective bargain it offers—queer sacrifice rendered as love—remains, for now, deeply familiar. Reading the bargain clearly is the first step toward refusing it.

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Declaration of generative AI in scientific writing

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framework, analysis, interpretations, and conclusions are entirely the authors' own work, and the authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and scholarly content of the article. Generative AI tools were not used for data analysis or theory development and are not listed as authors or co-authors.

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