



# Cold-Case on Serial Killings in F.H. Batacan's Smaller and Smaller Circles

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**Abstract**— A killer is someone who murders at least two people in separate events that occur at different times. Pointing the killers in any gruesome killing may take a long time especially if the investigators conducting the investigation are not doing well. Even up to this time there are unsolved killings in the country and justice is elusive to serve or yet too long to achieve. This study analyzes the search for justice on the serial killing of the “novel, *Smaller and Smaller Circles* by F.H Batacan.” Specifically, it investigates the elements of characters, symbols, and conflict. It uses *Qualitative Method*. The findings revealed that the attitude of the national investigators is thwarted with rivalry; identified symbols are manifestations of how the gruesome killing happened: heart, face, genitals, and knife. The conflict is man vs man in which rivalry to get career advancement is also revealed. It is concluded that national government investigators are inept to solve murder cases where the search for justice is too slow and elusive. A phenomenology study on lived experiences of the victim's family shall further be ascertained in order to know their predicaments.

**Keywords**— Search of justice, F.H Batacan, Serial Killing, Qualitative Method.

## I. INTRODUCTION

A killer is someone who murders at least two people in separate events that occur at different times. Killers have often been seized on by the media and the public consciousness—especially in cases where there are many victims or the murders are carried out in gruesome fashion. Their murder weapon of choice may vary. But one thing holds them common in an abnormal form of psychological gratification. In most cases, alongside the murders they committed, there's also sexual assault, robbery, cannibalism, extreme love of money or property. The murders usually take place over more than a month, including a significant period of time between them — and may even go on for years. There are different levels of insanity at work in the mind of killers.

Pointing the killers in any gruesome killing may take a length of time especially if the investigators conducting the

investigation are not doing well. Even up to this time there are unsolved killings in the country.

The focus of the study is the literary work of “F.H Batacan entitled *Smaller and Smaller Circles*, a Filipino novel. As a Filipino novelist, she is noted as a journalist, musician, and crime fiction writer. Extreme social issues are definitely popular, and one of those is killing. Batacan's piece fits to be a target of an in-depth analysis presenting the characterization and its responsibilities in their work<sup>1</sup>.

This study explores the search for justice on the killings in society. Exposing the realities becomes a piece of information to make the people more aware of why killings are happening and the reason why the search for justice takes time to reach.

With this, this would not halt the reader to think that this might happen in reality, especially in the Philippines form of looking for justice in the killings that happened.

This study analyzes how the search of justice is handled “in the novel, *Smaller and Smaller Circles* by F.H. Batacan. Specifically, it investigates the elements of characters, symbolism, and conflict.

### 1.1 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

This study theorizes that “F.H Batacan’s novel, *The Smaller and Smaller Circles* reveals how a search of justice is conducted of the investigators in the Philippines. It is strongly supported by the literary theories of formalism and mimesis.

*Formalism* examines the inefficient plot structure of the novel from exposition to the initial incident that rises and complicates the action, and heightens to the climactic event that makes the action fall, and finds a conclusion. According to Shklovksky (1), the formalistic approach emphasizes the analysis of all the sentences in the literary piece. Formalism takes into account the objective form of the order of the story, the characters, symbols, conflict, and some other literary elements that contribute to the whole meaning of the fiction.

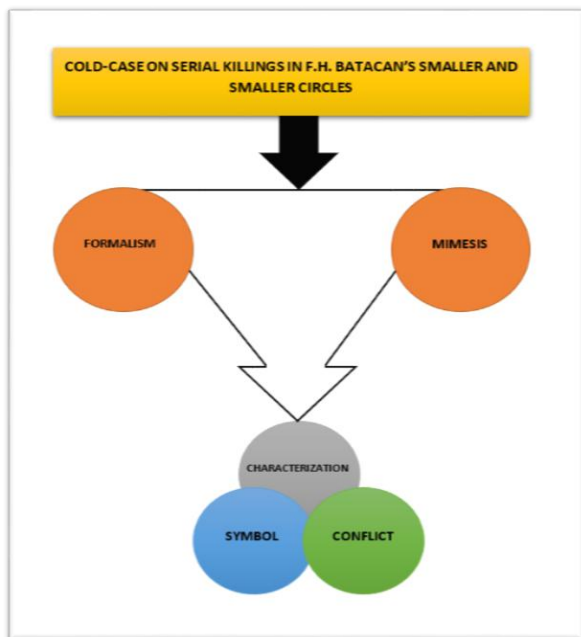


Fig.1. Schematic Presentation of the Theoretical Background of the Study

*Mimesis* also emphasizes the image of the investigators in the study. The art of ideas copies the first human experience and is taken out and replaced with a duplicate of concepts as expressed by the original theorists of Mimesis-Plato and Aristotle. The simple becomes complicated without eternity and is dropped into the point of hyperbolic ideas. The more authentic and imitative thing is, the more it becomes deceitful the reality is.

It is significant to prove the contention of the fictional Filipino novel which focuses on proving the existence and extent of the investigator’s search for justice to solve murders in a characterization, symbol, and conflict. Within this context, the study is investigated.

### II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Novel an invented prose narrative of considerable length and a certain complexity that deals imaginatively with human experience, usually through a connected sequence of events involving a group of persons in a specific setting. The novel is a genre of fiction, and fiction may be defined as the art or craft of contriving, through the written word, representations of human life that instructor divert or both.

Zainul (6) considers formalism theory that looks at patterns and treats literature as a group of literary devices that investigates the relationship among the smaller parts in the text. Zainul (11) added that there has been a distinction made between the events that can be said to happen in real-time and the artistically treated version which is in the text presented to the reader<sup>3</sup>.

In the study of Pipit and Eripuddin (3) they mentioned that formalist criticism analyzed the large-scale structures of longer works, looking for patterns and relationships among scenes, actions, and characters. A novel is a kind of literature that has the quality of value of the author’s experience<sup>4</sup>.

Sulistyorini (33) added that a novel which is written down with good fiction can prove that there is something beyond the text telling about moral value, human behavior, and also tells how to be a good people, added to this if that conflicts happened, characterization and setting of the story gives a real portrait of real human life<sup>5</sup>.

In this study mysterious killing is been looked upon in which Chan (1) pointed out that murders are always disturbing and some are even worse, killings were brutal, almost unimaginable in their depravity. The crimes horrified communities and stumped police — leaving questions that lingered for decades afterward, as years passed without an arrest or even a credible suspect.

Added to this, Chan (1) pointed out that victims of the so-called “Whitechapel Murders” — Mary Ann Nichols, Annie Chapman, Elizabeth Stride, Catherine Eddowes, and Mary Jane Kelly — all had their throats slashed, and most of them had their stomachs slit and organs ripped out before being dumped on the streets<sup>6</sup>.

Although there are efforts of the government investigators to conduct an investigation it lacks driving force. Lucenio (1) as quoted by De Guia in Benar News said “we hope that commitments to uphold human rights translate to

delivering justice to the aggrieved and improvements on government programs and policies, including reviewing the conduct of state agents in implementing them.”<sup>7</sup>

High-profile investigations present a multitude of leadership challenges for law enforcement, from investigators to police executives. Collectively, strong management throughout the chain of command must continually reinforce the supreme goal of the investigation as cited by Morton<sup>8</sup> (1). It reinforces the idea of Corpuz (8) that the criminal justice system is all of these institutions or pillars collectively. For it to work efficaciously and speedily, all these pillars need to work efficiently and with dispatch, in cooperation, and in coordination with one another<sup>9</sup>.

But whatever is the effort of the national government there are still reported cases of killings in the Philippines and as to Conde (1) justice remains elusive as many suspects have not been brought to trial or remain at large, this is supported by Buan (1) as quoted Cayosa “we share the fear and frustrations of many about the brazen violence, continuing criminality and appalling impunity in our country. Justice is distant and delayed for too many victims.”

Searching for justice on the killings that happened in the Philippines is elusive more importantly if the investigators are lopsided on taking action on the case they handled.

Citing the report of Valenzuela (1) "Justice delayed is justice denied." The perception of a continuing failure of the Philippine criminal justice system to deliver fast and efficient justice has inevitably led to the erosion of public trust in the government. As a consequence, citizens are laden with anxiety because of unabated criminality and violence in their communities<sup>10</sup>.

The related readings expounded and reviewed are beneficial sources that would strengthen the present research for a more expansive study on searching justice.

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs the descriptive method which is qualitatively arranged in a systematized manner through matrices and textual format. The main concept investigated in this study are a) characters; b) symbols; and c) conflict. The novel “F.H Batacan’s Smaller and Smaller Circles” published in 2015 is “the” principal reference of “the” study. The novel is a necessary source to get the full details of the analysis of searching justice for the investigators to resolve gruesome killings. Be it cautioned, however, that some gruesome lines are quoted as written in the novel to establish strong points of proof of the study.

Other sources are articles, books, research papers, and other online related readings for further references and proofs of searching justice in a gruesome killing. Finally, the researcher points out significant details of a novel of F.H Batacan to the characters, symbols, and conflict of the investigators in the Philippine setting.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4 contain the way how killing is done by the perpetrator as well as the character’s involvement in searching for justice on the killing. Chapters 3, 10, and 25 take the portrayal of how the investigators have animosity toward each other taking the cudgels in the bureau where rivalry and efficiency existed.

Table 1. Fictional Characterization

Fictional Characters	Societal Roles/Functions	Manner of Characterization
Father Gus Saenz	Catholic priest, forensic anthropologist	respected, diligent
Father Jerome Lucerno	a psychologist teaches in a university with Fr. Saenz	supportive
Director Lastimoza	director of the National Bureau of Investigations	elderly head
Atty. Benjamin Arsinas	ambitious, an attorney who works in the bureau	egotistic, single-minded, inept

Father Gus Saenz is one of the few forensic anthropologists in the country, juggling his teaching work at the Ateneo de Manila University and his church duties, his examination and identification of dead bodies of people who disappeared during martial law, and his pursuit of a colleague who has long been using his power to groom children and, worse, is safeguarded by the church. He is asked by the National Bureau of Investigations head to look into a series of grisly murders.

*Gus Saens is tall, a little over six feet—the metal autopsy table at which he is working has been adjusted so that he won’t have to bend too far over—it and he has the wiry muscularity that comes with zero body fat. (Batacan, 13).*

Father Jerome Lucero also teaches at the university, a clinical psychologist who has been Saenz's student before becoming his closest friend.

As Saenz and Lucero seek to unravel the mystery, they are thwarted by political infighting within the NBI.

*Father Jerome Lucero is about five foot nine, of a physical type that is usually described as "compact" or "solid." Jerome walks over to the metal table, where the remains of a child's body lie. Its back rests on a rubber block, pushing the chest up and out for better examination. (Batacan, 14).*

Director Lastimoza had been a trial lawyer, he served on company boards, government panels, committees of inquiry. The president had plucked him then out of semiretirement and, in a confluence of gumption and good judgment rare in Philippine politics. Appointed him to the post despite protests from many quarters that he was a nobody—and old nobody at that. He sought the help of Father Saenz to investigate the killings that happened in Payatas.

*"Now Father, it must be clear by now that I know a lot about you. Your work for Desaparecidos, for victims of disasters. I have a great admiration for you. And without any arrogance, I must assume that you know a fair bit about me as well. Perhaps you will agree that you and I share a somewhat similar view of the world. And while I've never had the chance to work with you, I guess there's a first time for everything." "I need your help." (Batacan, 39)*

Acting against out of envy and ambition is Attorney Ben Arcinas, who at first seems a stock "slimeball" character, with manicured nails, badly-dyed hair, and arrogant manners — he is by turns "defiant" and "sullen" — but what some readers might not realize is that such people are all too common in the realities of Philippines society, Arcinas is a depiction from real life.

*If you don't cooperate with me, I will.*

*You have a second chance here, Ben, but if you waste it, I'll have no qualms—not just about sacking you, but about throwing the book at you. Another child is dead because you didn't do your job right, and we can't sweep that under the rug. I'm asking you: are you going to help us—and I mean, really help, not just try to advance your own interests? (Batacan, 175).*

The characters are contributors to establishing how its portrayal on handling a murder case in their place. It is a manifestation that these characters have similarities in how Philippine murder cases are investigated. Franco (1) infers

that the families of the victims are reluctant to ask assistance from the people in the legal field. They have the notion that only privileged people have access to justice. This has been a reality for those who are living in rural poor areas. They unwillingly accepted the fate that they thought was bestowed on them. They would rather not speak than to even try to seek justice.

Thus, the novel's characterization reveals the fictional roles and functions in society that national investigators themselves cannot be trusted in searching justice in the killings that happened in the society, and in fact they used other private individual-investigators that are more credible to do the investigations<sup>13</sup>.

Table 2. *The Symbols*

Fictional Symbol	Societal Image Reflected
heart	killings where the victims' hearts are mutilated
face	killings where the victims' faces are peeled off
genitals	victims' genitals are removed
knife	the object used by the killer in butchering the victims

Father Saenz and his junior partner Father Lucero connect the clues from mutilated bodies being found in garbage dumps.

*"Viscera gone?" "Pretty much. Heart missing. Face peeled off." "Neat blade work." Jerome bends at the waist, tilting his head to one side to look obliquely into the chest cavity. "Skull?" (Batacan, 15)*

The two discuss the murder. Saenz observes that the boy's face was flayed by a small, sharp, smooth blade. They note that since there is was no blood at the site, the killing must have taken place elsewhere. While the boy had not been sexually assaulted, Jerome believes that the killer must have "some sexual conflict in there somewhere," because of the removal of the boy's genitals. The priests discover that the boys were each killed on the first Saturday of the month over the last six months.

*He quickly surveys the other injuries. "Genitals removed." He leans forward and runs the tip of his forefinger in a straight line beneath the child's exposed chinbone. "Face flayed, just like the others."*

(Batacan, 15)

*Jerome nods. “But the excision of the genitals . . . I still can’t fully account for that.” (Batacan, 16)*

*Most of the internal organs have been carved out. The penis, severed. The face, mutilated beyond recognition. (Batacan, 35)*

The brutally murdered and mutilated remains of preteen boys were discovered among the heaps of garbage dumps of Payatas and that series of murders that has gripped one of Metro Manila’s poorest neighborhoods. Authorities were immediately alerted to the presence of a serial murderer. The murderer, however, used bladed or sharp objects in order to gruesomely kill someone.

*“What do we know about the knife?” Again, very likely a small blade, about six inches long, no more than an inch wide. Something easy to handle for close, detailed work. Very sharp, no serration. And we’ve got the same grooves on the chinbone.” (Batacan, 15)*

There are several reasons why justice is not served right away to the victims of murder. These situations expressed negative conceptions about our status quo from previous years until the present. These situations are not just merely a situation in the story but rather a way to know the status of our society that may still be relevant until today, taking into consideration the handling of the cases and its recording system so to speak.

*Here, again, the poor recording of crime information comes into play, as well as the ineffectual communication and coordination between agencies and even units within the same agencies. (Batacan, 44)*

Killing is not as impossible a phenomenon in the country as popular perception and opinion seems to suggest, but one that local law enforcement has barely any capability or inclination to detect. This is because little if any, the comparison is ever made between the particulars of murders committed at different times or places.

Hence, the novel expresses the manifestation of the act of killing that is the consistent manner of the murder. The inefficiency of the investigators is also proven.

Table 3. *The Conflict*

<b>Fictional Conflict</b>	<b>Societal Image reflected</b>
man vs. man	the rivalry of the authorities in the bureau of investigation

Tasked to investigate these crimes is the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI), headed by Director Lastimosa. Due to insufficient manpower in his agency, he tapped the services of Father Guz Saenz and Father Jerome

Lucero, two Jesuit priests, assist them in getting to the bottom of these events. They have barely anything to rely on except the murders’ pattern which occurs on the first Saturday of every month. But the national investigators could not do the investigation with themselves because of rivalry and a self-centered attitude.

*It’s clear that this thwarted ambition is the key reason Arcinas has been so antagonistic toward him since he took the helm of the bureau. That antagonism has only been amplified by this plan to consult with another outsider— Saenz. (Batacan, 41)*

*Entering the civil service had a way about government employees of lesser aptitude . . . Decline to do general task . . . and devoted energies attaching himself to team leaders and supervisors who could further his career. (Batacan, 171)*

To sum it up, this is the reason why crime statistics are chronically underreported or misreported across the country because of the inefficiency of the authorities. Discrepancies have been estimated in crime incidents, with some authorities seeming more interested in staying in an office or snagging promotions than in presenting a true picture of criminal activity in their area of responsibility, thus seeking justice in killing is very elusive to achieve.

**V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

Understandably, no society is perfect. Every society is beset with its own set of issues. The Philippine society is painted close to reality as horrific as the murders perpetrated and these murders are not solved immediately because of the inefficiency of the national investigators who are thinking only of their own career advancement. Investigators tend to work for someone whom they believed can help them bring to the peak of their career. The findings of this literary research call for further investigation regarding the lived experiences of a victim’s family in order to ascertain their predicaments on why searching for justice is elusive, or yet too long to achieve.

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