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ABOUT THE COVER

Lino Brocka (1939-1991) and Behn Cervantes (1938-2013) in a public demonstration against censorship ca. the early 1980s. The overlay is from the blood-red Philippine map painted on Brocka's barong that he wore to the Cannes Film Festival.

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VOL. 5 (2020)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LONG TAKES

4 Ang Artista at Ang Falcon:
Tony Ferrer as Agent X-44 and
Eddie Garcia's Early Films As Director
Andrew Leavold

12 Peninsular/Peripheral:
The Rise of Bikol Cinema
Tito Genova Valiente

39 *Mapping Davao City's Film Culture*
Sarah Isabelle Torres

52 In/Vestments in Culture:
Two Catholic Priests on Early Cinema
in the Philippines
Louise Jashil R. Sonido

58 What is Philippine Horror Film?
A Bibliographic Essay
Jay Jomar F. Quintos

88 Rebels With a Cause:
Filipino Political Film Collectives
and Their Cinema for the People
Julian B. Bato

SHORT TAKES

48 Pelikula Union
Carla Pulido Ocampo

72 For an Endless Cinema:
John Torres's People Power Bombshell:
The Diary of Vietnam Rose
Chris Fujiwara

96 From Engkwentro to Watch List:
Philippine Cinema as a Battleground
Francis Joseph Cruz

100 Cinema and Regimes of Memory:
A Look Into Joshua Oppenheimer's The Act of Killing
and Lav Diaz's Mula sa Kung Ano ang Noon
Emerald O. Flaviano

104 Nada, Zilch, Nothing—
A Simple Defamatory Philippic
Ingo Petzke

REACTION SHOTS

76 Mahalaga ang Marami: Rebyu ng Manila by Night:
A Queer Film Classic ni Joel David
Chuckberry J. Pascual

78 Under the Neon Lights:
A Review of Brocka, Bernal, and the City Exhibit
Tito R. Quiling, Jr.

TALKING HEADS

66 On Making Romance Movies:
An Interview with Irene Emma Villamor
Patrick F. Campos

ANGLES

24 **Film Festivals in the Regions**
The Road to CineKasimanwa: Surveying the
Voices of Western Visayan Filmmakers
Elvert Bañares

30 Ten Years of Pelikultura:
Nurturing a 'Hometown Cinema' in Calabarzon
Katrina Tan

33 La Bella Zamboanga
Ryanne Murcia

36 Binisaya Film Festival 2019:
A Window into a Nation in Crisis
Grace Marie Lopez

106 **Organizing in the Film Sector**
Call to Action:
Dissolve the Academy to Save the Guilds
Wilfredo C. Manalang

109 An Oral History of Lockdown Cinema Club
Ilsa Malsi

114 Online Film Lab for Regional Stories:
Forming Associations During the Pandemic
Jerome Dulin and Joseph Arcegono

116 #WalangPipikit:
The Film Community Playbook on Resistance
*Alexandra Maria Poblete, Alyssa Mariel Suico,
and Leni Velasco*

122 Filmmakers and Dissent in the Time of COVID-19
Chrissy Cruz Ustaris

82 **ARCHIVE**
Lino Brocka and Free the Artist Movement
Elliot Stein

126 Protest in the time of Coronavirus
Neil Daza

EDITOR'S NOTE

2020 is a pivotal year that will be remembered for decades to come.

Though we began working on this volume of *Pelikula* without an inkling of the coming pandemic, we completed and released it to a world transformed by COVID-19. Such a world experienced international and local lockdowns, sociopolitical disruptions incredibly distressing in countries in volatile situations, and the deepest global economic recession since World War II. Though film streaming services boomed, film industries worldwide were severely hit. Movie theaters were closed down, film festivals canceled or postponed, and scheduled releases and productions suspended.

As we have witnessed in the local scene, and as we documented in the closing sections of this volume, the film sector tried to adapt quickly, and the community came together to support each other and draw plans for addressing the so-called new normal. The Lockdown Cinema Club went to the aid of displaced film workers. The Inter-Guild Alliance formed organically to create protocols attuned to on-the-ground experience and practice. Film festivals such as Daang Dokyu, Cinemalaya, Active Vista, Pelikultura, Lutas, Binisaya, and Mindanao Film Fest were held virtually and successfully. New organizations such as the Regional Filmmakers Network, the Luzon Regional Filmmakers Assembly, Filipino Screenwriters Guild, and AKTOR-League of Filipino Actors were established and made their presence public via social media.

The many times spontaneous coming together of various film artists and workers and the lively and sometimes heated discourses online give a picture of a vibrant community whose members are ready to move Philippine cinema forward despite the difficulties. At the same time, we can appreciate these formations and activities against the backdrop of widespread state violence and the systematic suppression of our democratic freedoms not seen since the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos, whose image is now being actively rehabilitated. During the lockdown months of 2020, the film sector, alongside other sectors of Philippine society, have registered their strong protest against unabated extrajudicial killings, illegal detentions of dissenters, the persistent red-tagging of people who voice out criticisms, the closure of ABS-CBN on political grounds, the undue pressure exerted to silence news media and journalists such as *Rappler* and Maria Ressa, and the passing of the Anti-Terror Law.

Though the present volume of *Pelikula* features diverse articles beyond its publication's immediate historical context, we have traced and limned in its pages the activist tradition in Filipino film. We felt it necessary and urgent to demonstrate at a time such as this and for posterity that Philippine cinema has had an illustrious history of social commitment—and film artists and lovers of film today are being called upon to carry on this heroic legacy in these, our own, dark times.

Again, I wish to thank the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, through the cinema committee, for extending financial support to *Pelikula*.

-Patrick F. Campos

ANG ARTISTA AT ANG FALCON:

Tony Ferrer as Agent X-44
and Eddie Garcia's Early Films As Director

Andrew Leavold

In July 2019 the Philippines lost a Titan of its cinema.

A country went into mourning, and so did I.

I was privileged to have interviewed Mr. Garcia twice: once in 2007 for my documentary, *The Search For Weng Weng* (2013), and the second in January 2019, only months before his on-set accident and untimely passing. I found him to be extremely kind and generous with his time, if a little short on details – after all, he acted in more than 700 feature films! Eddie was also at home behind the camera, eventually becoming a multi-awarded director and receiving acclaim for his films, such as the serious Nora Aunor vehicle *Atsay* (1978). Even at the time it was more or less forgotten that Eddie was a prolific director in the sixties, and had made a name for himself directing a series of spy films during the height of Bondmania as well as making an action superstar out of Tony Ferrer and an iconic character of G-2 operative Tony Falcon, Agent X-44.

Out of the eleven X-44 films Eddie directed, two topped the box office in the Manila Film Festival, ensuring the continuing success of a series of films which totaled more than 35 over a 16-year span.¹ For any film series regardless of genre, this is a stellar achievement. In a sea of imitators, Tony Falcon was the Filipino James Bond, and probably to some old-timers still is. Just like Ian Fleming's character, Tony Falcon long outlived the initial wave of Bondmania from 1964 to 1967; at final count, X-44 films do in fact outnumber the Bond series by more than 10 features.

A large part of the series' success, I suspected, was due to Eddie Garcia's direction. But where could you find those X-44 movies – or, for that matter, any of Eddie Garcia's early films as director? As with most pulp films of the sixties, copies of many of the X-44 series no longer exist in any format. Those that have miraculously survived the ravages of time and successive waves of technology are simply not in circulation via TV, streaming, DVD or Blu-Ray.² As much of the remaining Philippines' film output is in Tagalog without subtitles in English or any other language, and research for historical context is practically non-existent, those films are both inaccessible and incomprehensible outside of a miniscule circle of film collectors and academics.

With the recent discovery of two of the earliest Tony Falcon films – *Contra Señas* (*Counter Signal*, 1965) and *Sabotage* (1966), both in English, both directed by Eddie – a fuller appreciation of Eddie Garcia's work as director may truly begin. This article will delve into the spy thriller as one of the most disreputable of genres, and one readily forgotten in the arguments over global vs. national cinema. These films are pure pop cinema, and under Eddie's sure hand, then became great pop cinema. Eddie elevated his meagre material to a never-before-seen level of professionalism, sophistication, and "internationalism" as many of the titles and much of several of the films' dialogues are in English. I would even go so far to argue that the sixties, almost universally regarded as a wasteland of disposable and imitative dreck, should instead be considered the Philippines' Golden Age of Pulp Cinema, and the Eddie-directed *Sabotage* as its high-water mark.

Eddie almost never made it into show business. As a Philippines Scout based in Okinawa after World War 2, he could have easily become a career military man. His friend suggested he try out for producer/director Manuel Conde's *Siete Infantes de Lara* (1949) as one of the seven musketeers fighting Moors; to his surprise he was training for hours each day in stunt work and sword fighting. He soon became a contract player for Sampaguita Pictures, quickly becoming comfortable in action films, usually as kontrabida or villain, in which his military and stunt training were put to good use. But Eddie had greater ambitions.

Eddie Garcia directs *Atsay*
(Ian Film Productions, 1978).
Images from the Andrew
Leavold collection.

“I used to hang around the editing room, watching the editors,” Eddie told me. “Then, when I’m not acting – because Sampaguita had four units, they were grinding at the same time – I would go to the set of another director and watch him direct.”

When I started, I said I’m going to give myself 15 years, and I’ll probably be able to direct a film. Luckily it took me 12 years. I started directing at Sampaguita Pictures. The late Dr Vera gave me a break, and that’s how my directorial career started.”

His first directing job was *Karugtong Ng Kahapon* (1961), a war film starring Mario Montenegro, Rita Gomez, Ric Rodrigo and Marlene Dauden. It was followed by two films in 1963. The first being *Historia De Un Amor* with Juancho Gutierrez and Josephine Estrada for Sampaguita. The other is *Ang Manananggol Ni Ruben* for the independent Pilipino Pictures.

“Who was your main inspiration?” I asked Eddie.

“David Lean,” was his modest reply.

Freed from his Sampaguita contract in 1963, Eddie decided to go freelance, acting in kontrabida roles and accepting the occasional director job. At the time, there were two major trends in the Philippine cinema: independent outfits taking the place of the crumbling studio system previously dominated by Sampaguita, LVN and Premiere, and action films. Rough, fight-laden, populated with “goons” (the stuntmen-turned-bit players used as human punching bags for the bidas or heroes). In addition to war films, westerns and urban crime films, and their inevitable parodies by Dolphy and Chiquito, a new trend swept the world: Bondmania. By the time the third James Bond adventure *Goldfinger* was released in early 1964, almost every filming country had their own homegrown spy hero battling one nefarious organization or another bent on world domination. The Philippines, always with an opportunistic eye on popular trends, took to the spy craze like a starving man handed a balut. Between 1964 and 1967, more than a hundred Filipino Bond imitations were released³ as each action star sought to sex up his image, and each hungry independent producer wanted a slice of the action.

One of the hungriest was Tagalog Ilang-Ilang Productions run by Pampanga-born producer and president, Attorney Espiridion Laxa. He specialized in war, western and action films starring hot new stars such as Fernando Poe Jr and Joseph Estrada.

“He would gamble on new ideas,” Eddie said about Laxa. “Tagalog Ilang-Ilang Productions was one of the most successful producers during that era.” Many of TIIP’s films starred Laxa’s younger brother Antonio, rechristened Tony Ferrer after Hollywood actor Jose Ferrer, in a supporting role to Poe Jr, Estrada, Jess Lapid and others. Unfortunately for Tony, he never really made much of an impact on audiences.

That was until he became Tony Falcon, Agent X-44.

“I used to hang around the editing room, watching the editors, then, when I’m not acting.... I would go to the set of another director and watch him direct.”

Falcon was Laxa’s answer to Lagalag and Anthony Alonzo’s *Agent 69* (1964). In January 1965, the first X-44 adventure, *G-2/Taga-Usig Ng Kaarway* (*The Enemy Interrogator*), was released by independent outfit Broadway Pictures (no doubt associated with or even bankrolled by Laxa’s TIIP). Eddie Garcia was drafted as director. For him, it was the first of these new Bond imitations. The film has long since disappeared but it was evidently a hit with audiences and firmly established the new character of G-2 operative Tony Falcon, Agent X-44. He was paired with the already-established Agent 69, which Tagalog Ilang-Ilang also did with the second X-44 film, *Kalaban Ng Sindikato*. It was also directed by Eddie, only two months later. *Interpol* was the third, followed by a fourth – the earliest X-44 adventure and Eddie Garcia-directed film in existence – called *Contra Señas* (*Counter Signal*).

At first glance, *Contra Señas* is a quantum leap forward in quality from the first three films. It was the first X-44 film in color, which was considered a big deal at the time, and usually reserved for the studios’ roadshow presentations. Casted opposite Ferrer was Barbara Perez, known at the time as the “Audrey Hepburn of the Philippines”, and was hot property, especially after she was offered a Hollywood contract in the wake of her appearance in the US production *No Man Is An Island* (1962). Then there’s the film’s opening. It was a magnificently staged sequence of shots in which Tony Falcon is dwarfed by massive oil tanks as he prowls and karate chops his way through a goon-infested refinery (specifically the Shell Refinery in Batangas), while the music—Carding Cruz and his orchestra’s bongos, shimmying horns and staccato jazz stabs—propels the action along. Falcon then sets the refinery to explode, capping off an impressive credit backdrop which, although admittedly not up to Hollywood standards, is comparable to any Italian or Spanish Bond knock-off.

Contra Señas immediately kicks in with Professor Gera (Jose Garcia) offering his anti-missile formula to both the Philippine government and a shadowy organization for 200 million pesos. To ensure his personal safety, Gera deliberately withholds the missing part of the formula, the

“counter signal” of the film’s title. But he is still kidnapped by the global conspiracy’s Manila representative, Senor Galvan (Gerry de Leon and Eddie Romero regular, Oscar Keese Jr) and his parade of henchmen (Paquito Diaz, Rod Navarro, Victor Bravo). Each one has with a small army of apes in suits (Rocco Montalban, etc.) who threatens to snatch Galvan’s only daughter Vivian (Barbara Perez). G-2 boss Colonel Campos (possibly Manolo Roble, although I can’t confirm his name) assigns his top agent Tony Falcon to protect Vivian. Little does Tony know that Vivian’s rich socialite friend Margie (Miriam Jurado) is not only a member of Galvan’s nefarious organization, but is also trying to destroy the budding romance between Vivian and Tony. The counter signal is finally revealed to be inscribed on a wheel-shaped pendant around Vivian’s shapely neck. But it’s too late as the seemingly doomed lovers are grabbed and X-44 finds himself strapped to a table with a huge metal arrowhead aimed at his particulars.



Stills from *Contra Señas*.
Bottom: Miriam Jurado and Barbara Perez.

Very much a product of its time and its formula, *Contra Señas* does little to deviate story-wise from the hundred other Pinoy Bonds. What it does impart is a level of worldliness not usually seen in Filipino action films of the period, as well as a high degree of sophistication in the way the story is translated onto the screen.

“I enjoyed doing these Falcon series,” Eddie admitted in a 1978 interview in Expressweek.⁴ “They gave me the chance to explore the camera through quick pacing, fancy camera angling, all that stuff... I like my work to be fluid in the use of visuals and in continuity. I do a lot of homework even before the actual filming starts, and the script is usually pre-edited before the shooting begins.” Presumably Eddie was given more time and a larger budget than a regular Tagalog action film, and Eddie’s professionalism showed in his dynamic composition (high angles, triangular shots) and fluid action, which are in stark contrast to the usual technique of filming actors talking in a line in continuous shots.

Take, for example, the extended fight scene between Tony Ferrer and Paquito Diaz. Paquito’s character Maurice lures Tony Falcon to a deserted warehouse and ambushes him, initiating an unnaturally drawn-out and brutal fist fight. Eddie filmed much of the action from the warehouse’s mezzanine level, using low lighting to cast unnaturally long shadows. It’s beautifully staged and shot, using minimal cuts – clearly not for budgetary reasons, but instead to punctuate the violence. At one point, Tony Ferrer can be seen falling down the warehouse’s stairs, then gets up and continues to punch the living hell out of Paquito Diaz – all in one single shot.

Many of the film’s pleasures lie in watching the actors trade on their familiar screen personalities. Quintessential villain Max Alvarado, one of the most frequently used goons in the entire X-44 series, makes a brief appearance in *Contra Señas*. He is used to maximum effect as both muscle and comic relief. He plays hitman Damazol hired by Margie to kidnap Vivian and Tony Falcon. Damazol arrives at Vivian’s door in a ludicrous wig posing as her wildly effeminate manicurist. Damazol then garrotes one of Falcon’s sentries before Falcon literally stops him dead with a series of karate chops to the face. Another ubiquitous face in the early Tony Falcon films is “white goon” Jennings Sturgeon, a former GI who stayed in the Philippines after World War II to raise a family and study art at UP Dilliman. His in-law, screen villain Johnny Monteiro, introduced him to the movies, and his gaunt features and an unfeasibly thin frame often graced Eddie Romero’s war pictures. In *Contra Señas*, he adds an eyepatch and a reasonably convincing accent to his East German agent character, Alfred Kohner. Kohner is a torture specialist imported from behind the Iron Curtain to extract the whereabouts of Professor Gera’s counter signal. Unfortunately for the shadowy cabal, Gera chokes on Kohner’s cyanide-laced cigar before he can talk, leaving Kohner to berate himself for being too efficient. Sadly, *Contra Señas* would prove to be Sturgeon’s final film appearance before taking his own life.

Part of the success of *Contra Señas* is its repertory company, under the guidance of Tagalog Ilang-Ilang’s Attorney Espiridion Laxa. In addition to Eddie Garcia as director, there are writer Henry Cuino, Carding Cruz and his orchestra, the recurring characters Tony Ferrer and Manolo Noble, returning actors Victor Bravo, Rod Navarro, Paquito Diaz, and those supporting actors and bit players,

such as the “goons” of Filipino cinema like Alvarado and Rocco Montalban. Through the craggy features and rugged landscape of goon cinema, the peculiarly action-centric films of the Philippines, these Bond imitations become recognizable in itself: characters, faces, musical motifs, rhythms, authorial stamps, all are part of the iconography of Philippine pulp cinema, of which *Contra Señas* is a well-crafted example. Disposable? Probably. An important time capsule of the Filipino audience’s desires and expectations? Most definitely. The innate worth of these films comes down to an individual’s own prejudices. If you’re expecting national cinema or indigenous storytelling, you’re in for a rude shock. The X-44 films exist in an entirely different universe, far removed from the social realism coveted by serious cinephiles as it is a world of leisure suits, fancy mansions, and sports cars. They are imitations of the spy world portrayed in the West and, thus, are pure wish fulfilment as well as totally escapist fare. But as globalist as the films may be, they do have a local flavor.

Ferrer’s high-profile follow-up debuted at the first ever Manila Film Festival inaugurated by Mayor Antonio Villegas, who commandeered first-run theaters usually reserved for foreign films for 10 days beginning June 24, 1966. *Sabotage* was Tagalog Ilang-Ilang’s entry amidst stiff competition from other goon films with established action stars: two from Fernando Poe Jr (*Sarhento Aguila At Ang 9 Na Magigiting* and a remake of *Zamboanga*), the Dolphy spy spoof *Napoleon Doble At Ang Sexy Sex*, rival Bond-alike *Target Domino* directed by Danny L. Zialcita and starring Romano Castellvi, and the Jess Lapid western *Gunfighter, Triggerman* with Eddie Fernandez, and Jun Aristorenas as *Rico Soliteryo*. Incredibly, *Sabotage* became the top-grossing film, and scored the Best Action Film award. Tony Ferrer had become a bona-fide star.

Before the Manila Film Festival, local films were relegated to only a few theaters; MFF framed local cinema in a way that opened up new venues, new financial opportunities, and most significantly, granted a newfound aura of respectability for Tagalog films. “During those years, ’66 and ’67,” Eddie told me, “it was the glory of local cinema. They were beating Hollywood at the box office!”

A degree of *Sabotage*’s phenomenal success must be attributed to the perfect fit of Tony Ferrer in the role of X-44. He did indeed cut an impressive image: lugubriously oiled coiffure, stylish suits, a mean hand at karate, and while not conventionally handsome, possessing a certain *je ne sais quoi*. As a result, the distinction between Ferrer’s real life and screen image was deliberately blurred by articles which spoke of a lifestyle swinging as his alter ego. There were tales of Ferrer gambling on the casino ship moored off Manila Bay, and rumors of affairs with his leading ladies. On-screen, he’s polite and attentive to women – even the ones he’s forced to kill – if a little predatory, and evidently has the sexual appetite of a hessian sack full of rabbits. In both *Contra Señas* and *Sabotage* he does, to his credit, fall in love with the female lead, a trait

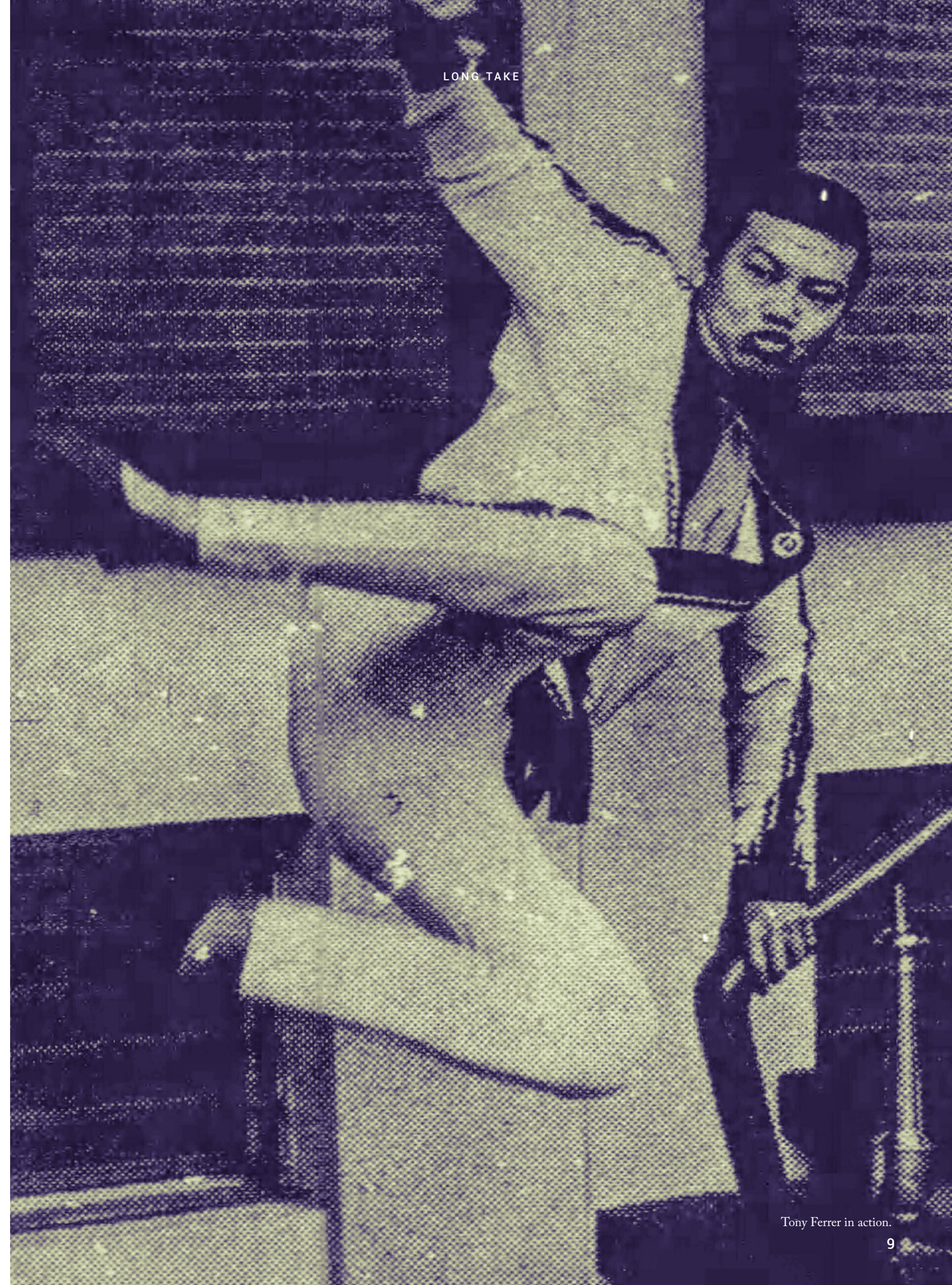
seemingly peculiar to the Philippines’ Bonds, as if to make their characters more palatable to a local (read: predominantly conservative and Catholic) audience, and to prove Tony Falcon isn’t just a rom-bot spraying romantic interest faster than Exxon Valdez.

Even without Ferrer, *Sabotage* would have been a fearsome beast, under the terrifyingly sure hand of director Eddie Garcia. As the official MFF entry, Laxa allowed Eddie his largest budget to date, and it showed in its next level of polish, film language and sheer glamor. Like *Contra Señas*, *Sabotage* is in color, and was also filmed in Scope, taking advantage of its breathtaking Baguio locations, and of its four starlets providing the sizzle: the stunning Josephine Estrada, a red head introduced in Sampaguita films in the early sixties; Alicia Basili, a hyper-exotic blonde bombshell with a Polish name but believed to be Italian and mainstay of at least seven X-44 features, and with a European accent as thick and impenetrable as her crayoned eyebrows; the welcome return of bad girl Miriam Jurado as the super-villain’s unnamed moll; and English-sounding Mary Louise Matheson in her sole film credit as a literally poisonous red-headed temptress.

A degree of *Sabotage*’s phenomenal success must be attributed to the perfect fit of Tony Ferrer in the role of X-44.

Agent X-44 is called to Baguio to investigate mysterious blonde Irna Martinelli (Alicja Basili), suspected by his G-2 boss Colonel Campos to be an international saboteur. She is, in fact, in the employ of Destruction Unlimited, a global crime syndicate headed by the sardonic, chair-bound, Bond-worthy (and possibly Communist) villain Senor Garredo (Joe Sison). Accompanied by Christine (Josephine Estrada), the stewardess he meets on the flight to Baguio, Falcon discovers that Garredo and his Destruction Unlimited are plotting to take over the country’s three main hydroelectric plants and hold the Philippines hostage. With his private army of goons in camouflage and red berets, personally trained and supervised by arch-mercenary Darmo Durango (Max Alvarado), Garredo secures all three plants and cuts the power of one station. Manila grinds to a halt, just to show Campos and the Philippine government he isn’t joking. Garredo’s goons then kidnap Christine and overpower Falcon, tie them up (Falcon to the metal floor with a nest of spikes hovering over him), and set the controls on “DESTRUCT!” while precious seconds tick away.

To a Filipino (and particularly Manila) audience, *Sabotage*’s stunning Baguio locations—Falcon wooing Christine at a mountain lookout with the sweeping



LONG TAKE

Tony Ferrer in action.



Stills from *Sabotage* (Eddie Garcia, Tagalog Ilang-Ilang Productions, 1966). (L-R) Josephine Estrada, Alicia Basili with goons, Max Alvarado.

Cordilleras behind them—were already exotic. However, the sight of Tony Falcon in a cable freight car hundreds of feet in the air locked in a fistfight with one of Garredo’s goons would have proved irresistible. Much of the film’s impact is generated by the use of three actual hydroelectric power plants near Baguio and in Laguna, in particular the Binga station in Bontoc, whose tunnels and cavernous interiors are captured with wide angle lenses for maximum impact. Then there are the gadgets – machine guns are everywhere, fitted into the back seat of a car during the Baguio car chase, and in the armrests of a wheelchair (for her treachery in informing on Destruction Unlimited, Miriam Jurado is executed with twin blasts from the seated Garredo!). Falcon’s flame-shooting ring from *Contra Señas* makes a return, as do his X-ray specs, and this time they can also detect poison from Mary Louise Matheson’s drinks cabinet.

More than the X-44 previous films, *Sabotage* ups the ante on its sophistication and international gloss by the fact that more than 90 percent of the dialogue is delivered in English. This makes for some awkward dialogue exchanges between actors whose first language is most definitely not English and, if anything, is a not-so-subtle reminder that you are after all watching a product of the Philippines. Take, for example, the scenes between Alicia Basili and the heavily-accented Tony Ferrer, whom she refers to as “Torn-knee Farlkonn.” “Are you shoore dat’s all you want frrrrrrom me?” she fizzles at a baffled-looking Ferrer, as his grasp on the English language becomes more tenuous by the second.

Miraculously, the *Sabotage* team was able to replicate their phenomenal success with their follow-up, *Modus Operandi*, at the 2nd Manila Film Festival in 1967, and was declared the top grosser and Best Action Film. Around this time, the X-44 franchise was leased out to other companies. Without the well-oiled machine, the quality evidently began to suffer. *Crackdown!* (1967) from Gretas Productions, for instance – one of the four surviving X-44 adventures from the sixties – is, by comparison to the Eddie Garcia-directed efforts, cheap (and in black and white, a retrogressive step!), flat, unimaginatively staged and perfunctorily filmed, parochial in its playing for cheap laughs in the cheap seats, depressingly ordinary, and derivative of not only the James Bond series but its Filipino counterpart.

The year 1967 signaled the tail end of the James Bond cycle as gadget-laded spy films slipped off fashion. Even Ferrer himself was making more karate-themed films by the time Tagalog Ilang-Ilang Productions entered the 4th Manila Film Festival in 1969 with *The Mad Killers*. Directed by A. Gregorio, the film didn’t rate at either the box office or Awards Night. TIIP came back, all guns blazing, in 1970 with *Crisis* – an X-44 adventure deliberately geared towards the world market, reuniting Tony Ferrer with director Eddie Garcia and *Sabotage* screenwriter Greg B. Macabenta, and stacked with dependable faces such as Rosemarie Gil, Marissa Delgado, Alicia Basili and Joy Dee, Leopoldo Salcedo, *Sabotage*’s villain Joe Sison, and goons Victor Bravo and Max Alvarado. Expectations at the 5th Manila Film Festival were clearly high and *Crisis* won the Best Director award for Eddie Garcia, but lost at the tills to Dolphy’s top-grossing jet-set comedy *Tayo’y Mag-Up, Up And Away*.

The X-44 series did indeed sell abroad, albeit in a modest way. Initially, several of the early Eddie Garcia-directed films screened in Guam, including *Trapped!* (1966), *The Assassin* (1967), *Sabotage* and *Modus Operandi*. One of the films’ selling points was that the dialogue contained more than 70 percent English. Hawaii, too, screened X-44 films for a primarily Ilocano-speaking diaspora. In 1970, an enterprising Trinidad distributor named Anthony Maharaj purchased the West Indies rights to around 10 X-44 films from Tagalog Ilang-Ilang and dubbed them into English, including *Contra Señas*. Those English-friendly versions were then distributed to West Africa, Indonesia and Thailand.⁵ Possessing a copy of the English-dubbed version of *Contra Señas* is a mixed blessing – it’s a miracle that it exists, and is at least comprehensible to a non-Tagalog audience, but they did such a wretchedly awful dubbing job that you can actually hear the sound recorder being switched on and off.

Despite Tony Ferrer’s relatively high international profile (for an actor in Tagalog films at least), the seventies weren’t kind to him. Ferrer’s body thickened along with his dinghy-shaped lips, and his karatista roles were supplanted by the Pinoy Bruce Lees like Ramon Zamora, Rey Malonzo, etc. and younger action stars like Lito Lapid and Rudy Fernandez. As the decade progressed, he relied heavily on his own company Margarita Productions to supply him with leading



Ad for *Contra Señas* (Eddie Garcia, Tagalog Ilang-Ilang Productions, 1965).

roles, evoking the word “sabotage” for a sequel in 1979. It costed producer Ferrer a small fortune and was “big” in every sense of the word, but nowhere near as huge a success as the original. X-44 was finally paired with Fernando Poe Jr in *Ang Agila At Ang Falcon* (*The Eagle And The Falcon*, 1980) and made a cameo in Ferrer’s sole foray into directing, the Hagibis (Filipino Village People) vehicle *Legs...Katarwan...Babae!* (*Legs...Body...Girl!* 1981), as well as playing Weng Weng’s boss in *For Y’ur Height Only* (1981).⁶ Aside from handing the torch to Vhong Navarro in the 2007 reboot *X-44, For Y’ur Height Only* effectively seals a 16-year cycle, and Ferrer’s casting was no accident. The elaborate spy parody draws inspiration from the X-44 series, and specifically *Sabotage*, including the flashing segues, Weng Weng’s white suit, the goons’ red berets, Tony Ferrer’s debriefing scene, and of course the X-Ray specs (although it’s Weng Weng’s ring which “detects all poisons,” not the glasses). It is quite an accomplishment for a 15-year-old film to have seeped into the public consciousness and continued a dialogue with an audience.

There have been hundreds upon hundreds of Filipino action films churned out over the succeeding decades. I would argue that none of them come as close to *Sabotage* in sheer scope and imagination, thanks to Tagalog Ilang-Ilang’s well-oiled machine at work, and with Eddie Garcia behind the steering wheel. The fact that an entirely Filipino series could last for so long and travel as far as it did is quite a significant achievement. And, as despicable as the X-44 films may appear in the eyes of the critics and academics, the films were Eddie Garcia’s training ground, and without his early Bond imitations like *Contra Señas* and *Sabotage*, award-winning films such as *Atsay* simply wouldn’t exist. Paalam, Eddie, and thanks for the pulpy, goon-addled, spy-a-delic memories.

1 I tried to compile the most comprehensive list of X-44 films, although I suspect several are still missing. Titles marked * are directed by Eddie Garcia: *G-2**, *Kalaban Ng Sindikato**, *Interpol: Hadlang Sa Manlulupig**, *Contra Señas**, *Mastermind** (all 1965), *Deadline: Agosto 13**, *Trapped!*, *Blackmail!*, *Sabotage**, *Boomerang*, *Code Name: Octopus*, *Kill... Tony Falcon*, *Frame-Up!* (all 1966), *Solo Flight*, *The Assassin**, *Crackdown!*, *Modus Operandi**, *Target: The A-Go-Go Generation* (1967), *The Specialists* (1968), *The Infiltrators*, *Seven Deadly Roses*, *The Mad Killers*, *Blue-Seal Matabaris* (all 1969), *The Pushers*, *Crisis** (both 1970), *Master Key*, *The Strategist*, *The Criminals* (all 1971), *The Smugglers*, *Secret Witness* (both 1972), *Darna And The Giants* (cameo only; 1973), *Magnum .44* (1974), *Last Target* (1978), *Sabotage 2* (1979), *Ang Agila At Ang Falcon* (1980), *Legs...Katarwan...Babae!* (cameo only; 1981), *For Y’ur Height Only* (cameo only; 1981), and *X-44* (cameo only; 2007)

2 A single Tony Falcon title, *The Interceptors* (1969), is in the ABS-CBN Archives but is rarely screened on TV.

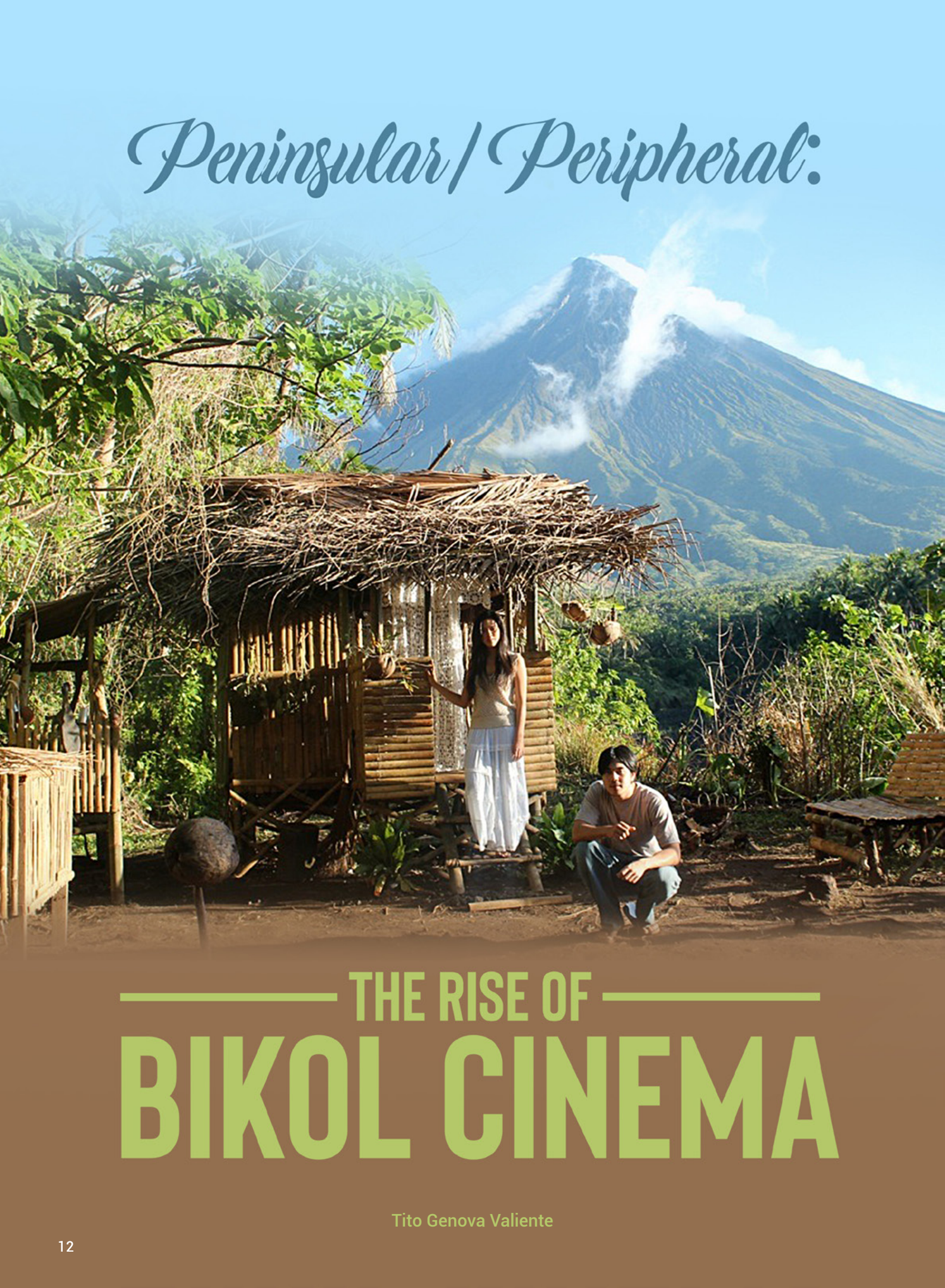
3 The Filipino spy cycle was initiated by the Cirio H. Santiago-produced Lagalag franchise starring Eddie Fernandez.

4 Justino M. Dormiendo, “Eddie Garcia: An Intimate Wook”, Expressweek, 1978, posted on the Pelikula Atbp blog: <https://pelikulaatbp.blogspot.com/2009/03/eddie-garcia.html>

5 A poster also exists for an X-44 film, country unknown, retitled *The Karate Chop*.

6 Although X-44 is not mentioned by name in the film, the trailer explicitly states that “Tony Ferrer IS Tony Falcon!”

Andrew Leavold is an Australia-based filmmaker, author, researcher, historian, and festival curator. An unrepentant and voracious fan of the pulpier aspects of genre cinema, he has toured the world with his feature length documentary and book, *The Search For Weng Weng* (2013), and has been recognized in the Philippines and abroad as the foremost authority in Filipino genre filmmaking.



Peninsular / Peripheral:

THE RISE OF BIKOL CINEMA

Tito Genova Valiente

LONG TAKE

It has been written about how, without that narrow stretch of land connecting Bikol to Quezon Province, the region could have been an island. Isolated.

Geography, for all its exactness, can never explain why Bikol—its cultures and perceived aesthetics—has always been removed far from the more familiar and accessible—all this from the perspective of the central location of Manila and the centralized points-of-view imposed and composed by a dominant Tagalog language—Quezon and Laguna territories. The languages, give and take the quaint (again from a mythical Center of neutral and, therefore, noble sounds) and piquant versions of Tagalog in the Quezon and Laguna, allow the said areas to be the starting point conveyed by that common line in the dialogue, “Luluwas kami papuntang Maynila.” It is given in that conversation that the person’s egress is a place nearby—the lakeshore towns however difficult the transportation of Rizal, the “bukirin” of Bulacan and the plains of Pampanga, the rural scenery of a Batangas or Mulanay. When one comes from Bikol, that name has to be said, spelled out on the wall of a lonesome train station or from the window of a bus with Mayon Volcano spewing just a charming wisp of white smoke, threatening us with energy instead of eruption.

Exoticized and stereotyped, Bikol, from the beginning of Filipino cinema, has always been in the consciousness of writers, scenarists, and cinematographers as a land of dark and devious charms, of women who are as untamed as its woodlands and forests, and of a language that is anomalously neither here nor there. Harden the “e” and Bisaya is captured and an object of derision. But how does Tagalog dialogue convey it as being spoken by a Bikolano and Bikolana? The aim then is to be explicit in the invention of symbols and signs that could stand for the peninsula.

Thus begins the extraordinary journey of the Bikol cinematic traditions burdened by its nearness to a codified imperial Central source of images but freed by its difference from the national character developed by the Manila literatures on film. As with all beginnings of prototyping, the articulation on the singularity of Bikol cultures is to other it in the domain of gender, politics, and cuisine. These landscapes, because they are familiar, are easy staging areas for the presentation of Bikol identities and aesthetics, of notions of a person or family that, without the need of stretching to the point of violent tautness, can still be subsumed as part of the panorama of Filipinoness. A bit of oddness and ounces of trenchant interpretations are all it needs—or accommodated for realness—for the Center to accept the Bikol contribution into the fabric of an identity it is creating out of cinemas that are, well, of the Philippines.

These processes have never been devoid of struggles and violence. Along the way, Manila cinema and its means of production maintain an unmoving core, and around it depictions of the other horizons not mainly and generally covered by that perspective, are drawn, outlined, sketched roughly but never interrogated.

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The 1940s Onward

At the beginning of the so-called Golden Age of Tagalog Cinema, which is always bandied about as Philippine cinema, Bikol is already a critical art issue. In 1947, *Sarung Banggi* was made. Two of the biggest stars of the period are in the lead: Rogelio de la Rosa and Mila del Sol.

The story is about a composer living in a small town. He meets a young woman who belongs to a landed family. They fall in love. But the man has to seek his fortune elsewhere. In Manila, he becomes famous when he is asked to sing his own composition, “Sarung Banggi.” He is then lured to stay in the city by a sophisticated woman—Rosa Rosal as Rosa Rosal. But, the man remembers his town and his beloved. He goes home in December, and the movie has a happy ending.

Well, not really. There are two main offenses in the film. “Sarung Banggi” is composed by Potenciano Gregorio from Albay. However, in the movie, another person claims ownership of the song.

The other issue is more complex: Bikol is not mentioned as a setting in the film, but the song is a Bikol song. In the depiction of the woman in the film, as played by del Sol, a problem arises in one scene when she hoists her skirt higher than what is allowed by the moral codes of that period. History plays a trick when one views *Sarung Banggi*. Presently, when a cineaste or a film scholar views the film, does he see the woman as a Bikolana? Is this Bikolananness the reason for the script to call the actress playing her to be more daring with the hemline?

It would take several more years for the same song to be utilized once more. Eman de la Cruz would direct a film using the title of a lullaby now spelled as “Sarong Banggi” (2005). Without meaning to spoil the interest of the viewers, the one who sings the lullaby is a prostitute. This is noteworthy because as far back as the 1930s, Bikolanas have always been popularly known to be a “salonera” or a woman who dances for a fee. Skilled and graceful on the dance floor, it is insinuated that she is also a grand performer in bed. The de la Cruz film exploits that gilded and guarded memory, either

Opposite page: Still from Alvin Yapan’s *Debasyon* (Cinemalaya Foundation, Voyage Studios, 2013). Images from *Debasyon* and *Gayuma* courtesy of Yapan.

unconsciously or consciously.¹ Outside of the song, a train connecting the peninsula to Manila has distinguished Bikol from the rest of the regions in the country. The train is called Bikol Express.² It has retained its name to this day even when it is no longer operational.

Bicol Express (1957) is an omnibus film composed of seven stories by seven directors, namely, Eddie Romero, Efren Reyes, Josefino Cenizal, Cirio H. Santiago, Teodorico Santos, Gerardo de Leon, and Cesar Gallardo. It stars some 34 actors and actresses, which included Fernando Poe Jr. Commentaries can be found online mentioning Poe's role as that of a psychotic, perhaps the first and only time the actor played a villain.

Geography is the *primum movens* in the film of the several stories happening to those passengers, ostensibly Bikolanos or whose kinship to the tales within the film is about departures and arrivals from and to Bikol.

The motif of travel by train reappears in 1978 when Eddie Garcia directs Nora Aunor in *Atsay*. Again, Bikol is not explicitly mentioned in the film narrative but the scene at the end with the train and the station—that predictable but still dramatic moment of love and reunion—poses to the audiences a destiny that can only be reached by that train. This is a theme that is exploited and a myth that is explored around Nora Aunor, who portrays this woman who leaves abject poverty only to be met by more oppression. Aunor, in her own epic personal history, always includes the story of a child near the train station waiting for her father, a stevedore in real life, to come home at night bringing with him pancit. This little girl would sell bottled water at the same train station.

Mention Bicolandia or Kabikolan, the toponym given to the land, and two major symbols come into view: the Mayon Volcano in Albay and The Virgin of Peñafrancia in Naga City.

Two films were made with the Ina, as the Nuestra Señora de Peñafrancia is fondly called by devotees, at the core of the theme. One was in 1970, and had Zeny Zabala, *contravida* or *traidora* par excellence, in a major appearance as the lead. For many years, Zabala dominated the screen with the legendary virago, Bella Flores, as the other woman, that

female presence allowed to wear tight skirts the opposite of her loose moral and stiletto as sharp as her poison tongue. She was the creature that made terrible the lives of beautiful actresses from Susan Roces to Amalia Fuentes. But in the cavernous Naga Metropolitan Cathedral, in the shoot witnessed by devotees to the Virgin but also worshippers at the shrine of cinema, Zabala was humility and contrition personified. She cried and repented, her tears falling, well-lighted and photographed, with the Naga cineastes and fans attesting to that conversion in cinema. Romy Villaflor directed this film, *Our Lady of Peñafrancia* (Patroness of Bicolandia), produced under NGI Productions. With such a location and subject matter, would the film be considered a Bikol film?

In 2011, a film often described as a religious family-drama would be made by Marilou Diaz-Abaya. Released by Star Cinema with the Archdiocese of Caceres and the Marilou Diaz-Abaya Film Institute and Arts Center, the film *Ikaw ang Pag-Ibig* was the filmmaker's last film before succumbing to cancer in 2012. With the Virgin of Peñafrancia at the center of the narrative, the film was seen as a film about Bikol and, as happened, is referred most of the time as a Bikol film.

That the Roman Catholic Church made a direct contribution to the production of a film speaks of the power of the institution within Bikol society and culture. Outside the Diaz-Abaya film, the church in the Archdiocese of Caceres sponsors a short film competition called the Peñafrancia Short Film Festival with the devotion to the Lady of Peñafrancia as the perpetual theme. For some reason, the films in this annual film concourse never make it to the national and regional short film competitions.

Screened Ethnicity

For years, Bikol can be found in many Filipino films as a provider of cast and crew. In the 1940s and '50s, the ethnolinguistic identity of actors and actresses was never given much importance when they were presented. Filipino cinema was Tagalog cinema; it was best to assume all the actors and actresses were sophisticates, and it was uncalled for that they would be talking in the languages of the place where they came from. All of them were actors and actresses of Tagalog films, which composed Filipino cinema. It would take many more years before film scholars would defuse and refuse the national character of these films. Patrick F. Campos, in his book *The End of National Cinema* (2016), would be one of the strongest advocates of this position.³

Would not the "Manoy" films of Eddie Garcia qualify as Bikol cinema? In an essay for the 2020 Udine Film Festival, I wrote how in 1985, a film would formalize what people would years later immortalize as the other screen name of Eddie Garcia. In an article I wrote for my column, "Reeling," in *Business Mirror*,⁴ I also talked about this Manoy as a "reference to his many sex-comedy films where he played

a lecherous man. Political correctness was not the hallmark of these films. Chauvinistic, the films poked fun at the sexualities of women." This Manoy, or Uncle or Big Brother, would cross over into sex-action films. In such films, Garcia would utter obscenities or expletives but they would be in the Bikol language, the language of his birth.

Let it be said that Garcia's Manoy did not appeal only to the Bikolanos. Other ethnic groups (the non-Manila or non-Tagalog) perceived Manoy not merely as a manifestation of the Bikolano but the sense of bravery and reverse snobbery that mocks the natives of the favored Center. Garcia, speaking a smattering of Bikol words, gave assurance to non-Tagalog speakers that it was okay to mouth words that were not understandable even when you did not belong to the accepted central group. This "revenge" of the *provinciano* is one of the major contributions of Garcia to Philippine cinema—his subversion to talk in the language not understood by the dominant ethnolinguistic group as represented by Metro Manila.

Spread through the years, Garcia's films that had palpable link to the region of Bikol could not create a ground or base from which a regional cinema could be labelled and probed. The actor traced his roots to Bikol but that was the only possible linkage to that identity. The ethnolinguistic aspects of his character did not frame the cinema, despite and maybe because of the use of the language from that ethnic grouping.

A different condition would provide the lens by which the ocular inspection of a cinema from the periphery could be visited and examined. This condition stretched into the formation of a new mode of production by providing new avenues and opportunities for films with actors using languages other than Tagalog, now officially named the Filipino language. The debate accompanying the transmutation of a regional language into one that is decreed to be the language of a putative nation would inform the development of cinemas whose sounds are not Tagalog or Filipino but still Filipino. That qualifier "still Filipino" by itself would be the source of other problematizations necessary in the formation of the "other" cinemas.

The complex conditions that would serve to usher in Bikol cinema (and other cinemas from other lands in the country) were provided by film festivals and concourses. The Cultural Center of the Philippines' Gawad Alternatibo and, later, the Cinemalaya Independent Film Festival led the banner heralding the arrival of films coming not from Manila, shot not in Manila, and with dialogues not of Manila. Cinema One Originals would follow closely and with it the other film concourses. One of the last festivals to fund and therefore add to the ground from which new, alternative cinemas could grow is the QCinema International Film Festival.,

It is in these festive and competitive occasions that the films of Alvin Yapan came first. It was in 2011 when the film, *Gayuma*, a title which refers to a love potion and



was given the English title, *Pilgrim Lovers*, was an entry to the Cinemalaya. From those three words—potion, pilgrim, lovers—descend the mythical tripartite processes of separation, initiation, and return common among mythologists. The density of the film covers an old man who is dead but cannot stop talking, a small statue of the Child Jesus who moves through spaces, and a young man—a sacristan or lowly church helper—who falls in love with a woman belonging to a different class status. In his deep love for the woman, the young man sinks into a coma. The woman goes deep into the mountain to heal this man who is not clearly yet her lover.

The film ends with no commitment, a commentary to the puerile politics of the film that has many things to say about religion and sensuality but denies a clear position, a conflation of two social domains that are already dense jungles leading into a forest of symbols, to borrow the words of anthropologist Victor Turner. Somewhere along the narrative, one senses an indictment of love not as a leveler but a real manifestation of levels in societies, of dead men who keep on talking but whose verbosity has no valid meanings in the sacramental living, and an icon hysterical and troublingly funny in its worshipful appearance.

Gayuma has actors speaking in Naga language, or what some traditional Bikol scholars term as Central Bikol. In 2013, Yapan directed *Debosyon* for the ninth edition of Cinemalaya. On the surface, the title addresses the presence of the Virgin of Peñafrancia, an image that is celebrated in what is the only regionwide Marian devotion.

Mando, played by Paulo Avelino, is an orchid-gatherer in the film. To get the blooms, he has to go into the forest. In one of those sorties, he sees a cluster of red orchids on top of a huge branch of a tree. He tries to reach for it but falls to the ground and is knocked unconscious. He awakens surrounded by *santilmo* or St. Elmo's fire, which in Bikol belief system represents the ghosts of dead beings condemned to walk or float on earth as enthralling flames.



Fr. Jess, Carla and Delfin (opposite page) in *Gayuma* (2011).

A woman brings Mando home and nurses him back to health. In the morning, this woman, played by Mara Lopez, introduces herself as Saling. She seems like an ordinary woman but her responses to questions about why she is alone in a home in the woods do not make sense. The caveat to this tendency to create elusive personas in distant places is to claim the mystery of mystery.

Debosyon appeals on different levels. For the non-Bikolano audiences, the film qualifies as a literature filled with what scholars of the '50s refer to as "local color." The Bikolano viewer has to confront the meanings of locations as representative of what they know about Bikol. The first contentious element is the language. The filmmaker opted to have the characters speak in Iriga-Rinconada. Avelino speaks this, and so does Lopez, the latter acquitting herself better than Avelino. To fans, however, there is a strange and giddy charm in an established actor like Avelino speaking in Iriga-Rinconada, a language which is othered by those who believe in the dominant, Central Bikol language. Take note that the healer, played by Ramona Rañeses, speaks in Oasnon, from a town in Albay which carries another strand of the Bikol language. To those used to the sound of the Rinconada language, it has similar tones and accents with some towns in Albay like Oas, Polangui, and other places. To the uninitiated, the actors are all speaking in one language. *They all sound the same.*

Language, however, is not the progenitor of the problematics in this film; it is that other language, the language of myths or, to borrow freely from Claude Levi-Strauss, the *mythologiques* or logic of the myth. The elements may change but the structure remains the same, an oft-quoted claim from the said French anthropologist runs. Indeed, one night, Saling whose identity has been the source of Mando's curiosity and, let us assume, the focus of his desire and love, reveals who she really is: the woman spurned, the nurturer forgotten, the seat of wisdom and witchcraft. It is as if a Jungian feminist is guiding Saling in all the glorious unveiling of her identities as academics turned expert participant-observers await the disclosure in fulfillment of their theories and fieldworks. She is Oryol, the enemy and sometimes comrade of Handiong in the Bikol epic, embraced by Bikolanos hungry for cultural identities (epic, museum, legends) vetted by the West and contested with glee by a few who believe it is a creation of the Spanish missionaries for evangelization.

The film ends with Mando abandoning his vow—a Bikolano male vow—to hug and kiss the Virgin of Peñafrancia in favor of the woman waiting for him in that small hut that the Mayon Volcano looms over. Inside that hut, the two lovers have sex while the woman flits in and out of serpentine shape and as we wonder what happens to the devotion to the Virgin. Faith and sexuality are now interchangeable not in the postmodern sense but in the old Jungian archetypal breakdown of the Woman perpetually manifesting herself as material vessels and Bodies Inviolable but nevertheless remaining the Woman. It is good to insert at this point the more radical perspective that the Virgin, a rational Mother Deity, has overtaken the power of the Snake capriciously running the affairs of the pre-conquest Bikol with the creature's ability to bring flood and destruction because the sacrifice was not appropriate enough.

If cinemas are sacrificial objects at the altar of cultures, heritage, and identity, then there is another high priest struggling with the dialogue between the sacred and the profane after Yapan, and it is Kristian Sendon Cordero. Both Yapan and Cordero are literary writers. Indeed, the films

of Yapan and Cordero have acute literariness that can be boon or bane regarding the reception of their works. Ask a film market expert, and "poetic" may sell books but not films. And yet, it is these informed literary contours in the filmic landscape they discover and uncover from the imagined Bikol horizon which separates them from films that demonstrate wholly grit and *verite*.

To follow the discourse of sacrifice, Cordero and Yapan do engage in cinemas that violate the surface acceptance and essentialism of the Bikolano as religious, docile, and *masinunod-sunod* (obedient). Their films are not into the usual narrative of a land that is happy and the people contented. Theirs is a land that cultural workers of the mainstream disposition and of local government units may not be pleased to replicate.

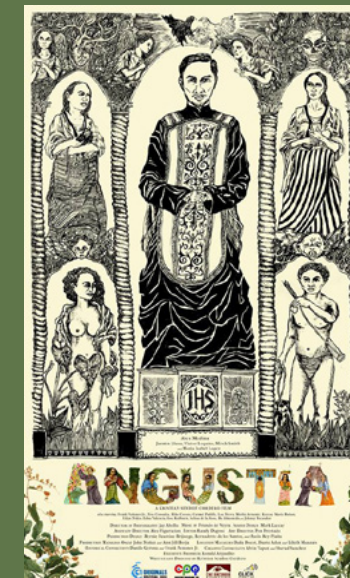
Themes of colonization are interspersed with the more physicalized responses of the indigene to the brutality of effacement and domination. Religion, which is acclaimed as the entry of civilization in formal documents such as textbooks, is questioned, critiqued, and convicted. Cordero's contribution to this discourse is in his first full-length film, *Angustia*. Produced under Cinema One Originals, the 2013 film is about Don Victorino Fernandez, a secular priest in the latter half of nineteenth century Bikol. A painter by vocation, the young priest starts to evangelize the Agta in the area and paints them, even as he gathers the plants exotic to him. He is the perfect hunter-gatherer, and the only difference is that he is no nomad as he possesses a permanent retreat in the foreign Church dominating the land.

The conceit of *Angustia* is interesting: the priest who converts the indigene also covets them not as souls but as bodies, an annexation urging incarceration before transformation. He should be with them, touch them if he is to make good his goal to bring these strange miscreants into the fold of his sacred creation. Within the friar's territory blessed against the profaned jungle or forest, the indigene is given a name, taught how to use the words that will link him or her to the divine sacerdotal gaze. This physicality of being with the natives—touching them—is where Fernandez discovers the prey in him.

The comeuppance for the priest—and the foreign ideology—of the Church comes toward the end, when in his new assignment in a remote village, a punishment for a crime and misdemeanor, Fernandez discovers the surrounding as resisting any domination or interference. The river which calls him for purification or self-immolation carries the current that brings forth the divine monster of the natives. Even when the natives have already learned the incantations to their new redeemer, the church of Fernandez is not accommodating the song invoking forgiveness nor does he understand that the village is praying for his troubled spirit. Fernandez's *angustia* or anguish is all his own as the redemption is solely up to the reinterpretation of the native whose body is pondered upon and plundered.

The tragedy at the end of *Angustia* is the tormented beginning of a religion that relies upon lost-and-found icons, shrines built out of divinations and revelations, and actions that will be ranked in terms of trespasses from the original to the mortal. The complex historical perspectives of colonization and conversion, which are historical gridlocks in themselves, are also the sources of difficulties confronted by Cordero in his first film.

Without meaning to and given the limitation of the number of what can be termed as Bikol films, *Debosyon* and *Angustia* can be appraised by the Bikol audience or those who see the link between culture and cinema as a conversation. Where *Debosyon* implicates the mythical into ordinary life and thereby extends the life of a momentary image to years into a cosmic, asynchronous past, *Angustia* interrogates the lament of a period and provides the backdrop in hindsight to the complications of histories against histories, of narratives chanted against other narratives. Shall the woman in Saling be kin to the indigene whose death becomes the cause of the fall of the priest? Exploring the questions of identities and gender is almost organic to the said two films.



Kristian Sendon Cordero's *Angustia* (Cinema One Originals, Cine Rinconada, 2013). Images from *Angustia* and *Hinulid* courtesy of Cordero.



Cordero with the cast of *Angustia*. Opposite page: Manuel and Salome in *Debosyon*.

Locating the Language

In 2016, Cordero directed his second full-length entitled *Hinulid*. The film would on record be the first film to claim ethnicity other than Filipino, with the credit displaying the label “Pelikulang Bikol.” The title of the film means “laid to rest” or “laid down” in preparation for sleep. It is never meant to be a prelude to death or its accompanying actions like burial or interment. The title, however, refers to the Dead Christ or the Santo Entierro (the Blessed Interred One). The icon, as with the other interpretations of the persona of Christ in the pageantry of Filipino Catholicism, has a disturbing presence. In Cordero’s work, the grotesquerie of icons is pushed further because the selected thematic icon is the Tolong Hinulid or Three Dead Christ found in Gainza, a town in Camarines Sur.

Of this film, I am quoting the review I wrote in my column, which appeared on October 19, 2016, in *Business Mirror*. From that essay, “Hinulid: The Sorrows of Sita and the Politics of Myth and Memories,” comes this passage:

The train is the magical motif that rumbles across the screen, connecting sorrow with rage, loss, and recovery, justice and disorder. As this train moves, a story is told about a mother who comes home to bring her son to rest in peace. But this is merely not coming, and this is merely not a train. It is the land, where mountains come alive and where distant islands are monsters that fall as stars from the sky.

In the film, Sita, when asked why she is not pursuing justice for her murdered son, replies: “Memory is more powerful than justice.”

The same essay closes with this: “The train blazes with the fire of a thousand fireflies and resumes its journey through mythical time, where monsters can never forget their sons, where villages will not be ignorant of the politics of violence, where numbers rule our destiny because sons are murdered and we turn to memory for justice.”

Outside of the performance of Nora Aunor, the singular achievement of the film is in the realm of language or languages. The film allows the presence, and sound, of several languages. The most interesting aspect of language use in the film is in the fact that, after more than five decades in Philippine cinema, *Hinulid* would be the first time Aunor would use her own Rinconada language, the language of Iriga. It is to the daring of the filmmaker that instead of imposing the so-called Central Bikol, imagined by particular classes and intellectuals and attributed to Naga Bikol and the closest towns around the city, the other actors are given the independence and luxury to use their own respective languages. It does happen that Raffi Banzuela, who plays the priest, talks in Camalig/Albay language while Aunor as Sita responds or initiates the dialogue using her own Rinconada/Iriga language. Aunor would maintain her language even when communicating with the three actors who portray Sita’s child at different age-levels who all speak in Naga Bikol. In a plaza scene, Rico Raquitico uses Buhinon or Boienen to deal with Aunor’s Iriga Bikol; in a thrift store, Noel Volante would return to his Bula language. Juan Escandor’s delivery of the Bikol dialogue nuanced his Sorsoganon inflection.

This linguistic dynamics may not be apparent and even without use for the non-Bikolano audience, but among the Bikol audiences, the exchanges in different Bikol languages astound and amuse them. This film trait has created an opportunity when shown to local (Bikol) audiences to articulate the use of languages as a point for discussion outside the aesthetics of the same film

If there is a cinema that can be utilized ideologically for the advocacy of Bikol culture in cinema, *Hinulid* fulfils that function. A major reason for this belief is the presence of Aunor, who is considered the best thespian—bar none—in Philippine cinema. It is also on the basis of the ethnicity of the film that it has become a marketing experiment that may propel a programming dedicated to the audience from which the film may generate organic and organized response and patronage.

But to what degree does language create cinema and its identities?

The fate of geography has enabled Yapan and Cordero to generate an identity for their narratives. The languages they have elected for their stories are those that insiders and outsiders would readily and officially label as “Bikol.” Cordero, with a claim that his is a Bikol film, acutely situates his stories in the landscape and soundscape expected to be apprehended by the viewer/listener.

What happens when the language used is not in the form and sound readily acknowledged by the speakers of the putative central language? What if the status of the language is contentious or its being is questioned by way of location and belongingness?

Within Bikol, therefore, a language that is deemed Central subjugates the languages in the less urban sites of the region. Social relations of inequalities are ultimately reproduced by the same system that, on the surface, aims to negate differences, dispose of marginalization, and elide the peripheral to the productive power. Such is the case of Joselito Altarejos and his films. Born in Ticao Island in Masbate, Altarejos in his films uses another language or smattering of words from the language with its most exotic label being Tigaonon, and is generically termed as Minasbate. To add to the confusion, the same language or languages in Masbate, with its two smaller islands of Burias and Ticao, are lumped under one classification—*Binisaya*.

Placed with Yapan and Cordero, Altarejos provides an existential counterpoint in his seeming disinterest to convict the Catholic Church or religion of the crime of poverty and injustice. Eluding any off-the-counter promise of religion, Altarejos makes a decision to proceed to the sociology and political science of human groups, gender and disparities, sexuality and violence in his narratives.

Island of Margins

Masbate is Altarejos’s region—a field of culture that is marked an outsider from the mainland by being an island-province. Within that status of a geographic outcast, Altarejos penetrates a geography of encounters as he marginalizes the margin by establishing an environment in another smaller island—Ticao. Note how eccentric is the practice in Masbate of referring to Ticao as isla (lit. island) when the entire province for that matter is an island.

Altarejos’ films—from the 2007 *Ang Lalaki sa Parola* to *T.P.O.* (Temporary Protection Order) in 2016—evinces place with either a mention of it or a dropping of a term or vocabulary from that place. It is, however, a kind of an esoteric game for viewers whose participation is limited to having a knowledge of Minasbate to catch a word or a phrase that signals a language source. We can also point our finger at an exoticization taking place, with Altarejos using the words of his childhood to create an atmosphere that will differentiate his works. That his films, contrary to the lucid classification under which the Bikol languages of Yapan and Cordero are cited, do not conform to the regular Bikolano motif and imaging, such as the use of Mayon and the *sili*. This nurtures a peripheral vision that interestingly elucidates a peripheral subject matter—gay love and “gay hate” and the in-between hushed production of non-manly desires for the manly.

Fair or not fair, Altarejos must contend always with the facile but limiting category of some critics that refer to him as making films that are openly gay. This open gayness, if you will, is the meta-application of an omnipresent gaze that enables the audience to peep through the keyhole and be appraised of the abuse or use of maleness between a man and a boy, as in the case of *Ang Lihim ni Antonio* (2008), or insert ourselves in between the sheet of a couple composed of a man and another man. Without the allowance of an entrance and an exit, Altarejos’ films remain closeted and checked, perhaps to better please the general audience who must be assured always that gay men—and women—will keep to themselves.

Nothing can illustrate better the contradictions in the works of Altarejos than in his film *Pink Halo-Halo*. Released in 2010, this film, by the use of language, is the very first Bikol film. Altarejos would antedate for a year Yapan in finding the spirit to use the Bikol language in the entirety of the film. Most significant in this achievement of Altarejos is that *Pink Halo-Halo* does use not Central Bikol, proffered and professed against always by Bikolanos who believe the major language is either found in Albay or Camarines Sur. Altarejos would use his native Tigaonon.

If Manila did not celebrate the accomplishments of Altarejos, could it be because the Tigaonon language being a mix of Hiligaynon, Kinaray-a, and Cebuano, was lost in the vibrant entries of the islands from the Visayas? But then you ask again, what is the sound of Bikol language? It is significant to note again that the Altarejos’ “openly gay theme” does not register itself in *Pink Halo-Halo*. Set in the town of San Fernando in Ticao, the film is about a young boy named Natoy who discovers early on the meaning of life in the death tales of soldiers from Mindanao. His father leaves for that battlefield in the south and comes back in a coffin, just like all the men who became soldiers from that place.

There is no “gay” person in *Pink Halo-Halo* except for the boy and the pink food, a point-of-view that bears more our judgment than Natoy’s. The malice and memories of our own childhood color the arm of a young boy across another boy. When death comes to the island, the women walk strong in black and young boys fly their kites, and men are buried deep in graves. The boys grow up and we presume, we assume, will long for the embrace of other men or bury them deep as their secret.

Ani (2019) is a daring attempt to make a sci-fi, a rare venture in the local film industry and a first for Cinemalaya. Directed by Kim Zuñaiga and Sandro del Rosario, the film is set in 2050 Bikol. A young boy befriends a malfunctioning robot named ANi. Together, the two set out on a journey to find magical grains that will help cure the maladies infecting the boy’s grandfather. From the past and now in the near future, the train continues to haunt the Bikol fiction. The boy, Mithi, journeys to his grandfather’s



Joselito Altarejos’ *Pink Halo Halo* (Cinemalaya Foundation, Beyond the Box, Voyage Studios, 2010). All images from *Pink Halo Halo* courtesy of Altarejos.



Father and Son, *Pink Halo Halo*.

home in a train designed to travel on a railroad system elevated and free from landslide—a real problem for the real train that once connected Bikol to the “world,” which was merely Manila.

Talk about how crude the animation of the film *ANi* surfaced when it was screened in different parts of the country. However, what animated the discussion about the film when it was shown in Naga City, Camarines Sur, and Legaspi, in Albay, was its language. The filmmakers are from Catanduanes and their Bikol language different from those spoken as the dominant strand. Many viewers said they found the Bikol odd. The dialogues were moving between Bikol-Catanduanes, “Central” Bikol, and Tagalog. The question is: Was the avowed center, which is located in the two provinces of Camarines Sur and Albay, asserting their supremacy over the other languages extant in other areas of the region? Another Bikol film was released in 2019. *1957* is about that period in the ’50s when land problems were escalating. In Bikol, a group of corn farmers are waiting for the day when they can own the land, and that land reform will finally take place. They are pinning their hopes on President Ramon Magsaysay, but it was in 1957 that this president would perish in a plane crash.

Beautifully photographed, the film was shot in Iriga or the Rinconada region. Interestingly, its manner of opening the film with a romantic imagery of a figure strumming a guitar and playing that much used “Sarong Banggi” in twilight works for the period in which the events of the film are set. If the archaeology of Bikol cinema is to be considered, *1957* taps once more into the stratigraphy hidden by the landscape of the region beloved by those excavating memories of rural societies: plaintive music, a family intoning a prayer, in this case it is “Ama Niamo,” which is the Lord’s Prayer in Bikol language, and, out in the cornfield, a man and a woman are having sex.



Kite, *Pink Halo Halo*.



Stills from Jun Dio's *Sarong Aldaw* (Likhang Rabaraba, 2012). Courtesy of Dio.



LONG TAKE

The Short Histories of Bikol Shorts

A paper on the rise of Bikol cinema can never be realized without the mention of short films. The works of RoxLee are a category all his own. In a format that is, by length and contour, considered separate in the odd way from the full-length and the documentary, RoxLee has pioneered films that qualify as short simply because that is how far his narrative will go. His works are like spurts from a mind that has taken acid or is simply acerbic. *Mayon* and *natong*, as the gabi leaves are known outside Bikol, are tweaked in RoxLee's universe, made fun of, cheekily worshipped as a send-up of all those exoticization of Manila-based ad men and cultural historians of Bikol and other sites in the periphery.

It is the irony of RoxLee's fascination with his own biography and memories, personal and cultural, all tied to Bikol and the arts movement there, that his short films and other visual experimentations lose their ethnicity. Being a breaker of codes and rules, RoxLee inserts his persona in the matrix of the cosmopolitan, with an identity that has freed itself from any local or even national framework of ideas. This is both fortunate and unfortunate. The fortune in RoxLee's art is that he is easily acceptable whether the film festival is in Berlin or in Barlin Street, in Naga City. The misfortune in this thought is that Western bias that no art movement based on the breaking of canons or the killing of forms can ever originate from a peripheral place.

RoxLee uses Bikol language the way a healer does after he has discovered a wellspring of chants and *oraciones*, so mysterious and potent, it can create or destroy magic. This recklessness organic to his art has made RoxLee a cult figure among animators and filmmakers in Bikol and all over the country, as well as in other places in the world. Strangely

enough, his style has not found a following in Naga or in his school, Ateneo de Naga, where animators have remained bound to telling tales from a popular Bikol epic called "Handiong" or "Ibalon," never mind if that epic is considered to be a creation of a seventeenth-century friar out to create his own evangelizing module.

For the cineastes and lovers of trivia, RoxLee is the friar caught by the revolution in the middle of the road chanting "Ama Niamo" and singing "Salve Regina" as he masturbates furiously in a scene in *Balangiga: Howling Wilderness* (2017). This is the RoxLee who made posters in Ateneo de Naga, which amused the students and stumped a Jesuit principal who was bothered why everyone seemed to be flocking like pilgrims before a poster campaigning for a kite-flying contest on the day of St. Ignatius of Loyola. The poster simply says: To all *Para-kiting!* (lit. to all who fly kites). But let a Bikolano read that and the magic of language happens. The splendor of languages brings us to a short film with a Bikol title but made by a filmmaker who is from Batangas and did not know much about the language. The filmmaker is Marianito Jun Dio Jr., who in his search for the Bikolano in him, travelled back to Sorsogon, the birthplace of his father. He wrote a story about a young man who, while not despising farm work, is eager to go the big city to study how to be a writer. His father, a farmer, is not happy with this. The young man's mother has left the farm to find herself and he is following that dream. In the end, the father allows his son to do what he wants. Jun Dio plays the young man, and Mariano Sr. plays the father.

In a conversation with the filmmaker after the screening of his short film, I found out that he needed to

study the language again and persisted to write the script in the Bikol language. He also shared one difficulty in the making of the film, which is the search for the appropriate music for the story. He was already on his last day when he heard a group of men singing near their yard. The song would turn out to be a folksong adapted as song by the militant farmers in the southern part of the region.

Jun Dio's film bears the title "Sarong Aldaw," a reversal of "Sarong Banggi," a song that persists in the minds of many filmmakers. It is gentle reminder, a subtle subversion, if there is one, of a song that has been mistaken for a folksong and one that has been interpreted also by those whose ideologies go against the order of things as a silent serenade to those asleep in the metaphorical night.

How do we deal then with the nine-hour drama of *Kagadanan sa Banwaan ning mga Engkanto* (Death in the Land of Enchanted Beings) written and directed by Lav Diaz in 2007? Will this be counted as part of Bikol cinema, rising from the periphery to haunt a cruel Center? Or are we looking at folklore as being "not divorced from considerations of the labor entailed in the creation of social value"?⁵ Or, is this what Landy expresses, using Gramsci and folklore as popular cultural production and reception, as an investigation into the sources and character of particular conceptions of the world, their role in enhancing or inhibiting the creation of popular culture, and how these are constructed and function as powerful incentives in creating the illusion of social cohesiveness and continuity, in inhabiting social transformation, and in working against those subaltern groups for whom change is imperative?

N.B. The author believes that many short films should be included in this study. In 2019, the Cinemalaya extended its screening in selected regions, Bikol included. A feature of the widening of the scope of the said film festival was the First Short Shorts Film Festival, where student filmmakers were asked to make films that would not run beyond one minute. The competition elicited nearly a hundred entries. Would that the contents of the films were subjected to critical analysis as well.

1 Interestingly, the song "Sarung Banggi" has always been a confusing artifact. For a long time, it has been known as a folksong, which it is not. As late as 1957, it is identified as a folksong on the vinyl record produced by Villar Records.
2 It is also an exonym for a Bikolano dish noted for its strong and sharp spiciness. The ingredients are freshwater shrimp and an abundant presence of pepper cooked in coconut milk.
3 *The End of National Cinema: Filipino Films at the Turn of the Century* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2016).
4 Business Mirror, "The subversions and splendor of an Eddie Garcia", June 27, 2019.
5 Marcia Landy, *The Folklore of Consensus: Theatricality in the Italian Cinema, 1930-1943* (New York: SUNY, 1998), p. 1.

Tito Genova Valiente is an anthropologist, author, film critic and educator. He taught in Ateneo de Manila and is a member and former Chair of the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino. He has co-authored books on Japanese cultures in Asia, war memories, and Bikol rituals and cultures. He is a columnist for *Business Mirror* and *Bicol Mail*, and an editor for *Bicol Bloc*.

The Road to

CineKasimanwa

Surveying the Voices of Western Visayan Filmmakers

ELVERT BAÑARES



The launch of the film trailers for CineKasimanwa 5 held at the University of the Philippines Visayas Cinematheque in Iloilo City—one of the three homes of the festival.

There is a misguided notion that the “regionality” of a film has something to do with geography alone—that filmmakers must be based in a particular locale to be considered regional. Delimiting cultural definitions, meanings, motivations, and visions do no justice to the independent or even the underground efforts of many Western Visayan filmmakers who produced films from outside the region. Perhaps the lack of a formal or academic definition of what regional cinema is urges many to supply their own meanings. While geography is one significant factor, it is an understanding of local culture that gives soul to what should be considered regional. But what else makes a film regional?

Rather than defining it outright, a regional cinema can be articulated by tracing its roots and seeing how it evolves through the years—if indeed it does. Let’s take the case of Western Visayas, a region that is quite young in the cinema movement but not without its feats and history. In what follows, I recount my journey as witness and participant in the formation of CineKasimanwa and similar efforts.

Because the center of the film industry has been located in Metro Manila from the early 1960s to the late ‘90s, filmmakers hailing from Western Visayas eventually migrated to the country’s capital to pursue their passions and further their careers. Others like Tara Illenberger and Ned Trespeces, both from Iloilo, started their film careers in Metro Manila. Ironically, while I pursued filmmaking in Metro Manila, I consider (as I told geographer Joseph Palis over 10 years ago), “Tagalog-centered films as ‘cliquish’ because they contribute to the de-emphasis and neglect of regional cinema.”¹ Filmmakers from the regions, especially from Iloilo, have long been making their personal films, although they lack a unified platform to program and screen their works for the local audience. There had been a handful of efforts here and there but none wide enough to gather films from five of the region’s provinces—though all these efforts are significant nonetheless. There was a need for a “united front” for filmmakers because of the “unprecedented proliferation of regional film events” and “because the avenues have been opened by the Digital Revolution.”²

The creation of CineKasimanwa: Western Visayas Film Festival has provided such a creative space for the filmmakers of Region VI since its inception in 2013. As master director Peque Gallaga, co-chair of the festival’s jury in its third edition, aptly put it: “When it comes to making independent films, Iloilo used to be so behind Bacolod. Now it’s the opposite.”³ This validation from the pioneer of Bacolod is not without evidence in terms of output. In its first edition alone, CineKasimanwa screened more than 60 films, both in short and long forms, from all over Western Visayas. Counting the submissions alone, the number of films increased by more than 200 percent in its second year, all of them world premieres—a feat in regional filmmaking by any standard. From that point, up to this writing, the film festival

“When it comes to making independent films, Iloilo used to be so behind Bacolod. Now it’s the opposite.”

“remains to be the largest region-based celebration of cinema in the Philippines.”⁴

But we would fail to see the significance of CineKasimanwa if we don’t look back to the filmmakers who, and movements that, paved the way for regional filmmaking in Western Visayas. The one that made a big impact in the ‘90s was the Negros Summer Workshops (NSW) founded by Gallaga in 1991. The most prominent among the early efforts in regional filmmaking, it gathered upcoming and established talents every summer and trained them in different workshop modules from cinematography to production design, from acting to directing. The NSW produced many filmmakers including Erik Matti, Lawrence Fajardo, and Jo Macasa. The workshop epitomized the consciousness of regional cinema as it attracted participants not just from Iloilo but also from Metro Manila. At the end of each NSW, the Crystal Piaya Awards honored the most excellent films, judged by a pool of carefully selected film industry experts.⁵

Outside of Negros Occidental, a number of efforts, screenings, exhibitions, and short film competitions held mostly in Iloilo City have been recorded starting in the early ‘90s. Student filmmakers from West Visayas State University (WVSU) followed suit in making self-produced films after I created the short films “Banal” (Holy), “Itiwarik: Talu-saling Batas” (Invert: The Temperamental Law), “Pangatlong Dulo ng Axis” (Third End of Axis), and “Apoy” (Fire) in 1994 while I myself was still a student. The student movement produced avant-garde films, however crude, shot in collaboration with schoolmates, gathering then young artists like Ian Laczi (“Taglugar,” 1995), Shugo Praico (who later on directed the TV series *Bagman* and wrote many episodes for the series, *Maalala Mo Kaya?*), Geoffrey Obe (appearing as actor notably in “Dagyang”), and Louise Gumapas (“The Baha’i Faith,” 1996). They were among the earliest regional filmmakers who competed under Gawad CCP para sa Alternatibong Pelikula at Video (now Gawad Alternatibo). I was the first recipient of Gawad CCP’s regional film award (Best Regional Entry) for my debut short film, “Banal.”

In a festival that I founded, the eKsperim[E]nto Festival of Film, Video & New Media (1999–2005), cited as one of the three earliest festivals, alongside Gawad CCP and UP Film and Video Festival, “that have encouraged the young in the (film) endeavor,”⁶ I included a regional film



CineKasimanwa: Western Visayas Film Festival 5 (2017).
CineKasimanwa posters, collateral, and trophies are designed by local artists.
Images courtesy of Elvert Bañares, unless noted.

program. In 2003, eKsperim[E]nto named Bacolod filmmaker Manny Montelibano, who would later head Bacollywood, as its Emerging Filmmaker in Focus and declared a regional student film, “Pagkatapos ng Ulan” (After the Rain), by F. L. Brillantes of Silliman University in Dumaguete City, as its winner in the Neo-Visions/Student Category.

In the early 2000s, filmmaker and film scholar Nick Deocampo, an Ilonggo from La Paz, Iloilo City, inspired the creation of Cine Ilonggo, a product of MOWELFUND Film Institute’s 16mm Workshop funded by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) Cinema Program headed by National Artist Eddie Romero.⁷ Deocampo, a leading figure in Philippine independent cinema, who directed the first full-length Ilonggo documentary, *Private Wars* (1997), supervised the production of 16mm films which screened at a major cinema in Iloilo. Cine Ilonggo produced films like “Dihon” by Alan Cabalfin, “Batchoyan sa Banwa” by Eileen Ocampo, and “Hulot” by Ma. Teresa Tejero—all of which swept the Ika-14 Gawad CCP in 2001, winning in the Short Feature and the Best Regional Entry categories.

Two years later, Joenar Pueblo’s “Hablon,” also a product of Cine Ilonggo, took home both the first prize in the Experimental category and the Best Regional Entry in the Ika-16 Gawad CCP. Another five years later, in 2008, two more Ilonggos won the Best Regional Entry with Oscar Nava’s “Hupa” and Ray Gibraltar’s “Tiangge”—the latter would end up directing one of the earliest Ilonggo full-length films, *When Timarwa Meets Delgado* (2007), and would have a series of collaborations with renowned Hiligaynon and Kinaray-a author, John Iremil Teodoro. With all these wins from the country’s longest-running independent film awards, Alex de los Santos, a prominent and award-winning Kinaray-a writer and then columnist of the now defunct *The*

Daily Informer was prompted to question the need to give out a separate award for filmmakers living outside Metro Manila.⁸

In 2010, the Ilonggo Short Film Competition was staged at Amigo Plaza Mall, implemented by a local company, The Marketing Experts (TMX), through a collaboration between its marketing head, Joy Cañon (now Cañon-Carrol), and myself. The competition was joined by many Ilonggo filmmakers and was one of the first city-wide competitions that accepted student films using only the Hiligaynon language. I helped conceptualize the competition and was in charge of moderating the jury deliberations with directors Jeffrey Jeturian, Jay Abello, Sean Lim, and French film critic Max Tessier, at the Asia Pacific College, where Lim and I taught film production subjects.

In the same year, filmmaker and lawyer Joenar Pueblo, sitting as Tourism and Culture Officer of the Province of Iloilo, staged a mini-festival of Ilonggo films screened at the historic Iloilo Provincial Capitol. There was also the short-lived Ilonggo Film Festival that screened Tagalog movies together with Bacolod-bred Richard Somes’s *Yanggaw* (2008) during the Dinagyang festival season. But it is the Bantayan Film Festival, now on its 15th year, co-founded by then Mayor Richard Garin and Ilonggo filmmaker Ray Gibraltar that had an annual production of local shorts in Iloilo. Subsidized by its local government and screened mostly in the municipality of Guimbal, Iloilo, the festival has already produced more than 50 short films, to date, using only local talents and the Kinaray-a language.

Over at Negros Occidental, Manny Montelibano’s Bacollywood filled in the lull left by NSW with workshops on various film disciplines. The group eventually hosted Cinema Rehiyon, a flagship project of the NCCA Cinema Committee, in 2012.⁹ Meanwhile, in Iloilo City, short film competitions were staged by the Film Development Council of the Philippines, through its Iloilo Cinematheque established in January 2012.¹⁰

Despite the many efforts and festivals, there was no wider avenue and more diverse programming to screen films from Region VI than CineKasimanwa: Western Visayas Film Festival, which I established in 2013 with funding from the NCCA Cinema Committee. Before embarking on the endeavor that is CineKasimanwa, I sought the endorsement and support of my mentors Nick Deocampo and Peque Gallaga as well as visual artist Rock Drilon, who was a strong supporter of Cinematheque Iloilo and is one of the leaders in the Ilonggo visual arts scene.

The film festival was intended for, and to be ran by, Western Visayan filmmakers. The first edition was successfully implemented with the support of Tanya Lopez, Executive Director of The Negros Museum, who served as the conduit of the festival; Atty. Helen J. Catalbas, Regional Director of DOT-Region VI, who would later on co-found with me the Western Visayas Film Grants Program—the first and still the only one of its kind outside Metro Manila; August Andong

CineKasimanwa is the first festival with programs specifically created for and by children, for indigenous filmmakers, and for genre films. The initial films programmed were mostly stories of hope, mysticism, and devotion—three of the many distinct dispositions of the people from Region VI.

and Ruth Pequierda, both formerly with CCP and now based in Iloilo; filmmakers Tara Illenberger and TM Malones from Dumangas and Maasin, Iloilo, respectively; Frances Lacuesta, then OIC of the UPV Cinematheque; Daniella Caro, then marketing officer of FDCP’s Cinematheque Iloilo; Carmencita Robles (+), then Dean of the College of Communications of the WVSU and a TV director who did shows for IBC TV-13 Iloilo; Louise Macoco Lim and Elsie Flores Gancia, faculty members of John B. Lacson Maritime Foundation University; Tin-An Gaitana, Ronie Demonteverde, Chiqui Pamong of the National Economic and Development Authority; Eric Divinagracia of University of San Agustin; Ma. Luisa Nalupano, the representative of Guimbal filmmakers; Dr. Lenny Mucho of Central Philippine University; and Joenar Pueblo, co-founder of the Western Visayas Filmmakers Network, who personally challenged me to one day come home and do something for the filmmaking community in Iloilo.

The press and media in Iloilo were most generous in their support of CineKasimanwa. They featured comprehensive articles and news segments that gave positive reviews of the festival. Equally important was the support of Marilie Biboso and Troy Camarista in helping facilitate a smooth partnership between CineKasimanwa and SM City Iloilo. While CineKasimanwa pays for screening fees, SM City Iloilo gives us discounts even until the present year (2020).

The major goal of CineKasimanwa for its first year was to survey filmmakers and screen as many existing Western Visayan films as possible. But instead of declaring established filmmakers to be its Filmmaker in Focus, I opted to bring lesser known filmmakers from Guimbal to the regional limelight, making them the filmmakers in focus during the debut year of CineKasimanwa. It was the first time that the Guimbal films and its filmmakers were programmed in such magnitude. In addition, among the films that were also part of the first edition of the festival were Frances Lacuesta’s Gawad URIAN-nominated “Luna” (2004), Ned Trespeces’s “Local Girls” (2011), TM Malones’s “Salvi, Ang Pagpadayon” (2013), Peter Solis Nery’s “Gugma Sa Panahon Sang Bakunawa” (2012), Jay Abello’s *Pureza: The Story of Negros Sugar* (2011), and Tara Illenberger’s *Brutus: Ang Paglalakbay* (2008). Except

for Abello, who is from Bacolod, all the others are from Iloilo.

While meeting with filmmakers from all over the region was a huge task, I scheduled a series of individual meet-ups prior to the festival in order to survey films and filmmakers, connect many dots, and suggest names unknown to the organizers. It took two weeks of daily meet-ups with filmmakers, teachers, student leaders, school heads, art curators, and film enthusiasts to come up with the curated program. With the goal of unification in mind, especially since the festival ran a week after Typhoon Yolanda struck Iloilo City, the theme we adopted was “Aton ini tanan!” (This is ours!).

CineKasimanwa is the first festival with programs specifically created for and by children, for indigenous filmmakers, and for genre films (horror, sci-fi, fantasy, folklore, etc.). The initial films programmed were mostly stories of hope, mysticism, and devotion—three of the many distinct dispositions of the people from Region VI. It was the first time that film programs were titled in Hiligaynon and Kinaray-a. “Diin Kamu Padulong?” (shorts for children); “Mayad Man!” and “Saragang” (shorts from Guimbal); “Ang Tanan May Ginhalinan” (shorts by WVSU students); “Mga Matayog Nga Pantasya, Mga Matuod nga Istorya” (experimental and documentary shorts); and “Moo-moo-an sa Biyernas Atrese! Maghalong!” (horror shorts). CineKasimanwa was also the first festival to feature the short films of Peque Gallaga. Two of his acclaimed shorts—“Bayi sa Aparador” (Lady in the Closet, 2013) and “Tabang” (Help, 2016)—were screened in CineKasimanwa.

The opening and closing films of CineKasimanwa’s first edition were by the Ilonggo pioneers, those whom we consider as godfathers, to serve as symbolic book shelves binding all filmmakers as one. Nick Deocampo’s *Cross Currents: Journey to Asian Environments* (2012) opened the festival, and Gallaga and Lore Reyes’s *Sonata* (2013) closed it. More than 60 films—all homegrown—were screened, and this was historic in many ways because never has this number of Ilonggo films been gathered under one festival, screened in four major venues (SM City Iloilo, UPV Cinematheque, Cinematheque Iloilo, and WVSU-COC AVR), and toured in all the provinces of Region VI.



SM Cinema Iloilo is one of CineKasimanwa's homes, where the film festival has reached a record-holding 5,000 audience members—all year-round across Western Visayas' provinces.

The year that followed (2014) doubled the feat and was considered a major year of harvest for Ilonggo films. By then, Ilonggo cinema was considered to have experienced a second wave of “reaping.” More partners came in after the departure and migration of a few. Prof. Alfredo Diaz, an actor and cinephile, took over UPV Cinematheque, and later on, Prof. Martin Genodepa, an Ilonggo visual artist and sculptor, was appointed Vice Chancellor of UP Visayas—both would play an active role in promoting and programming the festival in UPV Cinematheque which was donated by the Exmundo family who are also active supporters of CineKasimanwa.

In 2014, four of Iloilo’s major filmmakers, who had not shot their own films in more than seven years, held the world premieres of their new shorts in CineKasimanwa. Joenar Pueblo, the director of “Ang Romansa ni Tinyente Gimo kag Marya Labo” (2010) and *Dagyang* (2008), considered to be the first full-length film from Iloilo, came to CineKasimanwa with “Gamhanan,” his first in a series of shorts that explored the theme of power. TM Malones, after his local hit film “Salvi: Ang Pagpadayon,” came back with two documentaries, “Dapya Sang Paglaum,” about the life-changing experiences of Yolanda survivors in Isla Naborot and “Maninina” (both 2014) about the dreaded local snake of Western Visayas. Malones would later be selected in Cinemalaya and serve as cinematographer for other filmmakers. Ray Gibraltar, director of *Wanted: Border* (2009), attended the festival to re-present his full-length film, *Brod* (2010), and the short film, “Ang Bayu ni Manilyn at ang Pekeng Duck” (2011), about a young female Panay Bukidnon who moved to Intramuros, Manila.

Tara Illenberger, one of the most awarded Ilonggo

filmmakers and the only one who has won an URIAN, a FAMAS, and awards from Cinemalaya and ToFarm film festivals, came to Iloilo that same year and shot her first short film in Hiligaynon, “Gaid,” which had its world premiere at CineKasimanwa 2014. The film, starring Ilonggo theater and film actors Nathan Sotto and Alain Hablo, was about a crime of passion. Illenberger, who has, to date, directed three full-length films (*Brutus*, 2008, *Guni-guni*, 2012, and *High Tide*, 2017), has edited more than 70 features including Gil Portes’s *Saranggola* (1999), Joel Lamangan’s *Mano Po* (2002), and Jeffrey Jeturian’s *Bridal Shower* (2004).

CineKasimanwa’s second edition opened with *Norte, Hangganan ng Kasaysayan* (2013) directed by acclaimed filmmaker Lav Diaz, whose parents are reportedly from Leon, Iloilo, and closed with “Asin” (2012) by Ilonggo filmmaker Aimee Apostol-Escasa. Other full-length films programmed were Jay Abello’s *Namets!* (2008), Ned Trespeces’s *Trabaho* (2005), Kip Oebanda’s *Tumbang Preso* (2014), and Baby Ruth Villarama’s *Little Azkals* (2014)—the last two were produced by an Ilonggo, Albert Almendralejo.

Among the short films from Guimbal that were programmed were Joebert Casas’s “Wow” (Best Film of Bantayan 2014), an atmospheric horror film; Eden Gilpo’s “Paranublion,” (2014) which is based on the folkloric zombies of Western Visayas; Bob Perez’s “Bagangan,” (2014) a take on superheroes using the local beetle popular in the interiors of Iloilo; and Arnold Casas’s riotous comedy, “Nice Juan” (2014), best enjoyed in Kinaray-a language.

Other well-received shorts were by emerging filmmakers from Iloilo, Bacolod, and Guimaras. Local film critic Reymundo Salao’s sophomore short, “Bantay Salakay,”

(2014) which has its distinct brand of deadpan comedy, also premiered that year. Filmmaker and poet Noel de Leon, the first filmmaker to have made a film in his hometown of Guimaras, made “Handem,” (2014) which is linked to his previous short “Kapawa” (2010)—both works echoing questions about hope and fulfillment in the island of Guimaras. Bacolod filmmakers Rosswil Hilario’s “Luksong Tinik” (2012) and Myish Endonila’s “Unod Bukog” (2017) provided a departure from the familiar social realist from their city.

The voices and visions of the younger generation of filmmakers from Bacolod and Iloilo were evidently braver—that is what their films tell us. In CineKasimanwa 2014, Angelica Paviliar’s “Reverie”; Blessel Joy Toledo’s “Yuhom”; Steven Asaph Reasol’s “Silong”; Vincent Montaña’s “Kawatan”; Venz Erick Losbañes’s “Sirom”; and Gino Genson’s “Half Measures” merited discussions. “Reverie,” “Yuhom,” and “Silong,” in particular, were winners in the Bakunawa Cinema of the Young (2014), a film festival I founded focusing on first-time filmmakers with fresh ideas.

The years that followed became brighter for CineKasimanwa and Western Visayan Cinema as filmmakers formed groups in their respective schools and communities. A number has since been programmed at Cinemalaya, Cinema One, and other international film festivals. With new records, an increase in audience attendance, the coming of more fringe programs, and the provision of the first-ever regional film grants to have one representative for every province in Region VI, CineKasimanwa, despite challenges, continues to be an enthusiastic and supportive venue for screening and promoting Western Visayan cinema with aims to deepen the people’s appreciation and awareness of Ilonggo culture and heritage. CineKasimanwa believes that local stories are a great reflection of who we are as a people. Our dreams, aspirations, lamentations, emotions, and hopes are found in locally produced films, as expressed in the tagline of CineKasimanwa 2014: “Aton mga sugilanon. Kay kita ang Sintas” (Our own stories. Because, we are cinema.). Our local filmmakers—with films so diverse—define the ever-changing, multiple meanings of regional cinema.



Stakeholders and jury members of CineKasimanwa 4 (2016). (L-R) Production designer Adrian Torres, then FDCP Executive Director Wilfredo Manalang, Negros Museum Executive Director Tanya Lopez; FDCP Chair Liza Diño; the author; DOT-Region 6 Regional Director, Atty. Helen J. Catalbas; QCinema Festival Director Ed Lejano; Filmmaker Jeffrey Jeturian; then chair of the NCCA Cinema Committee Teddy Co. Courtesy of Atmos.ph.

1 Joseph Palis, “Cinema Archipelago: A Geography of Philippine Film and the Postnational Imaginary” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, 2008), 137.
2 Ibid., 138.
3 From Gallaga’s speech, 3rd CineKasimanwa Awards Night, Dec. 2015.
4 Rhick Lars Vladimer Albay, “Over 130 homegrown films find home in Iloilo’s regional film festival,” *Rappler*, January 18, 2020.
5 I was the Project Development Officer of the NCCA Cinema Program that helped fund the NSW in the late 1990s and was eventually invited twice to be part of the jury.
6 Johven Velasco, *Huwaran/hulmaban Atbp: The Film Writings of Johven Velasco* (Quezon City: The University of the Philippines Press, 2009), 168.
7 In 1996, Romero established and served as Head of the Directorate of the NCCA-FAP Cinema Values Reorientation Program, while Deocampo acted as the program’s consultant. It funded a good number of film initiatives and training programs including Cine Ilonggo.
8 In a column on the film “The Cockroach Principle” (Gawad CCP Best Regional Entry) published in 2005.
9 Gladys Reyes, “Bacolollywood: Cinema Rehiyon 2012 to Showcase the Best of the Regions,” *Experiencenegros.com*, January 31, 2012.
10 Albay No Filter, *Panay News*, Jan. 10, 2017.

Elvert Bañares is an independent filmmaker, teacher, and festival programmer. He was the first regional manager of Cinemalaya in Visayas, head of the NCCA-Cinema Program secretariat, member of its National Executive Committee, and co-founder of the Western Visayas Film Grants Program, ASEAN Film Festival and Bakunawa Cinema of the Young.

10 years of pelikultura

Nurturing a “Hometown Cinema” in Calabarzon

Katrina Tan

Always finding new ways to experience cinema, Pelikultura held an open-air film festival in 2016.

What started as a small gathering of student filmmakers in Calabarzon, the region clustering the provinces of Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon together, has turned into an annual film festival called Pelikultura. It was one of the earliest film festivals funded by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) under their Cinemas in the Regions program. Except for one year when it was held in Cavite, Pelikultura is held annually at the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) campus in Laguna. It is run by faculty and student volunteers of pelikuLAB, the media arts division of Department of Humanities’ Samasining laboratory program. Its funding comes from various sources but mainly the NCCA, the Film Development Council of the Philippines, and the UPLB administration. Now on its tenth year, Pelikultura has been held to promote and develop filmmaking in Southern Tagalog areas located in mainland Luzon.

Mainly student films were submitted in the early years of the festival. This is because the region has many colleges and universities that offer mass communication courses, including filmmaking. To come up with a program, we had to visit several of these schools to solicit films. In later years, as the festival established itself more in the region, these school-to-school outings lessened, and we received film submissions online or via courier. At first we had three sections: narrative, documentary, and experimental, but we removed these after a few years. Since we receive submissions from nonprofessional directors based in Calabarzon, we put up two competitive sections, the student and the open category.

All kinds of films, whether live action, animation, narrative or documentary, compete together in these sections. Every year, the number of submissions swells, mostly from university students and nonprofessional filmmakers. This upturn is perhaps a result of the relative affordability and accessibility of digital technology necessary to make a film. But it could also be the thrilling and empowering feeling of controlling the means of film production: filmmakers have found the freedom to tell stories that matter to them with digital technology. While many of the films the festival has

What Pelikultura has succeeded in doing all these years is providing our regional filmmakers the space to show their films, no matter what their themes or styles may be.

shown are indeed made in Calabarzon, what remains difficult to ascertain is whether they can be said to constitute a certain “Calabarzon cinema,” or more appropriately, a “Southern Tagalog cinema.”

This concern has preoccupied us since the first years of the festival, and in the 2018 edition, it was raised again by an invited speaker, film scholar Paul Grant. He asked whether there was indeed a “Calabarzon cinema” to speak of. I responded in the affirmative, yet I found it difficult back then (and even now) to identify its defining characteristics. Perhaps, I did not need to, as cinema continuously evolves, and Pelikultura is where Southern Tagalog cinema can indeed develop and evolve.

Before Pelikultura’s maiden edition, I was invited to program films from Calabarzon in the second instalment of Cinema Rehiyon (CR) in 2010. Film archivist Teddy Co, who was CR’s programmer, told me that he initially thought films from Calabarzon do not differ from those made in Manila since they use the same language, which is Tagalog. Because the region lies so close to Metro Manila, the latter’s colossal Tagalog cinema casts a wide shadow over Southern Tagalog cinema in Calabarzon. Some filmmakers who joined Pelikultura were also trained in film schools or workshops in Manila, and these trainings ultimately influence their film style and aesthetics. Co later told me, however, that there’s something distinct with the films made in Calabarzon; he realized this when he saw short films from Batangas and Cavite. The narratives are rooted in local cultures, the Tagalog spoken sounds different, and the texture of the region’s urban and rural spaces look and feel very particular on the screen.

These germinal ideas on Calabarzon films drove us in pelikuLAB to frame Pelikultura as a festival that encourages regional filmmakers to film in their own backyard, as it were. Pelikultura frames “Calabarzon cinema” as “hometown cinema,” which embraces local culture and cultivates a meaningful relationship with it through cinema. The theme of Pelikultura’s second edition in 2012 encapsulated this in the slogan, “Sine sa’min” (Cinema in Our Town). The submission guidelines also emphasized the inclusion of cultural elements in the films submitted.

The films, however, do not always have these cultural elements. What Pelikultura has succeeded in doing all these years is providing our regional filmmakers the space to show their films, no matter what their themes or styles may be. This function may not have immediately let us achieve our vision,



Filmmaker delegates and festival staff during the first Pelikultura in 2010. Photos courtesy of UP Los Baños PelikuLAB.



Left: Poster for Pelikultura 10.

Right: Film workshops are a mainstay in Pelikultura programming. In this photo, Mindanaoan filmmaker Arnel Mardoquio conducts a directing workshop for Calabarzon filmmakers.

but I believe the festival has helped new filmmakers gain confidence with their work and develop their interest in the craft, both of which are necessary when they decide to turn their attention to stories waiting to be told right in their own backyard.

The emphasis on cultivating a cinematic relationship with the local culture takes more significance in the context of the region's proximity to Metro Manila. The capital's vibrant film culture attracts filmmakers. Those who want to get serious with the craft and aspire to be professionals move and take their practice in the crowded Tagalog cinema produced in Manila. When this happens, the growth of cinema in the region is somewhat stalled, although new filmmakers are sure to produce new works about their local culture.

Had it not been for the CoVid-19 pandemic, we would have presented the 10th Pelikultura last April 2020. We had envisioned this milestone edition to set a slightly different direction for the festival. For one, we implemented new submission guidelines, abolishing the two categories separating the student works from those by the nonprofessionals. Another move was to emphasize the film's content—that the films should clearly relate to any aspect of Southern Tagalog culture and society. For this, we created the "Southern Tagalog Shorts Premiere." We also removed the residency requirement; this means that anyone who has a film about Southern Tagalog but does not necessarily reside there can join Pelikultura. This provision complicates how we define "Southern Tagalog cinema," that it's not only composed of films made by directors located in the region. We received less than our usual number of entries, but the 48 submissions for this edition were an encouraging response.

Prior to the lockdown, we had selected the finalists for the short film competition. The program promised to be exciting, having all short films articulate unique perspectives on what it means to be embedded in Southern Tagalog cultures. Now that Pelikultura's emphasis has shifted from the filmmakers to the films as basis for submission, I expect the programs to stir up stimulating discourse on Southern Tagalog cinema.

Another direction for the festival is to shore up our audience development program. We want to develop a critical audience as we believe it has a role to play in shaping "Southern Tagalog cinema." Previous festival editions already

included programs for audience development, such as film appreciation talks, film lectures, panel discussions with filmmakers, and the like. Post-screening discussions with experienced filmmakers presenting their films in Pelikultura had created connections with and among the audience. We had invited respected film critics, scholars, programmers, directors, writers, editors, cinematographers, and producers to engage our region's filmmakers and audiences.

As a university-based festival, majority of our audience had been students. For the next years of Pelikultura, we wish to reach more audiences outside the university campus, particularly the residents of Los Baños and neighboring towns. Pelikultura intends to strike a balance in its program to both champion our regional filmmakers and nurture critical audiences.

Part of this rethinking of the festival's direction is the expansion of film programming. In recent years we received submissions for our exhibition section from filmmakers in neighboring Asian countries, North America, and Europe. In 2019, Pelikultura had film programs with Asian shorts for the first time. Inspired by the continued submissions from filmmakers outside the country, we decided to institute a regular section for foreign-language short films to expose our festival audience to other cinematic traditions and styles. Of course, this was not at the expense of chucking out the space we reserved for films from other Philippine regions. As is the case in previous editions, Pelikultura proudly presents excellent regional films from other film festivals.

As it enters a new decade, Pelikultura soldiers on to serve as a nurturing space for filmmakers in Southern Tagalog who create works that celebrate, interrogate, problematize, or subvert local cultures. It will not cease to show a diverse range of films—from light, heart-warming films to unsettling or rebellious ones—that enrich and challenge our audience's views and sensibilities. It will remain a space to create a cinema of one's home.

Katrina Tan is a PhD Candidate at the School of Film, Media, and Journalism at Monash University in Australia, and a faculty member at the University of the Philippines Los Baños. She writes on regional cinema, gender, and migrant representations in Philippine cinema. She is the founding festival director of *Pelikultura: The Calabarzon Film Festival* held annually in Los Baños, Laguna.

La Bella Zamboanga

Ryanne Murcia



The Las Plumas are the official trophies of Festival de Cine Paz.

It was September 9, 2013; the sun had just risen when I awoke to the sound of fireworks and my phone ringing. It was my mom calling to tell me that Zamboanga City, where I live, is under siege. What I thought were fireworks were actually the sound of guns as helicopters approached low, almost touching the roof of my apartment toward ground zero. It was that very day I decided that something has to be done, that my La Bella Zamboanga will not be remembered by this day alone, and that it will rise strong, beautiful as ever, and people will remember the resilient beauty it possesses.

Zamboangeños are not privy to the idea that people are afraid to visit our city. The news holds the truth. Our beloved city has faced political unrest, killings, kidnappings, sieges. It has seen deaths brought by terrorism. These are the truths we usually see on the news. And yes, they are true. But I believe that the beauty of our stories is enriched by our experiences. The stories of hope, unanimity, and humanity that are not seen on television are but the truth about our lives beyond the horrors of our past.

What people do not know is that Zamboanga is a multicultural society, cradling the most unique Filipino cultures and traditions. It is home to the Subanons that live by the mountain rivers; the sea gypsies that are the Badjaos, the Yakans, and Tausugs whose exotic cuisine give pride to the land; the friendly Bisaya people; and the Spanish-speaking Chavacanos who are natives of Zamboanga. These people with different religions, cultures, and traditions create a unique place that is both peculiar and inspiring, and to see the people interact with one another in harmony and respect makes Zamboanga enchanting.



The author, Festival President Fr. Angel Calvo CMF, and Ateneo de Zamboanga University President Fr. Karel San Juan, presenting the Pluma de Paz, the highest award of the festival.



The author, together with the jury and speakers, at the closing ceremony of Festival de Cine Paz 2019.



The main viewing hall of Festival de Cine Paz Mindanao 2019. Photos courtesy of Festival de Cine Paz Mindanao.

It took four years for me to have the opportunity to create a platform to share the beauty of our stories in this western part of Mindanao. A platform dedicated to telling the most unique almost illusive truth: peace.

The diverse people of Zamboanga inspired the creation of the Festival de Cine Paz Mindanao, an annual film festival held in Zamboanga City, that showcases different stories of peace. It aims to support and strengthen the vision of sustaining the journey for peace: exploring its different dimensions, expressions, and forms through the cinematic medium. It is organized and presented by the Ateneo de Zamboanga University (ADZU), Zamboanga-Basilan Integrated Development Alliance, Inc. (ZABIDA), Peace Advocate Zamboanga (PAZ), Hombrella Pictures, and the Joint Task Force Zamboanga (JTFZ). It is held in partnership with Film Development Council of the Philippines (FDCP), the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), and the City Government of Zamboanga.

The festival was founded in 2017 by a Spanish priest, Father Angel Calvo CMF, Maj. Ariel Lobusta, and myself, a filmmaker. The idea for the festival began with our desire to create a platform to promote peace. And the passion I have for film sounded like a great idea to promote peace in a more communal manner. It took less than 20 minutes of acquaintance and laughter after spilling coffee on my white shirt that the idea was put into action.

Fr. Calvo became the de facto president of the group, while I became the festival and artistic director. In solidarity with our people, we decided that the festival should take place together with the Mindanao Week of Peace celebration that happens every last week of November until the first week of December, the perfect season to carry our cause.

The festival does not only program films with themes about peace and conflict. It is interested in programming films that offer strong perspectives on culture, tradition, religion, identity, diversity, humanity, social issues, and even social experiments. The festival is always looking for fresh and exciting cinematic presentations on these themes, thus

our interests extend across all cinematic expressions, genres, disciplines, and hybrid forms.

The festival believes that the theme of peace is not exclusive to the stories about peace and conflict but rather is open to all kinds of stories including the most personal stories in which we can see a reflection of the greater social, economic, and political issues we experience everyday. The festival's fascination with the broad spectrum of human experience comes from its core intention to discuss peace and understand more deeply the meaning of it.

The festival curates short films for competition and feature films for exhibition from all over the country. The festival is organized into various sections: the Selecciones Oficiales, Charlas de Cine, and Mesa de Cineastas. The Selecciones Oficiales (Official Selections) is divided into three sections: the Pluma de Paz, La Bella Peninsula, and Horizonte. The Pluma de Paz is the main competition of the festival that curates films from all over the country. La Bella Peninsula is a competition section exclusive to filmmakers from the Zamboanga Peninsula and the islands of Basilan, Tawi-Tawi, and Sulu, so that we can showcase their stories and encourage the development of cinema in the region. And Horizonte is a special section dedicated to championing pressing issues in the country that the festival would like to highlight. This section changes its subject of interest every year.

The Charlas de Cine is a series of workshops and master classes given by prominent figures in the Philippine film industry. And finally, Mesa de Cineastas is a special roundtable discussion with the filmmakers in attendance to talk about their films and their artistic processes. The festival believes that it is important for filmmakers to share with our audience their personal thoughts and artistic processes, because as much as the festival believes in the power of film to affect people, it also believes that film is a springboard for dialogue. Thus, we create a space for our audience, patrons, guests, and filmmakers to interact and engage in intellectual conversation.

Both the inaugural and the sophomore year of the festival was opened by a film by Sheron Dayoc, a native of Zamboanga. This was a conscious decision by the festival organizers to celebrate the cinema of the south and to signify the coming of the brave voices of the southern filmmakers. The films *The Crescent Rising* (2015) and *Women of the Weeping River* (2016), stories of Mindanao's forgotten people caught in between crossfires of unwavering faith and ambiguous history, represent well the values of the festival.

The festival takes pride in making a conscious effort to discuss the most sensitive and controversial issues through our programming, confronting the very society where the festival takes place, that is, Zamboanga. The festival particularly invites key people holding important positions in society, may they be politicians, religious leaders, community leaders, and officials of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police, to immerse with our audience in the experience of cinema and the truth it holds. With this, we have forged solid relationships with these people and the community to better create sustainable engagements for peace.

The third and most recent edition of the festival opened with Adjani Arumpac's *War Is a Tender Thing* (2013), a retelling of the blood-soaked story of war-torn Southern Philippines from the memories of the filmmaker. The festival considers *War Is a Tender Thing* as a "coming home" film in which the filmmaker reimagines the various facets of identity and explores the possibilities of engaging with more people so that they would consider our festival's cause and discuss, interpret, and understand peace in all its complexity.

The festival continues to grow as evidenced by the 800 films that were submitted for selection in its last edition. And because of the submissions we received from outside the Philippines, the festival has decided to announce that on its fourth edition, it will be known as Festival de Cine Paz

International, welcoming a selection of films from different parts of the world as well as new ideas and perspectives on cinema and peace.

Our audience has also grown beyond what we ever imagined, with over 2,500 watching the films we programmed in our last edition. The support of the community, filmmakers, and our partners allows the festival to explore possibilities and nurture artists so that it can extend itself to a greater audience. It is important for the festival to ensure that the platform we created will affect more people and hopefully change our society.

For its third edition, the festival found its home in a beautiful seaside property, the Ateneo de Zamboanga University-Lantaka Campus, which will become the official venue of the festival in the coming years, through the generosity of the ADZU President, Fr. Karel San Juan SJ, who saw the festival's dedication to peace-making and dialogue.

The creation of the festival in one of the most politically conflicted areas in the Philippines is a symbol of strength and devotion to peace-building, and we continue to hold true to our goal of sustaining the journey for peace through the cinematic medium and celebrating diversity and resilience—the very beauty our La Bella Zamboanga possesses.

Ryanne Murcia works as director, producer, acting coach, and festival director of the Festival de Cine Paz Mindanao. She also teaches at the Ateneo de Zamboanga University. Her short film, *No Ama Connigo* (2013), won the Golden Durian at the first Salamindanaw International Film Festival. She is the current Mindanao representative to the National Committee on Cinema of the NCCA

BINISAYA

FILM FESTIVAL 2019:

A WINDOW INTO A NATION IN CRISIS

Grace Marie Lopez

Promotional material for Binisaya Film Festival.
Courtesy of BINISAYA Facebook Page.

The 9th edition of Binisaya Film Festival held on October 16-18, 2019 was a leap of faith. As a Board Member of Binisaya Movement Inc., the non-stock, non-profit organization that runs the festival, there was a sense of urgency for me to volunteer as last year's Festival Director.

Since the current administration took office in June 2016, the Philippines has been tormented by the state's war on drugs. This is apart from the silencing of its critics using the many loopholes of law. The fatalities from the war on drugs have been mostly the poor and many of them young. The body count from reports of police and vigilante killings keeps on rising.

The vision of last year's festival was to further engage the Cebuano community to be vigilant with the social issues of the country, to embrace our collective duty to maintain artistic freedom and promote independent expression. Beyond entertainment at the local level, the need to intentionally address the pains of the nation through the medium of film was to set a socio-political tone to the festival.

Roughly during its first year, while the war on drugs was slowly creeping from Manila to the different cities in the country, Cebu's voice against these questionable killings was not as strong as that in the national capital until the number of killings spiked significantly.

Apart from Binisaya Film Festival, Cebu is also home to two other annual film festivals: the Sinulog Film Festival and the Cebu International Film Festival. The former has been consistent with its goals of promoting the Christian faith and family values while the latter has zeroed in on screening documentaries until it opened itself lately to narrative fiction.

Binisaya has always been a platform for eclectic films and experimentations. To lead it and to craft a theme and direction in response to some alarming national concerns are likened to a citizen heeding the call of one's conscience.

Foremost, it is imperative to aggressively suggest, if not reinforce, the connection of the festival to the public. Using the phrase "*atong festival*" (our festival), the last edition of Binisaya aimed to remind the viewing public to take ownership of what is their own. The phrase connotes the necessity to personalize Cebuano films, internalize it, and to purposely make it part of Cebuano cinema consciousness. In the Festival Director's statement I delivered during the press launch on September 5, 2019, I emphasized the following idea:

"By experimenting with film form itself to disrupt the undemanding and comfortable, we can gauge the developing aesthetic boundaries our own filmmakers are willing to break.

"Art shows human struggle and with that, we identify and see ourselves. We are not regaled by it sometimes, but perhaps we are called to assess ourselves, reflect on ourselves as a community. We urge the public to encounter contemporary Cebuano cinema with fresh eyes and open minds here in this festival. *Susihon nato ang ATONG festival*" (let us examine OUR own festival).

2019 also marked the premiere of *Hurwebes Hurwebes*, the last of Binisaya's *Adlaw Adlaw* series. One of the early tasks of the organizing committee was to select the directors for *Hurwebes Hurwebes* and to explain to them the festival's objectives. Given that 2019 also marked the centennial year of Philippine cinema (Proclamation No. 622, 2018), the team decided to tap Cebuano directors who started their film practice as early as the transition period, from celluloid to digital, shooting Mini-DV films before today's standard formats. After a conscious search, the festival team identified three directors in the person of Don Gerardo Frasco, Kris Villarino, and Januar Yap. Yap is a three-time Palanca Award-winning Cebuano short story writer and currently has a novel-in-progress. Villarino is a filmmaker and well-travelled graphic artist, who currently teaches film courses at a local film academy. Frasco is a director, cinematographer, and a proprietor of a film production company in Cebu. He debuted as a director with the romantic feature, *Waves* (2015).

The importance of *Hurwebes Hurwebes*, not just as the festival's opening film, but as one burdened to set its tone, was an undertaking that the organizers carefully deliberated. Of the *Adlaw Adlaw* series, *Hurwebes Hurwebes* has had the distinction of being the first to be shot using the Arri Alexa camera. Anyone who has followed the series can perhaps infer that this technical decision was a refraction of the festival's nine-year journey.

However, the heart of the film lies in the manner the menacing images of the war on drugs is constructed and conveyed to a public that has become almost numb to the senseless killings. Faced with frequent news on the killings, the public is paradoxically distanced from the subject of the sanctity of life, the lives taken without due process, and the stories of these lives. Dramatic moments in the film were muted for better observation, such as the scene inspired by photojournalist Raffy Lerma's famous photograph that alludes to the *Pietà*. However, the pivotal moments of assassinations were diabolically augmented by the sounds of guns and the screeching of tires of the executioners' vehicles escaping into the darkness or by the executioner standing in the light with impunity. Indeed, the artistic intervention of *Hurwebes Hurwebes* begs for the crisis to be heard.

Short political films curated by visual artist, human rights activist, and filmmaker Kiri Dalena supported the theme of the festival. Martha Atienza's "Anito" (2015), Roberth Fuentes's "Basura" (2018), Dalena's own "Gikan sa Ngitingit Nga Kinailadman"



Directors Don Frasco, Kris Villarino
& Januar Yap for *Huwebes Huwebes*



Audiences of Binisaya Film Festival 2019.



(2017), Sunshine Matutina's "Orphan" (2017), Mike de Leon's "Kangkungan" (2019), Carina Evangelista's "Sa Dibdib Mo'y Buhay" (2019), and Dean Marcial's "Manila Death Squad" (2017) added profound weight to the discussion that followed during the second day of the festival. In her talk "Taktika sa Lilas," Dalena described to the audience her work with the Respond and Break the Silence Against the Killings (RESBAK) and the Council of the Alliance for the Advancement of People's Rights (KARAPATAN). She also shared the alternative ways to create films "that speak in a thousand different languages, films that take on an immeasurable gamut of forms." The theme of artists as citizens highlighted Dalena's interaction with the public.

On the other hand, community engagement also meant instilling a sense of volunteerism. Surprisingly, the Binisaya team had to put a cap to the overwhelming number of student volunteers coming from five universities in Cebu and some working individuals who loved films. The volunteers are as much a pillar of the film festival as its other vital elements.

Cebu's golden age of cinema happened after World War II, particularly from 1948 to 1958, and again in the early to mid-1970s.¹ These periods are evidence that film appreciation is part of the Cebuano culture. However, contemporary Cebuano cinema seems to be having a two-pronged struggle: to carve its space in the living Cebuano

film history and in that of the nation's cinema. Fortifying the connection of Binisaya Film Festival to the local audience may help address this struggle. Through the lens of the marginalized, the ordinary, and the overlooked, Binisaya Film Festival 2019 tried to summon the audience to notice the depth and breadth of the effects of the escalating war on drugs that now undeniably defines our milieu. To affect them is to bring cinema closer to them and to make this festival part of their collective consciousness, year after year.

By holding the festival in an accessible theater space through the partnership of the Arts Council of Cebu Foundation, calling for and promoting volunteerism, and inviting the engagement of its increasing number of viewers, the festival continued to exert effort against the strong tide of mainstream cinema. The last edition of the festival was well-attended by a diverse audience, altering our familiar expectation of spectators looking to be pampered by blockbusters and homogeneous stories with predictable conflicts and facile resolutions. There is hope that the succeeding festivals will continue to build on the steps we and those before us have taken.

Grace Marie Lopez is a film instructor of the University of San Carlos-Talamban Campus, where she is set to finish her master's thesis in Cinema Studies. She is into video installation, documentary filmmaking, and is a practicing private lawyer.

¹ Paul Grant and Misha Anissimov, *Lilas: An illustrated History of the Golden Ages of Cebuano Cinema* (Cebu City: University of San Carlos Press, 2016).

MAPPING DAVAO CITY'S FILM CULTURE

Sarah Isabelle Torres



I spent six of my formative years in Davao City and consider it my second home. When my family and I first arrived, I refused to learn *Bisaya*, not because I perceived it as parochial, but because I turned to language as my form of protest: I had not agreed to move there to begin with. Now, as I reflect on the city that cradled and shaped me for a good number of years, I find it unfortunate that my memory is limited to school-related encounters. What could have been had I immersed more in the place I called my “second home” during my stay there?

This essay is my way of reconnecting with Davao City and to fill the crevices left in my memory, through re-learning and re-experiencing a sense of this place, in and through the cinema it engenders. However, choosing Davao for this study is more than a nostalgia trip or an atonement. Davao City, the largest city in the country, is a melting pot of various cultures and ethnicities; it nurtures large communities of the Philippines’ Muslim populace and indigenous peoples who coexist with non-Muslim and non-indigenous settlers, each group having a narrative of its own.¹ And, although different cultures converge in the area, the resulting experiences and practices are not limited to the city itself. These flow and move across geographical boundaries, and mark shifts in representation while redefining the city and its people.²

As the place where most local media institutions, organizations, and infrastructure operate and thrive in Mindanao, Davao City offers a narrative that needs to be written and analyzed for the purposes of documenting the contemporary film history of the regional center, mapping the local film culture and comprehending its relationship with neighboring film cultures, and situating the local film culture within the prevailing mainstream scene.

Toward these ends, this essay focuses on *mapping* the following areas that allow Davao Cinema to exist and thrive: 1) filmmakers and cineastes, 2) films, 3) film festivals, 4) financial stakeholders, 5) institutions, and 6) screening places.

Filmmakers and Cineastes

The differing politics and geographical positions of local filmmakers can be associated with how their local film community has been built, has flourished, and is contested today. Notably, two of the filmmakers discussed here are not Davao-born, but their contributions to Davao film culture and relationship with Davao filmmakers are significant to the growth of the local film community.

As activists and cultural workers, Arnel Mardoquio and Arbi Barbarona, both Davao-born and raised, use film as an emancipatory medium to tell the stories of the marginalized and educate the mass audience. Because of this perspective, film for them must be distributed and exhibited in alternative venues that reach a wider audience, with or without ticket fees.

For Sherad Anthony Sanchez and Sheron Dayoc, born and raised in Davao and Zamboanga respectively but both practicing in Manila, their concept of film is nothing less than art. Even though their films carry narratives that are rooted in their birthplaces, they do not necessarily identify themselves with the place because what is more important for them is to make films that embody or experiment with what cinema could be.

Gutierrez “Teng” Mangansakan II, a Moro filmmaker from Maguindanao, explores the various aspects of film production as he takes the position of producer, filmmaker, festival organizer, and critic all at once. He currently resides in General Santos City but shoots films in various provinces around Mindanao. For him, telling stories that represent his being or identity is crucial not only to register his perspectives but also to create a space for marginalized characters.

Sanchez, Dayoc, and Mangansakan embody varying senses of place in which their background and experiences beyond Mindanao have resulted in varying degrees of affection toward their birthplaces and toward broad and evolving perspectives on regional cinema. However, even if these filmmakers have different perspectives and politics, their films have aesthetic and thematic similarities. It seems safe to conclude that how they make sense of the place cinematically enable their films to characterize a certain look and thematic pattern.

Apart from individual filmmakers, Davao birthed two film organizations, the *Pasalidabay* Movement and the Mindanao Film and Television Development Foundation (MFTDF). Both aim to facilitate the growth of the local film community in terms of creating programs for the audience and amateur filmmakers.

Pasalidabay is composed of Bagane Fiola, Yam Palma, Glorypearl Dy, Rap Meting, and Jay Rosas. They formed *Pasalidabay*, meaning “film screening,” in 2013 because they saw the lack of exhibitions of and conversations on local films as well as lack in the development of local filmmakers.

Meanwhile, MFTDF was founded by Dax Cañedo and Rudolph Alama in 2007 as the result of institutionalizing the longest-running independent film festival in the country, the Mindanao Film Festival (MFF). Aside from the festival, MFTDF also conducts workshops, filmmaking marathons, and other educational programs for the enhancement of the local film community. Their most innovative project to date is the establishment of the Mindanao Film Archive in December 2018.

The two groups have similar goals and programs, and have built good reputations over the years. However, there are limits to the reach or impact of their programs. While they are trusted to deliver, there remains a significant lack of audience in screenings and festivals, in the marketing of film events, and in institutional support for filmmakers and films. There is also a glaring absence of young filmmakers who should be able

to build on the traditions the pioneers have set. The local film community, however, recognizes the need to grow in number not only in terms of patrons and filmmakers, but more so in terms of film organizers and film workers who will focus on the logistics, publicity, research, and financing of the programs of both groups.

Davao City offers a narrative that needs to be written and analyzed for the purposes of documenting the contemporary film history of the regional center, mapping the local film culture and comprehending its relationship with neighboring film cultures.

Films

This section looks into the general attributes of some of the important films that the region has produced in its contemporary history. I derived my selection from Cañedo’s *Guerrillas in the Midst* (2017)³ with the following definitive characteristics as basis: a) made by a Davaoeño filmmaker, b) shot in Davao City, c) about Davao City, or d) uses Bisaya, in part or in whole.

Most films were shot in the filmmaker’s hometown: Davao City for Mardoquio and Sanchez; Maguindanao for Mangansakan; and Zamboanga for Dayoc. Their films generally discuss the issues of their hometowns such as urban poverty in Mardoquio’s *Sheika* (2010), and in Sanchez’s *Imburnal* (2008), or traditional complexities in Mangansakan’s *Limbunan* (2010) and Dayoc’s *Women of the Weeping River* (2016).

Local filmmakers dare to tackle unexplored themes that are rarely discussed in mainstream media yet are very important for them as Davaoeños/Mindanaoans because 1) they want to represent themselves in issues that are related to their region such as history, culture, or politics; and 2) they want other regions, especially the national capital, to listen to them.

Davaoeño filmmakers make a conscious effort to contextualize the struggles of Mindanao which are inherited from its unique history of colonization and internal colonization; the political, cultural, and economic struggles of various ethnolinguistic groups; issues brought about by modernization and globalization; and other urban concerns such as poverty and drug war. However, themes are not entirely limited to these topics. There are also films that talk about human relations, folklore, myth, and daily life in the city.

Films that talk about the Muslim or Moro communities, youth, and tradition are the most prominent, often framed through war and conflict, and often with women as central characters. The dominant use of social realism as a genre may also be reflective of how their long-standing struggles should be narrated almost exactly how they happened in actuality. Such social realism is depicted in a contemplative or meditative manner—with less dialogue and more action (Rosas 2018).⁸

The most noticeable treatment is their fixation on long takes with long pauses or silences. What Mindanao films prominently project on screen is the place: the setting or shooting location of the film. The place is the event; the place is the story.

According to Fiola (2018), if one knows the history of a place, the inclusion of the place as part of the story, and not just as background or location, is inevitable. Mardoquio (2018) adds that affection for a place is another important



Still from Arnel Mardoquio's *Sheika* (2010).
Courtesy of Mardoquio. All succeeding photos
courtesy of Sarah Torres.

thing in filmmaking. Dayoc (2018) agrees: for him, learning about the geography and environment of a certain place entails learning more about its people and culture.

Language and casting are other important elements to analyze. Filmmakers, more often than not, use the vernacular—Bisaya, Maguindanaon, or Tausug—to popularize these languages and more vividly represent Mindanao to non-Mindanaoan audiences. This is also positive for the Mindanaoan audience because the nuances of the vernacular allow them to fully relate with the films. The choice of casting Mindanaoan actors and actresses, whether professional or typecast from the local communities, also proves how films can succeed without mainstream celebrities. The rawness of local films allows the audience to focus on the issues in which the narratives are contextualized rather than on the beauty of the actors.

This way, local filmmakers are not only able to explore and experiment with cinema, but also visually narrate the issues of their homeland in the most genuine way possible.

Film Festivals

A film festival forms a major part of film culture because it serves both a declaration and celebration of the kind of film culture the host city cultivates. It is an identifier that the host city is a film hub in its region or country and that there is an emerging film culture worthy of showcase and investment in a given locale. Despite being held at one specific location—or being representative of a particular location as often evidenced in its name e.g., Davao *Ngilngig* Festival, *Nabunturan* Independent Film Exhibition, and Mindanao Film Festival—Mindanao film festivals are often national in scope—sometimes even transnational, as in the case of the *Salamindanaw* Asian Film Festival. The characteristics of regional film festivals in the Philippines are quite interesting because, just like how the filmmakers and films transcend boundaries, regional film festivals cease to become regional the moment they are conceived.⁹

In the case of the festivals included in this study, “regional” means two things: 1) a reference to geography, and 2) a characterization of particular sensibilities. But on the matter of scope, or which films are to be programmed and screened at these festivals, “regional” is transformed to mean national or even transnational.

A film festival is important for, but also for more than, the following reasons: 1) it is a big platform for the distribution and exhibition of films; 2) it is an event, a gathering of filmmakers, critics, producers, film enthusiasts, and others who take active roles in sustaining film communities; 3) it is an opportunity for filmmakers to showcase their films that have not seen commercial release nor had any opportunity of screening or competition prior; and 4) it is an opportunity for audiences to watch films they have no chance of seeing in commercial cinemas but many of which have received critical recognition in international circuits.

Therefore, a film festival is a *place* of exchange not only of films or ideas about films, but also of possible collaborations among



Gutierrez Mangansakan II commences Salamindanaw Asian Film Festival at General Santos City, November 2018.

filmmakers, producers, or organizers in the future. Often, the focus of regional film fests is on workshops or conferences because the goal is not just to showcase homegrown films or popularize the host city as a film hub, but also to develop audiences and filmmakers.

Between September to December annually, four important film festivals happen in Mindanao: Nabunturan Independent Film Exhibition or Nabifilmex, Davao Ngilngig Festival or DNF (recently rebranded as Ngilngig Asian Fantastic Film Festival Davao), Salamindanaw Asian Film Festival, and Mindanao Film Festival or MFF. The Nabifilmex and Salamindanaw are held in Nabunturan, Compostela Valley and General Santos, respectively. But while neither is held in Davao City, these two are important not only because Davaoño filmmakers are part of the organizing and programming teams, but also because they have unique characteristics which other festivals in the region do not possess.

First on the list is Nabifilmex, an open-air film festival that is supported by the local government unit (LGU) of Nabunturan. Organized by Atty. Karen Santiago-Malaki, the Nabifilmex cycle I attended in 2018 was a three-day festival which showcased mostly short films from different regions and schools all over the country. The festival was free for all.

I observed that, unlike the viewing experience in cinemas or other closed spaces, in Nabifilmex, Nabunturanons prefer to discuss the film with the people they are with *while* watching. Perhaps, part of the reason for this peculiar viewing experience is that there is no cinema in Nabunturan. Although they have limited exposure to mainstream films, they are still able to watch

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films mainly through free or cable television, online streaming, or torrent sharing. Only those who can afford it are able to travel to the nearest city to view films in cinemas; the nearest is in Tagum City, about two hours away from Nabunturan.

Second is DNF, a genre-based film fest with a focus on “ngilngig” stories, or those that talk about the horrors of the places we live in or the places we come from—the horrors of our society or in our own personal experiences. DNF’s program is diverse because they accommodate art forms across disciplines. In the 2018 DNF, aside from films, the program included stage play, graphic design, and live art. There were also talks and a zine launch. The activities were spread out in different venues such as Gaisano Mall, the Film Development Council of the Philippines (FDCP) Cinematheque, and the Morning Light Art Gallery and Shop, all located in downtown Davao.

Apart from its Philippine programming, DNF also programs other Asian films, similar to Salamindanaw. In 2018, it screened several short films from Singapore and Indonesia. The Davao Ngilngig Festival may thus also be seen as a transnational film festival, at least in scope.

Third is Salamindanaw, an Asian film festival with a film lab and film journal component. Headed by Gutierrez Mangansakan II, *Salamindanaw*’s 6th year had two blocks in competition: the Asian category and the Philippine shorts. Selected films from the Asian category came from Indonesia, India, Vietnam, Laos, Malaysia, Singapore, China, and the Philippines. The Philippine shorts, on the other hand, comprised 23 films from different regions in the country.

Parallel to the festival is the film lab, a program for young filmmakers to undergo mentorship with acclaimed filmmakers with the goal to revise and polish their existing full-length scripts. Another unique feature of Salamindanaw is its *New Durian Cinema*, an annual journal that discusses Southeast Asian Cinema. This journal includes critical film reviews, interviews, and essays on regional cinema, women, Moro identity, and other concepts.

Finally, MFF is the longest-running independent film festival that mainly programs films with Mindanao sensibilities. The MFF is similar to the DNF in the sense that both festivals take place at the center of Davao where foot traffic is very high. Therefore, among the four film festivals, MFF and DNF should be able to gather the greatest number

of audiences, at least in theory. Although a lack of audience is a general reality of all local film festivals and screenings, local filmmakers feel that MFF could have been the frontrunner in this aspect given that it has been able to regularly hold filmmaking workshops, screenings, and a culminating festival for over 16 years. The expectations are high because it had set such a high standard from the get-go.

Professor and festival organizer Katrina Tan (2018)¹⁰ said that festival heads should employ a better programming strategy to engage and sustain the audience, but in such a way that does not underestimate the audience’s capacity to appreciate and comprehend. This way, MFF could further elevate its brand as a film festival that not only showcases regional films and discovers promising filmmakers, but also serves as a model to aspiring practitioners and local audiences as to what kinds of films represent the blossoming Mindanao flavor—an aesthetic that sets Mindanao films apart from other regional films and defies what is usually seen in the mainstream.

Mindanao’s most prominent film festivals have been successful in terms of securing a good reputation in their locales, having distinct programming from other festivals, and spreading awareness of Mindanao sensibilities; but they have not yet positioned themselves to become events, scenes, or spaces that audiences and film enthusiasts would actually look forward to attend and talk about. Festival heads, especially of DNF and MFF, must consider taking more active roles and a more democratizing stance in distributing local films in schools and communities to break the barrier of exclusivity or elitism that they lament about in national film festivals.

Furthermore, the biggest challenge that they must face at this point is how to advance their film festivals to become a vehicle of audience development, film literacy, and mentorship to young or student filmmakers who will form the next generation of critically acclaimed Mindanao filmmakers. This stems from my observation that local filmmakers take pride in the growing number of festivals and films screened in the region, yet the question of whether this is already a good measurement of film literacy among local audiences remains. How many of those amateur filmmakers who won in film festivals such as DNF and MFF have improved and pursued filmmaking?

Financial Stakeholders

There is no business or economic institution in Davao or in Mindanao that is solely dedicated to funding films, booking them in cinemas, exhibiting them in festivals, and marketing them to sponsors or advertisers. There is also no business for booking actors or actresses to star in films. And there are no investors that will enable such structures or businesses because there is no demand from consumers. Davaoeño filmmakers heavily rely on themselves, on the local film community, on grants, and on national festivals to fund, distribute, exhibit, and market their films.

The region, however, nurtures several production studios which enable the filmmakers to create their films from start to finish. But equipment, talent, vision, and connections are not enough to sustain filmmaking because it is not simply a passion project. Money remains a huge and challenging issue.

Many young filmmakers do not proceed to create more films because they end up seeking regular jobs. In fact, even the pioneers have other jobs aside from filmmaking. They engage with advertising, events, or freelance work through local production studios just to sustain themselves, their families, and their filmmaking. This kind of setup is currently the most viable option for local filmmakers, but this is not enough. As a result, some filmmakers migrate to Manila to seek more stable jobs in the mainstream film industry and are assimilated into the film culture of the capital.

Filmmakers also do not earn enough from the films they produce in order to make the next one. In fact, the most that local filmmakers usually hope for is to break even. There is also no remaining budget to pay off debts a filmmaker may incur when budget runs out or to kick off a new film project. Because funding is limited and distribution and exhibition are restricted, filmmakers resort to other means in order to continue creating films, especially those of a full-length scale. They search and apply for grants, market their films elsewhere, or shoot staggeredly to avoid pressure of gathering a huge amount of money at once. In most cases, local filmmakers endure low-budget filmmaking, sometimes via crowdfunding, which may affect their vision due to lack of resources.

Even with grants, filmmakers still seek other means to augment the awarded funding because of the rising costs of filmmaking: equipment rental, location rental, decent pay for cast and crew, props, food, and transportation, among others. And this is just the production phase. Filmmakers also have to spend for pre- and post-production, marketing, and government taxes.

Cinema is indeed a very expensive endeavor for our local filmmakers, precisely because of the lack of a regional film industry and government support for regional filmmakers. Films, even if mainstream-produced, are viewed as commodities to be consumed for about PHP 130 to PHP 200 in Davao cinemas and PHP 200 to PHP 500 in Manila cinemas, depending on the kind of film theater. If there is

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anything that mainstream, independent, and alternative producers agree on, this is the fact that cinema receives very little government support politically and economically. In fact, foreign films enjoy deregulation and tax breaks while Filipino films suffer.

Without government support, the tired cycle continues: the perpetuation of films for cheap entertainment, films that are star-driven more than story-driven, and films that maintain stereotypes, gender roles, and culturally-insensitive humor or storylines.

Davaoeño filmmakers do not aspire to emulate the exploitative kind of industry or film scene that mainstream film companies thrive in. They believe that an alternative route is possible as long as the local government will step in to provide institutional support to the local film community without compromising their creative control. Currently, filmmakers try to distribute in schools and communities where most of their target audiences are. Their philosophy is quite the opposite of mainstream film producers', who usually create films based on themes that trend or those most alienated from social realities.

Institutions

A film industry will not advance without the support of the government and its mandated agencies to nurture Philippine Cinema. The current system of our prevailing film industry will continue to be private, deregulated, and vulnerable to demise due to the more powerful Hollywood influence if the government does not interfere. Local filmmakers are unanimous in pointing out that the Movie and Television Review and Classification Board (MTRCB) and the Cinema Evaluation Board (CEB) judge and handle films unjustly. For example, the MTRCB, which classifies films and TV shows based on audience suitability, extracts a huge amount of money from local filmmakers just to get their films

rated, and ratings are imperative in order to be screened in cinemas, schools, or other public spaces.

I computed the total fees and charges a regional, independent film incurs based on MTRCB's Memorandum Circular 12-2013 effective January 2015.¹¹ A regional, independent filmmaker pays MTRCB a total of PHP 23,580 for the following services: review of the film, rating, screening in cinemas, optical media material, and checking. For the same inclusions, a festival film incurs PHP 28,250; a mainstream film, PHP 41,150; and a short film, PHP 7,700. There are separate fees for trailers shown in cinema and television.

To work around such a burden, filmmakers partner with the Film Development Council of the Philippines (FDCP) because it is mandated to promote and develop local films and filmmakers. In fact, since the beginning of Liza Diño's chairmanship in 2016, FDCP has been geared toward supporting regional cinemas. FDCP assists local filmmakers in screenings and vouches for them. FDCP also has six Cinematheques nationwide, one in Manila and five in key provinces, which program and facilitate local screenings. Moreover, FDCP has established the CEB, its own board that gives ratings or grades (A or B). The main difference between MTRCB and CEB is that the latter is mandated to give tax rebates for quality films.

Films that are Graded A receive 100% rebate on amusement tax while those that are Graded B receive 65%. The problem is that the CEB often ends up giving As and Bs to mainstream films while there are cases when independent films do not receive any grade at all. Films not graded by the CEB are not entitled to any rebate or incentive. Filmmakers also criticize the FDCP for its limited regional programming, focus on international linkages, and lack of political will to push for the development of a regional film industry. While FDCP is reliable as a partner in screenings, lectures, and workshops, local filmmakers are concerned with the budget that FDCP incurs for the international linkages it tries to establish.

Rosas (2018) suggests that FDCP should balance its budget and attention between international linkages and local audience development. Although FDCP has already established six Cinematheques nationwide and has regular programming in each, there is a considerable lack of audience. To Rosas, a successful film industry is not solely measured by how outsiders notice it; instead, it is more important that its immediate audience consumes and patronizes its films.

FDCP's shortcomings do not only have to do with the lack of political will but also with scarcity of budget. While it has promising programs, these can be executed rather inadequately because of intense budget constraints. While this is something that FDCP cannot control, they definitely have control over advocating to unite filmmakers, mainstream and independent alike, to one major cause: to push for a progressive film industry that benefits and impacts on filmmakers and audiences on a larger scale.

The education sector must also be enjoined in order to push the agenda of film literacy from the ground up. Local filmmakers have made efforts in collaborating with schools, communities, and civil society to screen films and hold lectures and workshops about film appreciation and analysis. However, such initiatives need to be institutionalized in the education system, and this will only happen when the government recognizes the importance of film literacy in cultivating critical thinking among constituents.

Screening Places

Screening places are important in making up a film culture simply because films are meant to be screened and viewed wherever there is an opportunity to do so. In fact, more than just built structures for commodities, screening places have cultural history as well as a crucial role in bridging the gap between producers and audiences. But because most screening places are first and foremost structures built for profit, owners prefer to screen commercially viable films normally produced by mainstream studios over alternative or independent quality films, which would have allowed film literacy among audiences to flourish.

In Davao's case, there are six major malls that house cinemas with 34 screens combined. These six malls are operated by two national companies, Ayala (1) and SM (2); one regional company, Gaisano (2), and one independent company, Victoria Plaza (1). Both Ayala and SM operate as they do in the capital and elsewhere in the Philippines. Although cinema tickets are cheaper compared to those in Manila, the programming of films is the same: Hollywood over Filipino films; mainstream over independent.

Davao also hosts one of FDCP's Cinematheques, which is a milestone for the local film community because it recognizes and marks how the community has generated quite a number of important films worthy to be screened. This also gives a chance for the local audience to watch films in an alternative venue with cheaper prices and selected programming of films from local to international circuits. But before malls became the staple cinema venues in cities and before cinematheques art hubs, standalone theaters were the trend. Particularly in Davao, recorded from the 1970s to 1990s, both Hollywood and Filipino films were shown at now-defunct standalone theaters such as Lawaan and Queens located in downtown Davao City.

Lawaan and Queens were able to fill their theaters with audiences back then, especially when they showcased double features for a price of less than PHP 5.00. However, social classes defined the kind of films the local audiences watched. For instance, when Hollywood films were screened, the audience was composed of the elite Settlers of Davao; when Filipino films were on the schedule, the audience was the masses (Garcia, 2018).

Unfortunately, Lawaan and Queens saw their demise when local malls, Victoria Plaza and Gaisano Mall, were built to cater to rising consumerism in the region. Later on, both local malls faced bigger competitors, Ayala and SM. Gaisano Mall was able to reinvent itself through renovating its space and improving its offers, including cinema programming. Meanwhile, Victoria Plaza focused on selling cheaper goods and less-known brands. Unlike Gaisano, Victoria screened old films, some were also X-rated.

As a result of urbanization, local audiences now prefer going to malls, replacing the once significant Lawaan and Queens as favorite entertainment places. The physical spaces that once housed the grandeur of cinema have been transformed into food stalls, bars, or chapels, which are manifestations of the uneven development of capitalism.

The rise and fall of screening places are result of the interplay of the politics, economics, and cultures of exhibition not only in the local scene but moreso in the national landscape of the film industry.¹² For one, the advent of technology allowed the business of CD/DVD rentals and sales to flourish. Second, television began to screen old films in designated channels. Watching movies then became more accessible for audiences because they no longer had to go out of their homes and spend for cinema theaters.

Third, what Locsin (2013) calls *mallification* in the 21st century struck the biggest blow to standalone theaters.¹³ Malls are the result of the consumerist culture that globalization created, in which there is a strong need to dominate markets and sell cheap surplus goods. Today, malls sprout up everywhere and mallgoing has become a culture of its own.

Fourth, economic policies of mall owners are never favorable to local filmmakers. Most big mall chains implement a “first day, last day” scheme where films must be able to sell a good number of tickets on its first day to avoid being pulled out on the next. In numbers, the gross sales of a film is divided into three parts: an estimated 30% goes to producers, 30% goes to government taxes, and 30% goes to theater owners. Hence, a film has to earn thrice its capital just to break even.

For Mangansakan (2017), however, it is wrong to believe that films can only be experienced in cinema theaters. For him, if cinema theaters are not lenient enough to support and screen local films, there are alternative avenues. As long as there are willing audiences, there are spaces. Aside from cinematheques,

there are schools and communities that can be tapped year-round; and public places like plazas and bars where films can be screened as long as a projector and sound system are provided. These are guerrilla methods our local filmmakers have become so adept at just to be able to screen their films.

Generally, film infrastructures in the 21st century have become almost similar across cities and countries. The capitalist production, consumption or spectatorship, reproduction of ideas, and distribution of films affect how cinema is engendered on the national scale. Meanwhile, regional or local filmmakers are still struggling to expand viewership beyond their circles, market their films, and attract audiences in as many screening places as they can maximize amid competing national and foreign films.

In mapping the Davao film culture, I have realized that its beauty is in its rawness. There is rawness in stories, in technique, in aesthetic. However, this kind of rawness is never innocent or just curious and open to exploration—to the adventure of using the medium of film. In fact, Davao film culture is born out of people's struggles, with issues that revolve around ethnicity, religion, and land.

How political, economic, and cultural forces suppress dissent among local audiences is an incessant problem that Davaoño filmmakers are vocal about in their films and other cultural works. They are conscious of the environment they are thriving in and the forces they are struggling against. Thus, it is liberating for filmmakers to be able to express their ideas, curiosities, or questions about the status quo that continues to oppress and marginalize them.

Yet, the growth of the Davao film community faces contestations mainly in cultivating local audiences and emerging filmmakers in order to advance a stronger local film culture. Even if they thrive with passion, film organizations need not only to institutionalize themselves but also to demand government intervention in order for the Davao film culture to flourish in the national and transnational arenas.

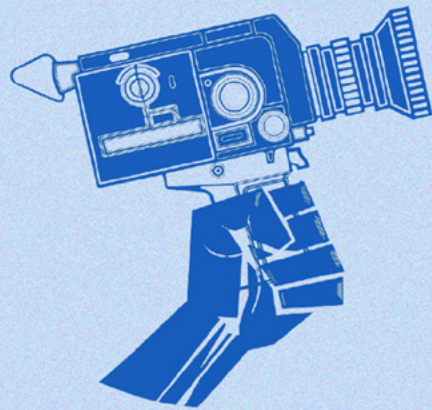
Aside from the lack of institutional support, local filmmakers also face structural problems in political and economic spheres. In reality, the status quo of the mainstream media infrastructures and political economic policies deprive local cinema of establishing a business model which can harness its capabilities to be sustainable and profitable for its community. It all boils down to asserting institutional and structural support for any discipline or sector to triumph and become valuable for the Filipino community, culturally and economically.



FDCP Cinematheque-Nabunturan inaugurated during Nabifilmex, September 2018.

1. Carlito Gaspar, *The Lumad's Struggle in the Face of Globalization* (Davao City: Alternate Forum for Research in Mindanao, 2000).
2. Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion Limited, 1976).
3. Dax Cañedo, “Guerrillas in the Midst: A Narrative on the Rise of Mindanao Cinema in the Digital Age in *Plaridel*,” *Plaridel* 14, no. 2 (2017): 183–190.
4. *Sheika*, directed by Arnel Mardoquio (Metro Manila: Cinemalaya, Skyweaver Productions, and HydeOut Entertainment, 2010), DVD.
5. *Imburnal*, directed by Sherad Sanchez (Metro Manila: Cinema One Originals and Salida Productions, 2008), MPEG video.
6. *Limburnal*, directed by Gutierrez Mangansakan II (Metro Manila: Cinemalaya and Bidali House Productions, 2010), MPEG video.
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Sarah Isabelle Torres is a development worker and advocate of media literacy education. She earned her BA Journalism and MA Media Studies (Film) from the University of the Philippines. In 2014, she co-founded *Out of The Box* (OOTB) to mainstream media literacy practices in the Philippines and is currently the Coordinator of Reality of Aid-Asia Pacific (RoA-AP).



PELICULA UNION

Carla Pulido Ocampo

Carrying the character of a macho-feudal colonial history and currently fed by a very strong OFW remittance-dependent economy, La Union's filmmaking and film-loving community is marked by two bourgeois traits from the past and the present: 1.) economic stability resulting to relative ease of access to filmmaking equipment and skills; and 2.) a charmed lifestyle mirroring conventional values that—still—believes in the normalcy of machismo and reactionary politics. The province's middle class, it seems, celebrates a perpetual “summertime,” where, as the song goes: the living is easy, daddies are rich, and all things at surface-level are rosy and good-looking.

La Union's patriarchal middle class is from where most of the area's cinephiles and audiovisual artists come; hence, it is inevitable that we take them as a baseline when we talk about the beginnings and the future of Pelicula Union, the two-year-old society of filmmakers and film enthusiasts in La Union and neighboring provinces.

But first, the obvious. There is a potent presence of young audiovisual artists (currently, mostly cisgender males) in the territory. La Union—or “Elyu” (L.U.) to the contemporary generation—has had a burgeoning filmmaking community since filmmaking skills and equipment were democratized and widened their reach among the middle and upper-middle class around 2009 and '10.

Ten years on, however, this community remains in its infancy stage.

Alas, the region's status quo contributes to this stagnation. Audiovisual art courses in schools and colleges remain to be afterthoughts and—students would wail—not given the respect they deserve. Case studies from La Union's youth, who had asked not to be named, were told to “go get a decent job” when they insisted on doing videography and filmmaking, or asked when they could “monetize their hobbies” in animation and other graphic arts.

Also, despite being up-to-date in videography techniques and technologies, La Union's decade-long film-for-cinema output pales in comparison to its neighbor Pangasinan's which has produced the internationally-screened *Dapol tan Payarwar na Tayug 1931* (The Ashes and Ghosts of Tayug 1931, 2017) by Chris Gozum and *Malinak ya Labi* (Silent Night, 2016) by Jose Abdel Langit.

The only La Union film in its mother tongue that has been screened in a major film festival, thus far, is the QCinema short film “Ania ti Nagan Mo?” (What Is Your Name? 2017) by woman filmmaker, Ice Idanan, who traces her roots to Bauang, La Union. “ALT” (2018), another short film by La Union son, JJ Lopez Buenaventura, made it as a finalist in the CCP Gawad Alternatibo—Experimental Category. It was shot, edited, and animated entirely at the Balay

Habi Studio in Bontoc, Mountain Province. The seminal documentary *Walang Rape sa Bontok* (2014) by filmmaker Lester Valle, who also hails from Bauang, La Union, is technically not a La Union film in that the documentary is focused on the Bontok Igorot culture of the Philippine Cordilleras.

The trend in the aforementioned films is that technical and artistic support for La Union artisans who strive to create film-for-cinema releases would come from Metro Manila, where most reliable film workers are based, or from artist-friendly territories such as Baguio City or Bontoc in the Cordilleras.

Meanwhile, an Elyu film released in 2015 entitled *Flotsam*—which starred Solenn Heusaff, Rocco Nacino, a host of other stars, and a couple of local San Juan surfers—had a limited run in Metro Manila. Helmed by Ilonggo filmmaker Jay Abello and co-written and produced by the owners of a surfing hostel in San Juan, the film's marketing hype relied on wolf-whistling tropes and repeated selling of “chicks in bikinis” in print and video publicity materials, reinforcing the prevalence of machismo in these parts of the Philippine shoreline.

Be that as it may—or perhaps actually because of all these—efforts to raise and nurture La Union's very own filmmaking culture, ethics, and workers community have always been deemed necessary by local artist groups.

Progenitors

In the past decade, workshops and film labs have been organized in La Union. These include the Digital Cinematography Workshop with Nap Jamir, facilitated by the Silip Camera Club in September 2015, and the acting workshops conducted by Cine Amianan¹ around 2014 and '15.

The most well-known of these film workshops is the San Juan Film Camp (SJFC), which was established by University of the Philippines (UP) Film Institute alumna and La Union entrepreneur, Bebe Go. From 2015 to 2017, SJFC brought over an illustrious lineup of filmmakers to Elyu shores to conduct filmmaking workshops that catered to both locals and visitors of this gentrified town. Mentors included Monster Jimenez, Mario Cornejo, Jade Castro, Sherad Anthony Sanchez, Antoinette Jadaone, Carlo Francisco Manatad, and Richard Bolisay. Logistical hurdles and human resource deficiency, though, hampered the sustainability of the SJFC, and it closed its doors after its 2017 run.

In 2017, the La Union Conventions and Visitors Bureau, Inc. (LUCVB) launched the Pagwanawanan Arts Festival.² Springing from this brand, the Pagwanawanan Film Festival, headed once again by Go, kicked off its inaugural run on October 2018. It provided a jump-off platform for young filmmakers from La Union and adjoining provinces to release their short films. Of these releases, SJFC alumnus JJ Lopez Buenaventura's *ALT*, as mentioned, made it to the

prestigious 2019 CCP Gawad Alternatibo, a year after the first Pagwanawanan Film Festival.

Pelicula Union is Born

Despite these efforts at fostering a cinema culture in La Union, the lack of an identifiable filmmakers' support group and the limited access to alternative films have kept filmmaking in Elyu from taking off. With this concern in mind, and fresh off the success of the Pagwanawanan Film Festival on the night of 7 October 2018, a meeting of young filmmakers and cineastes birthed the film organization, Pelicula Union. Among those present were myself, Go, Valle, Samae Buenaventura, Gelo Ganaden, Lauren Faustino, and Buenaventura, who coined the name “Pelicula Union,” a portmanteau of pelicula (film) and La Union, connoting both the union of film enthusiasts and the province itself.

Pelicula Union is now the central organizing team for all film-related projects emanating from La Union. By virtue of its members' linkages, its sphere of influence extends to as far as Pangasinan, Ilocos Sur, Ilocos Norte, Benguet, and the Mountain Province. Addressing the need for sustained film vocabulary-building for local filmmakers and the need to introduce progressive ideologies to the complacent La Union bourgeoisie, Pelicula Union initiated monthly screenings and discussions of independently-produced narrative, documentary, and experimental films. These materials that are otherwise inaccessible due to the exclusive preference of cinemas in La Union to show only crowd-pleaser movies.

To contextualize the films that Pelicula Union curates for its monthly screenings, it is pertinent to know the core values and vision that the organization espouses. To wit:

CORE VALUES

1. Prioritizing stories from the ili [i.e., home village, home town, home country]
2. Encouraging the use of mother tongue
3. Enabling different modes and genres of storytelling
4. Ensuring grounded, ethical, and gender-fair filmmaking

VISION

A solid community of filmmakers, cineastes, and academics advancing cinema as an instrument for audience introspection, leading to pro-people social change in Northern Philippines.

The monthly screenings called the Pagsarmingang Film Series,³ which has been happening since March 2019, has found its home in the Alfredo F. Tadiar Library. This library is

owned and managed by the Tadiars, a family of renowned academics.

The Space

The Alfredo F. Tadiar Library is being groomed by the Tadiar family to be a leading community art space in San Fernando, La Union’s capital city. Thus, they have been tying up with several arts and culture organizations and individuals to conduct workshops and hold other art-related activities.

It is no surprise that even if the library is relatively smaller in size than other art spaces in Elyu, it has also become the home for Pelicula Union. On ordinary days, book shelves fill the entire space. But come weekends on certain months, the shelves’ wheels are set in motion to transform the library into an ample assembly room and open the space for the scheduled screenings or lectures.

Professor Neferti Tadiar has insisted that these screenings should be available to the public for free, or at the very least available in a pay-what-you-can basis. Her reason is that the Tadiar Library has always been and should always be a space for the people, for the grassroots. Pelicula Union fully supports Professor Tadiar’s views on the use of their space. But realistically, this brings us to the first problem of Pelicula Union, which is sustainability.

Thus far, Pelicula Union is at the mercy of well-meaning patrons who give what they can manage to the donation dish every screening weekend. Collections average from Php 300 to 400 and would peak at Php 500 during full-house evenings. But this is less than ideal, since the goal of every Pagsarmingang night is to have a talkback with filmmakers after every screening. Inviting filmmakers especially from outside La Union would mean shelling out money for their lodging, transportation, food, and, in the best circumstances, a humble honorarium. But as it is, the average income per night would not even suffice for the cost of the meals of the filmmakers during the entire course of their stay.

It has been providential, hence, that many filmmaker-guests waive all fees, even choosing to pay for their own meals and transportation sometimes, in full support of the advocacy of Pelicula Union. Alas, the organization needs to find ways to make this the exception rather than the norm, fully understanding that Filipino alternative filmmakers need to be compensated reasonably for their films, which are, more often than not, lifeworks funded by their own pockets.

Achievements

Despite the hurdles, the reason why the Pagsarmingang Film Series frequently draws an SRO crowd has been the talkback experience every after screening. A sizeable audience draw is guaranteed whenever Pelicula Union announces the assured presence of the film’s director who would be welcoming questions and reactions from the cinema-hungry audience.

Pagsarmingang always has themed screening nights, and some of the most unforgettable responses in the series came during the “Freedom to Love” screening, where pride-themed shorts were shown. These include Xeph Suarez’s “Si Astri Maka Si Tambulah” (2017), Jared Joven and Kaj Palanca’s “Contestant #4” (2016), and Gio Potes’s “Mark and Lenny” (2018) and “Sunugin ang Aparador” (2018). Another edition in the series is the “Kolonisasyon: Sa Wala, Sa Mayo’n,” where Bagane Fiola’s *Baboy Halas* (2016) was shown back to back with Sari



Tadiar Library owner Neferti Xina Tadiar.



Ingo Petzke with the Experimental Film Workshop attendees.



Pagsarmingang: Senior citizens are always present.



In lieu of honorarium, the beach (Janyx Regalo, Pabelle Manikan, and Wena Sanchez). Photos courtesy of Pelicula Union



Rose Roque discusses AsiaVisions.



Safe space for LGBTQIA+ with filmmakers Gio Potes, Jared Joven, and Kaj Palanca.

Dalena and Camila Grigger’s *Memories of a Forgotten War* (2001). There was also the “History Repeats Itself” edition where Rose Roque brought to La Union gems of People’ Cinema, including *Arrogance of Power* (1983), *Sabangan* (1983), and *Mendiola Massacre* (1987).

The inference is that suppressed LGBTQIA+ voices in the heavily macho La Union population found a safe space in Pagsarmingang that night. In the next nights, alternative reckonings on Fil-American relations and the effects of Marcosian Martial Law and the New Democracy under the Cory Aquino administration woke up not a few among the audience, who thanked Pelicula Union for surfacing atypical perspectives on otherwise dogmatic readings of Philippine history. America’s “Benevolent Assimilation” is a sham, they concluded. And it was also during these nights when some audience members understood the meaning of land reform, fascism, development aggression, and military blind obedience. Hence, they realized that there has been little progress for the marginalized sectors and the proletariat of this agricultural country from Marcos up until the current regime.

The Pagsarmingang brand has also extended to film lectures. On April 2019, Pelicula Union, through Lester Valle, triumphed in bringing none other than Professor Ingo Petzke to the Alfredo F. Tadiar Library to conduct a three-hour film lecture on the basics of experimental cinema, a first in the province. Thirty people from La Union and other provinces attended the event, which was thoughtfully appreciated by Professor Petzke for helping widen the alternative cinema vocabulary of grassroots cinephiles.

Future Prospects

Pelicula Union’s long-term goal is to become the go-to institution for filmmakers and production studios who would wish to collaborate in making films in and about the Philippine North, especially in La Union and the rest of Ilocandia.

But for the tie-ups to be beneficial, they need to reduce the need to transport Manila workers to northern provinces which is a logistics-heavy process. They also need to employ local film workers who are sensitive to the culture and

sensibilities of indigenous communities. Therefore, Pelicula Union must train Amianan filmmakers on competencies other than cinematography and editing.

The north needs audio recordists and sound designers; art department people and production designers; musicians who understand scoring for film; gaffers, grips, bestboys, script cons, clappers and assistant directors; and especially, location managers and production managers who truly know the locales in Northern Luzon. Finding and training people for these roles are currently in the pipeline for the organization.

Pelicula Union shall also endeavor to sustainably effect gender parity not only via representation in films screened during Pagsarmingang but also via developing more talents from the sectors of women and the LGBTQIA+ community.

Lastly, the organization is intent on truly bringing cinema culture to the grassroots, the way the Alfredo F. Tadiar Library wishes it to finally happen in La Union. Pagsarmingang patrons have been mostly from the Elyu bourgeoisie; but hope sprung anew when finally, a member of the working class who introduced himself as Tatay Mario—former OFW, senior citizen, Martial Law survivor—went to a Pagsarmingang screening when the audience dissected the meaning of military rule and the danger of a perceived Marcos Solid North. He was close to weeping when he spoke during the talkback, expressing elation that somehow, in spaces and nights such as that one, La Union’s young ones were speaking out and waking up, snapping out of the illusion of a perpetual summertime. Such might be the power of alternative cinema to this region’s consciousness in the dark days at hand.

1 “Amianan” means from where the North Wind comes. The now-defunct group was founded by Jason Telles of UP Baguio.
2 “Pagwanawanan” means watchtower or viewpoint.
3 “Pagsarmingang” means to reflect; it also refers to an instrument held up to reflect an image (e.g. sarming, salamin).

Carla Pulido Ocampo is a filmmaker and cultural worker residing in Bontoc, Mountain Province. She co-founded groups that are purveyors of alternative cinema culture in Northern Philippines: Habi Collective, Balay Habi Studio, and Pelicula Union. She is the writer, researcher, and editor for the seminal documentary *Walang Rape sa Bontok* (2014).

In/Vestments in Culture:

Two Catholic Priests on Early Cinema in the Philippines

Louise Jashil R. Sonido

LONG TAKE

Cultura Social: Revista Católica Filipina was a Spanish-language¹ Catholic magazine that published from 1913 to 1941. Endorsed by the archbishop and headed by a line of priest editors, it published monthly and was a principal title among several “menores, bastante estables por lo general” (small but relatively stable).² Spanish-language periodicals were published in limited circulation around the country over a decade after the ceding of the Philippines to the American colonizers. Described to be “de un contenido muy conservador” (of very conservative content), *Cultura Social* was published during the time of expansion of the Catholic press within the new colonial structure at the beginning of the 20th century, as the Church continued to contend with rampant anticlericalism because of its association with the defunct Spanish regime.

Curiously, it was during this intercolonial junction that *Cultura Social* published what might very well be the earliest film review column in the country, “De espectáculos” (On the shows). However, “De espectáculos” came out regularly only during the magazine’s first year of publication, publishing intermittently and then eventually petering out in 1914. It seemed that the column was published mainly on the impetus of an individual column writer and was hardly the editorial priority of the magazine. Regardless, its emergence was indicative of the changing sociocultural and political disposition toward cinema at the time. It also featured the continuing efforts of the deposed colonial masters to, on the one hand, assert their political influence through cultural criticism and, on the other, sustain their management and discipline of the unruly and uncivilized colonial subject.

Toward the second decade of the 20th century, there was an increased narrativization of films from the formal experimentations of cinema’s early years. The advent of film adaptations of literary and theatrical works ensured moviegoing as a popular habit of leisure among the public. It also transformed cinema from being convenient entertainment that distracted the public from the atrocities of the wars into a mainstay of cultural life. Innovators were also experimenting more and more with sound-on-film technologies, increasing cinema’s proximity to the rendering of life. Furthermore, 1913 was a significant year for Philippine cinema as local filmmaking had taken off in 1912 with the release of Yearsley’s *El Fusilamiento de Dr. Jose Rizal* and Brown, Molina, and Gross’ *La vida de Rizal*. After *La vida de Rizal*, the Rizalina Film Manufacturing Company continued to produce films in the next few years. Most of these films featured their muse and Gross’ wife Juana “Titay” Molina, “the biggest star of the silent film era.”³ Cinema was, thus, attracting greater critical attention and gaining ground as a medium of cultural influence.

Notably, none of the articles in “De Espectáculos” covered locally produced films, commenting only on foreign fare, mostly American, German, Italian, and French. The absence of locally made productions from the reviews might

Film adaptations transformed cinema from being convenient entertainment that distracted the public from the atrocities of the wars into a mainstay of cultural life.

be attributed to a number of variables, such as the availability of the films in the theaters,⁴ the cinemas preferred and frequented by the reviewers, and the films that they wanted to or thought warranted review. However, the absence of Philippine films from the proverbial project of disciplining these (moviegoing) colonial subjects only emphasizes the multiple problems that vex the writing of cinematic history and the tracing of cinematic knowledge in the Philippines.

The stewards of “De Espectáculos” were authors under the pseudonyms Alonso de Mudarra and Filadelfo, who, given their language (both wrote exclusively in Spanish), choice of pseudonyms (masculine in their grammatical register according to the conventions of Romance languages), and religious affiliation (Catholicism, famously patriarchal in its structure), may be safely assumed as male and upper-class. While little can be known of their historic personages, one might glean a sense of their subjective positioning and historical emplacement in the aesthetic qualities of their language—including their choice of pseudonyms.

Alonso de Mudarra is a name that, broken down, might be taken to mean “one who battles for change.” Alonso is a common Spanish name meaning “eager for battle.” Whereas, “mudarra,” while having no direct translation in Spanish, might be derived from the verb “mudar,” meaning “to change.” In its conjugated form, “mudará” means “will change” in a third-person future or subjunctive register. Filadelfo, on the other hand, is a common name derived from the Greek words “phílos,” meaning “love,” and “adelphós,” meaning “of the same womb” or “brother.” Consequently, it means “brotherly love.” Curiously enough, the combative complexion of “Alonso de Mudarra” and the gentle forbearance in “Filadelfo” are rather distinctly reflected in their writing styles and attitudes toward cinema, corroborating the construction of a clear subjectivity (persona) that reflects “[t]he individuality and personality of this critic [who] is watching and writing, in this way, now” such that one might recognize from the aesthetic qualities of his work that “this is his...criticism.”⁵

Apart from a shared Catholic conservatism, both writers notably exhibited an outward-looking cosmopolitanism in writing themselves as “citizens of the

These differences in approach point toward the various strategies that these priests, and by extension the Catholic Church, attempted to use to reinforce the Church’s waning power and maintain cultural if not political control over early cinema audiences

world,” certainly due in large part to the cosmopolitan nature of Catholicism itself. *Cultura Social* articles made frequent references to policies and trends in European nations to recommend them for implementation in the Philippine Islands; declaimed on the greatness of European literary texts on which some of the films reviewed were based; and echoed the “refined” views of the great European civilizations.

However, in examining the ways that these two personages wrestled with the issue of cinema during its early years, significant differences in writing styles and critical attitudes may also be observed. While Alonso de Mudarra had a tendency toward the dramatic—tart and acerbic, with a penchant for emotional embellishment—Filadelfo had more comparably measured expressions. Alonso de Mudarra also seemed suspicious of cinema by default, whereas Filadelfo strived for a quasi-scientific mode of argumentation that cited both good and bad aspects of cinema. These differences in approach point toward the various strategies that these priests, and by extension the Catholic Church, attempted to use to reinforce the Church’s waning power and maintain cultural if not political control over early cinema audiences. At the same time, however, their cultural fictions present some of the few remaining imprints of early Filipino audiences and spectatorships in Philippine cinematic history.

Alonso de Mudarra (henceforth referred to as “Mudarra” for brevity) in his “De Espectáculos” articles leaned heavily toward aesthetic criticism, writing with a “formal demeanor” to evaluate what he perceived to be important aspects of the films. His was a limited perception that was more intuitive than deliberate and clearly moralistic in intention. However, there was a method to his engagement with cinema. Beyond matters of theme and storyline, he examined its elements with some awareness of its differences from established art forms, such as theater and literature.

Mudarra’s aesthetic criticism was anchored mainly on the *verísimo* (plausibility) of the plot and he lambasted, sometimes with remarkable derision, films that failed to convince him in this regard. He was particularly skeptical of “*coincidencias*” (coincidences) in films. In his February 1913 column, he cited *La Novela de un Corazón* for such unlikely coincidences: a woman commits suicide and her body is sent

to the examination room of the medical school where her former lover is studying and incidentally ends up dissecting her heart. In the same article, he described *La Canción de la Abuelita* as “*un poco desastrosa, casi tan desastrosa como el argumento de la obra*” (a bit disastrous, almost as disastrous as the plot of the work). The film is a drama about a woman who loses her memory when the theater where she is watching an opera with her husband burns down, and she is mistaken for a ballerina with whom a Count is deeply in love. Among other complaints of this “disastrous plot,” Mudarra sniffed at the implausibility of characterization, as exemplified by a captain who was constantly in uniform even if he had just gotten out of bed. Thus, when Mudarra commented on the cliché of a character losing her memory in “*las películas catastróficas*” (author’s emphasis in the original), we understand he was referring as much to a genre of films that contained catastrophes as to films that, to him, fell catastrophically short on artistic merit.

Mudarra’s proto-realist expectations were even more discernible as a critical aesthetic when he examined non-realist films such as *Quo Vadis* (August 1913). He made an exception to his conservative criteria against violence and sexuality for the Italian epic drama, describing the film as “*una de las mejores que sa han exhibido en Manila y tan ajustada a la novela como podía serlo*” (one of the best that has been shown in Manila and as close to the novel as it could be). He praised how admirably the film portrayed the narrative of an agnostic Roman general who falls in love with a Christian girl during the last few years of Emperor Nero’s reign, when Christians were being intensely persecuted. Mudarra wrote:

En la imposibilidad de describir toda la cinta, citaremos como más salientes la escena del banquete en el palacio de Nerón con un final de orgia discretamente crudo, la bellísima presentación de los mártires en el circo y, sobre todo, el momento solemne de dar suelta a las fieras y de dirigirse éstas contra sus víctimas, la aparición del Señor al Apostol y el incendio de Roma, sin que esto sea negar su mérito a las demás, tan bien hechas algunas como la desdichada muerte de Petronio.

In the impossibility of describing the entire film, we will cite salient scenes of the banquet in the palace of Nero which ends with a discreetly crude orgy; the beautiful presentation of the martyrs in the circus; the solemn moment in which the beasts were freed and directed against their victims; the appearance of the Lord to the Apostle; and the burning of Rome, as well-done as the unfortunate death of Petronius.

Notably, these “salient” scenes included rather explicit and/or grisly content, including a “*discretamente crudo*” orgy, which one would not expect a conservative and moralizing clergyman to appreciate nor approve of. In his defense, Mudarra wrote

that the film’s pitfalls had been “*salvado de manera magistral los escollos, porque no hay nada tan cerca de lo vulgar como lo sublime*” (masterfully saved, because there is nothing so close to the vulgar as the sublime).

Mudarra’s deviation from his moral criteria for a film like *Quo Vadis* can be easily attributed to a preference for religious and pro-Christian themes. Yet his moral criteria were hardly unconnected from his aesthetic criteria. When he commented in his February 1913 column that *El Rey de Bosque* was not very realistic but at least it was able “to move without harming anyone” (*de emocionar sin daño para nadie*), one understands how Mudarra linked the imitable lives that cinema produced on screen and their possible material influence on life itself, such that a realistic and moral cinema hypothetically produced a real, moral audience. This must have constituted in part what he perceived was cinema’s “*gran peligro para muchas almas*” (great danger to many souls) in his October 1913 article.

In confronting the undue influences of cinema, Mudarra was also particularly and quite often concerned about the children. In fact, he wrote in his inaugural article in January 1913, by way of introducing the column, that people were already tired of finding out for certain whether “*hay películas buenas para los grandes y especialmente apropiadas para dos chicos*” (there were still good movies for adults and, especially, films suitable for children). Certainly, the *Cultura Social* writers’ cosmopolitanism extended to their efforts to produce children, through their film writings, as ideal “citizens of the world”—if only local policies on cinema mimicked those in Europe.

Mudarra, in his May 1913 article, cited policies implemented in Liverpool, in which children younger than 14 were prohibited from entering the cinemas after 6:30 in the evening unless they were accompanied by a guardian, and where all films programmed for evening screenings were sanitized through a mandatory screening by the police every start of the week. Similarly, almost a year later in his February 1914 article, Filadelfo decried how difficult it was to find films intended for children in Manila. He also lauded how European capitals had developed a dedicated film program for children that both children and older viewers enjoyed: “*Por qué no hacer lo mismo en Manila?*” (Why not do the same in Manila?). These efforts had to do with developing the “*naciente ideario de pequeño ciudadano*” (nascent ideology of a small citizen) toward a moral and cosmopolitan outlook, insofar as Western, particularly European, cultures had been (and still continue to be) imagined as centers of modernity, sophisticated thought, and enlightened civility.

Filadelfo took over “De espectáculos” in November 1913. While Mudarra was reflecting only two months earlier on the dumb muteness of silent films, Filadelfo’s first article responded to the emergence of the *cinetófono* (Kinetophone) in the Philippine Islands—one of the earliest experimentations in sound-on-film technologies to be commercially accessible. In the article, Filadelfo fretted that a film with sound or dialogue might become merely a “*mala copia*” (bad copy) of theatrical

drama—“bad” in the sense that it would propagate incorrect values and immoralities. He was especially concerned about the increasing number of social dramas and comedies, because “*sus efectos tienden a quebrantar la fe y confianza que el hombre tiene en los principios de solidaridad, de respecto y de justicia*” (their effects ruin man’s faith in the principles of solidarity, respect and justice).

Yet, in succeeding articles, Filadelfo would become less harsh on cinema than his predecessor and would also take greater interest in broad film genres. Remarkable of these early discourses on cinema, which came out well before the entrenchment of the studio system and the commercial mode of cinematic production, was an apparent consciousness of the impact of the commercialization of cinema on the production of films. Mudarra, as early as in his May 1913 article, had noted:

Una peliula no puede estar en los carteles arriba de tres días, so pena de que nadie vaya a verla, y pocos serán los que aguanten dos veces una misma cinta. Esto obliga a los fabricantes a producir sin tino ni medida y explica la falta de novedad que se observa en los argumentos. (emphasis added)

A movie cannot be in theaters for more than three days, under the penalty that no one will go and see it and no one would probably go to watch the same thing twice. *This makes the producers make works without much thought nor precaution and explains the lack of novelty that is observed in the arguments of the films*

Although without any academic or theoretical basis, the conception of “genre” in these early discourses already situated the production of cinematic conventions within market demands and commercial viability. And when Filadelfo said in his November 1913 inaugural column that “[p]oco a poco ha ido invadiendo todos los géneros. . .” (little by little, all the genres have invaded us), he was already referring to a loose typology of films with recurrent visual content in cinema.

Filadelfo’s generic treatment of films was useful to him as a rhetorical strategy to critique, not just films in particular, but societal attitudes implicated in the appreciation of films in general. In his writings, films were usually used only as springboards for talking about social attitudes vis-à-vis general perceptions of genre: he used his experience of watching *Salustiano y el Hormiguera* to talk about the appeal and positive effects on the spirit of good comedy, and of *Amor de Madre* to illustrate the commendable restraint in *obras de sentimientos*. By all accounts, Filadelfo seemed less interested in segregating good from bad films, as his predecessor had attempted to do, than in understanding and evaluating trends in Philippine popular cultural life, among which cinema had proven its prominence and influence.

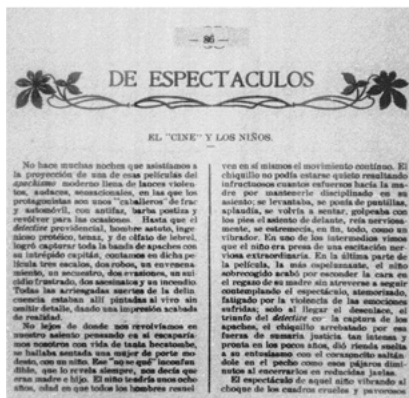


Figure 1. The first page of Alonso de Mudarra's first article. Images courtesy of Louise Jashil Sonido.

In line with this, Filadelfo's concern about film was rooted primarily in the pedagogical potential of the medium rather than in its aesthetic development. Mudarra's moral discourse, on the other hand, was argued and reinforced through his aesthetic criticism. Filadelfo took a more sociological, quasi-scientific route, tempering his moral claims with "objective" argumentation underpinned by a view of cinema's influence as not harmful by default, but potentially educational.

Filadelfo's claim to impartiality in his September 1914 article resulted in a lengthy summary of the film *El Pato a la Colbert*, without any value-judgement or opinion whatsoever except for a cheeky quip that the title perplexed him because there was no duck in the film. This "objective summary" of the film may be read as part of the efforts of the clerical intelligentsia to assimilate aspects of the modern preoccupation with scientific and rational thought into Catholic discourse. During these decades, the Catholic church was waging a battle against "European Enlightenment that...[had taken] a decidedly anti-Catholic cast," and Catholic devotees needed to contend with intellectual trends that rejected the traditional teachings of the Church.⁶ The attempt in Filadelfo's writings to objectively appraise the positive and negative aspects of films while continuing to espouse correct values of morality, truthfulness, and civility in the final evaluation was possibly a demonstration of how, "[f]ar from being a closed, medieval system...Catholicism was a tradition of thought capable of renewing itself and assimilating modern science."⁷ Filadelfo's pedagogical view of cinema was thus an effort toward participating in the educational revelry of the period.

Among Filadelfo's commentaries, his discourse on *apachista* films in February 1914 bore the strongest iteration of the generic qualities of films. The article included the following anecdote of an evening spent at the movie house:

No hace muchas noches que asistíamos a la proyección de una de esas películas del apachismo moderno llena de lances violentos, audaces, sensacionales, en las que los protagonistas son unos "caballeros" de frac y automóvil, con antifaz, barba postiza y revólver para las ocasiones. Hasta que el detective providencial, hombre astuto, ingenioso protético, tenaz, y de olfato de lebre, logró capturar toda la banda de apaches con su intrépido capitán, contamos en dicha película tres escalos, dos robos, un envenenamiento, un secuestro, dos evasiones, un suicidio frustrado, dos asesinatos y un incendio.

Not many nights ago, we attended the screening of one of those films of modern *apachismo*: full of violent, daring, and sensational characters, in which the protagonists are gentlemen in tailcoats, sporting automobiles, masked, with false beards and, occasionally, revolvers. Until the providential detective, an astute, ingenious, lean, and tenacious man with a greyhound's sense of smell, manages to capture the entire band of *apaches* with his intrepid captain. In this film, we counted three hikes up a mountain, two robberies, a poisoning, a kidnapping, two escapes, a frustrated suicide, two murders and a fire.

Yet despite its astute observations on the generic qualities of such films, this description would not extend into a genre critique of a particular *apachista* film. Instead, Filadelfo would recount that a boy around eight years old sat next to him in the theater and was so anxious and fearful throughout the viewing: "*se levantaba, se ponía de puntillas, aplaudía, se volvía a sentar, golpeaba con los pies el asiente de delante, reía nerviosamente, se estremecía, en fin, todo*" (he would get up,

tiptoe, clap, sit back down, hit the seat in front of him with his feet, laugh nervously, shudder, in short, everything). The boy buried his face into his mother's lap toward the end, and Filadelfo described the *chiquillo* as "*fatigado por la violencia*" (exhausted by the violence). When he calmed down toward the film's dénouement, the boy was "*arrebataado por esa fuerza de sumaria justicia*" (captivated by the display of justice). The scene, he lamented, was but one among many happening all over the cheap, children-filled cinemas of Manila.

Filadelfo's sensory descriptions of the boy's response to the film corroborates how "all description is a species of fiction".⁸ For Filadelfo, this fictionalization accomplished his greater advocacy for the proper, i.e. Catholic-Christian, education of children, as it strengthened both his notion of how influential a film could be and how damaging it could be to a child's well-being if left unchecked. It further fulfilled the rhetorical function of convincing and assimilating audiences into the Catholic-Hispanic values he espoused through the emotional argument of children's suffering. In effect, such fictionalization was part of the exercise of writing the colonial subject within the discourse of colonial logic. The emotional argument of children's suffering was utilized in order to manage and circumscribe the experience of cinema.

Yet perhaps it was also this colonial distancing from Filipino culture that allowed the *Cultura Social* writers to embed semblances of an ethnography of the Filipino audience in their writings—imprints of past lives lived in the nation otherwise inaccessible to contemporary scholars. In taking on a cultural and moral ascendancy over the "uncritical masses," Mudarra's and Filadelfo's reviews were as much observations on cinematic representations as they were ethnographic notes from which we might begin to exhume alternative histories of the Filipino audience.

Construing the material archive as a way to self-recognition means finding the imprints of real cinema audiences during the period of early cinema in the Philippines in colonial discourses. This, however, presents a constant and painful irony: that subsequent efforts to speak of ourselves must cite such derogatory discourses. But these attempts to resuscitate our cultural memory through ethnographies pieced together from histories produced by colonial denigration are the struggle to rename the archival absence in Philippine film historiography into a generative condition for discursive agency. In the gaps and ruptures of fiction, we listen for the sharp intakes of breath in a crowded cinema, we feel the fidgeting of bodies in the shadows, and we squint our eyes to limn faces gazing at the screen—lives that had lived, lives that live on in our histories, and lives we continue to live and *transform*—for, saddled as we are with the unending violence of our colonial history and neocolonial present, what greater pursuit is there?

CULTURA SOCIAL

ENERO-DIC. 1918



Figure 2. Filadelfo's article on Children in the Cinemas.

- 1 The first article in Tagalog in *Cultura Social* was published in 1922.
- 2 Antonio Godoy, "La prensa filipina en español entre dos guerras (1899-1941)" in *Revista internacional de Historia de la Comunicación* 1, no 4 (2015): 22-51.
- 3 Lena Strait Pareja, "Roles and Images of Woman in the Early Years of Cinema (1912-1941)." Unpublished dissertation, PhD in Philippine Studies (University of the Philippines, 1998).
- 4 During the period of early cinema in the Philippines, theater owners and program curators often competed with each other in their screening choices, resulting in varying availability of films across theaters and quicker changes to their film programming to continue attracting audiences.
- 5 Alex Clayton and Andrew Klevan (eds.), *The Language and Style of Film Criticism* (London & New York: Routledge, 2011), Kobo eBook.
- 6 Resil Mojares, *Brains of the nation: Pedro Paterno, T.H. Pardo de Tavera, Isabelo de los Reyes and the production of modern knowledge* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2006).
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Adrian Martin, "Incursions" in *The Language and Style of Film Criticism*. Alex Clayton and Andrew Klevan (eds.) (London & New York: Routledge, 2011), Kobo eBook.

Louise Jashil R. Sonido teaches at the University of the Philippines. As a teacher, scholar, multimedia artist, and cultural worker, she has a range of research interests transecting literary criticism, intellectual historiography, media and film scholarship, performance curation, and ethnographies of multimedia production.

Always, horror is considered the quintessential cinema that comprehensively exhausts the language and grammar of different cinematic elements—from *mise-en-scene* to cinematography to editing to music and sound design. In Philippine cinema, one of the earliest horror films titled *Ang Manananggal* (1927), directed by Jose Nepomuceno, made use of new effects and styles in dramatizing the self-segmenting body of the vampire-like viscera sucker, the manananggal. Director Vicente Salumbides opined that Nepomuceno was a “trick master” who was highly competent in using cinematic skills and techniques such as making objects like the manananggal fly.¹ In 1932, an American businessman and director named George Musser produced *Ang Aswang*, another horror film depicting the human-flesh-eating creature, the aswang. The film is believed to be the first to feature an optically recorded sound in Philippine cinema, thus making it the first Philippine talkie when it was shown on January 1, 1933 at Lyric Theater in Escolta.

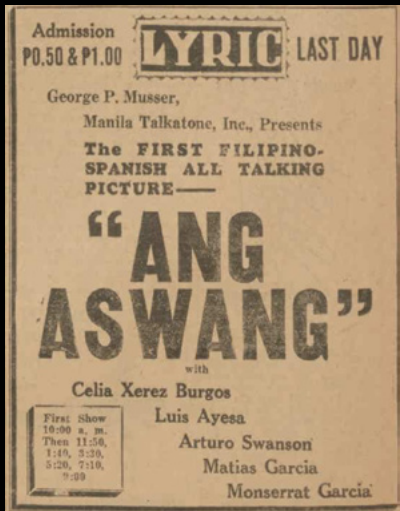
The two horror films *Ang Manananggal* and *Ang Aswang* can be cited to demonstrate a major American influence in Philippine cinema and at the same time offer a valuable proposition on the theoretical underpinnings of genre studies. The genre system being one of the three key influences brought by the Classical Hollywood Narrative Cinema—the other two being the star and the studio systems—has left a tremendous impact on the landscape of Philippine cinema.² The constellation of the star, studio, and genre systems constitutes and configures the totality of the cinematic text. The word “system” operates here in the sense of “process,” meaning it refers to the production of structures of feelings evincing dreams, ideas, concepts, and aspirations.

This essay probes the codes and conventions of the horror genre in Philippine cinema from 1927 up to the present through a reading of available literature. If genre is a system borrowed from Hollywood, the essay surveys and analyzes the paucity of materials on Philippine horror film genre. While the notion of horror is not new and has existed in Philippine imagination—from malevolent spirits in indigenous lifeworlds up to Gabriel Beato Francisco’s concept of kababalaghan during the Filipino-Spanish war—there are still conundrums on how we adopted and formulated the conventions of the genre for cinema. Using these questions as lenses and apertures, this essay investigates how the various academic and cultural institutions in the Philippines have imagined and embodied the genre of horror.

Horror Film Genre

The word *genre* is originally French, which simply means “kind” or “type.” It may be defined as a tacit agreement among filmmakers, reviewers, and audiences about film form.³ American film critic Thomas Schatz is of the mind that genre is a privileged category guided by social, cultural, and aesthetic conventions and laws.⁴ Filipino scholar Eulalio Guieb III puts it felicitously when he distinctly formulates the significance of genre according to its context. Guieb argues that genre does not only refers to the kind, type, and classification of film but can also be reasoned as a *social category*. These categories are centered and founded on the audience’s social interests shaped by the methods, processes, and standards of cinema from different historical periods and following various cultural phenomena.⁵

In cinema studies, the practice of genre analysis denotes compiling and explicating a comprehensive genealogical inventory that intends to survey cinematic codes and narrative conventions. Together with distinct typologies, narrative drives, and unique filmic styles, these codes and conventions are suggestive of the omnibus framework in the analysis of horror films. This approach insinuates the pathways and pleasures of horror films, thus articulating the potency of the horror genre.⁶ However, the influence of changing times has made the genre an unstable repository of codes and conventions. Horror films, without a question, have changed tremendously in form and content throughout history.



Advertisement for George Musser’s *Ang Aswang* (Manila Talkatone Studio, 1933). From Martin Magsanoc’s Archivo 1984 collection.

Opposite page:
Still from Richard Somes’s *Yanggaw* (Cinema One Originals, Reality Entertainment, Larger Than Life, Strawdogs Studio Production, 2008). Courtesy of Somes.

WHAT IS PHILIPPINE HORROR CINEMA?

A Bibliographic Essay

Jay Jomar F. Quintos



Film poster for Gregorio Fernandez's *Asabar at Kabaong* (Filippine Films Production, 1937). From the Gerard Lico collection.

The horror film historian Noel Carroll sketches out the ethos of horror genre criticism through the psychoanalytic framework ushered by Sigmund Freud.⁷ In “The Uncanny,” Freud asserts that strangeness can also be mapped out of the ordinary.⁸ He then elucidates that horror stems from repressive impulses that remind one of a traumatic infancy, social taboos, and other superstitious beliefs, especially those that are connected to “omnipotence of thoughts, instantaneous wish-fulfillments, secret power to do harm and the return of the dead” unmistakably inherited from “our primitive forefathers.”⁹ Thus, the emotion that one encounters in watching horror films is “catharsis” from repressed complexes such as fear and disgust.¹⁰

In Philippine cinema, there is a relatively scant amount of materials on horror film scholarship. Perhaps this is due to the privileging of avant-garde and art cinema over the gargantuan body of work on popular and genre cinema. We need not belabor here the debate between the prestige crowd and *bakya* crowd. Horror, as a thematic screen construct, is one of the most persistent among all of the genres.

In “Kasaysayan at Tunguhin ng Pelikulang Pilipino,” a pioneering text on Philippine film studies, respected critic and scholar Bienvenido Lumbera observes that Hollywood cinema has left the country’s cinematic landscape dented.¹¹ The American influence produced Filipino films marred by unoriginality; such films are instead imitations of the idiosyncratic style of Hollywood cinema. However, local producers seized this opportunity to *colonize* these foreign genres through *indigenization* of cinematic codes and narrative conventions. On the eve of the Pacific War, Philippine cinema produced a voluminous number of films sufficient for serious evaluation. Lumbera classifies the films produced during the said period into five genres:

Ang *melodrama* (pelikulang may seryosong paksain na ang nangingibabaw na emosyon ay kalungkutan), *romantic comedy* (pelikulang may pinaghalong iyakan at katatawanan, na nakatuon sa pag-iibigan), *musical* (pelikulang tungkol din sa pag-iibigan subalit sinalitan ng mga awit at sayaw), *historical film* (pelikulang hango sa aktuwal na pangyayari sa kasaysayan ng bansa ang nilalaman) at ang *adventure-fantasy* (pelikulang nagsasalaysay sa pakikipagsapalaran ng mga bayaning tauhan noong unang panahon).¹²

While the Philippines already had the sarsuwela, sinakulo, and other metrical romance forms even before the US colonizers arrived in the country, the five film genres cited by Lumbera can easily be deduced to have been derivative forms of Hollywood cinematic influence. Furthermore, it is remarkable to note that among the listed film genres, horror was not mentioned. If Lumbera’s essay was first published in *Sagisag* in October 1976, it means that there had already been a significant number of horror films produced in the Philippines. Among the notable horror films produced before 1976 are the following: *Ang Tiyanak* (1932) and *Mang Tano: Nuno ng mga Aswang* (1932) both directed by Nepomuceno; *Ang Aswang* by Musser; *Sumpa ng Aswang* (1935) produced by Filippine Films and starred by Mary Walter; and *Gabi ng Lagim* (1960), the film adaptation of the successful DZRH radio show which featured three episodes directed by Pablo Santiago, Tommy David, and Felix Villar. In this regard, the erasure of horror cinema in early Philippine film writings deserves careful considerations and interrogations.

The other early accounts from various academic and cultural institutions have also missed horror as a major genre. In *The Urian Anthology 1970–1979*, the anthology of essays and articles written by members of the

Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino (MPP), horror was still a missing genre.¹³ While the anthology follows Lumbera’s early classification, it delisted and added certain genres that sprung from the period. The six film genres cited by the MPP are the following: action, melodrama, musical, comedy, *bomba*, and historical. It is noticeable that the bomba genre was added in the list. Bomba is a sub-genre of melodrama that is slightly modified by adding more sexual scenes. Various critics and scholars led by Lumbera have claimed that the rise of this particular genre can be attributed to the sociopolitical turmoil rampant during the 1970s. It is also important to note that the “adventure-fantasy” in Lumbera’s classification was delisted and replaced with “action.” Browsing through the list of films under the action genre, one can see included *Nardong Putik* (1972). The film depicts the travails of an anti-hero figure that uses anting-anting to fight bad cops. The inclusion of the bomba and action genres in MPP’s *Anthology* is deemed necessary in the context and contours of Philippine National Cinema, but the omission of horror remains a question.

Similar to the *The Urian Anthology 1970–1979*, the first of the two monographs from *Tuklas Sining: Essays on the Philippines Arts* titled *Pelikula: An Essay on the Philippine Film 1897–1960* overlooks the horror genre.¹⁴ It covers film history from the birth of cinema up to the post-war years in the Philippines but only five genres are discussed: action, melodrama, musical, fantasy, and comedy. It can also be noted that historical and bomba are not cited in the monograph, albeit a number of significant historical films have already been produced such as Julian Manansala’s *Patria Amore* (1929), *Dimasalang* (1930), *Mutya ng Katipunan* (1939), *Tawag ng Bayan* (1940), and Nepomuceno’s adaptation of *Noli Me Tangere* (1930). Hitherto, horror is still missing.

By looking into the codes and conventions of various cinematic genres in the Philippines, it is tempting to imagine that the seeds of horror films can be traced to the action and fantasy genres. It has been argued, for instance, that the early action and fantasy films often intertwine folklore and Hispanic traditions such as the *awit*, *corrido*, and metrical romances. Their narratives constantly feature the battle of two competing groups: good and evil, *liwanag* and *dilim*, reality and fantasy, and beauty and madness. Action and fantasy films usually exhibit elements of horror such as the prominence of a character whose portrayal is molded by fear and terror. Historian Zeus Salazar’s idea of “pangnayon” in “pelikulang bakbakan” that are demonstrated in films like *Pepeng Agimat* (1973) and *Pepeng Kuryente* (1988) and its predecessors complements this assertion. These two aforementioned films depict the potency of “anting-anting” and “pangil ng kidlat” that help the protagonists combat the evil and the vile.¹⁵

In the second monograph from *Tuklas Sining: Essays on the Philippines Arts* titled *Film: An Essay on the Philippine Film 1961–1992*, horror has still not finally been cited as a full-fledged genre in Philippine cinema.¹⁶ Along with the other traditional genres such as action, melodrama,

“[T]he horror film seeks to induce fear and terror in the audience. It features preternatural beings like vampires, ghosts, goblins, and imaginary monsters. The appeal of such material stems from the Filipino penchant for ghost stories, tales of the supernatural, and for the ‘delving into’ the unknown.”

bomba, comedy, musical, and fantasy, horror is evaluated in the monograph according to its narrative conventions and the cinematic history to which it belongs. However, it is important to stress that the monograph’s account does not completely justify the absence of horror in the early listings of important and major genres: “the horror film which started out as a major genre in the early history of Filipino cinema has now become an occasional novelty that producers trot as a Halloween or Christmas treat for children.”¹⁷ If the monograph asserts that horror is already a major genre since the start of cinema in the Philippines, one might wonder about its glaring absence and minuscule references in the early film writings. These occasions simply affirm the lack of critical interest in horror film studies.

The monumental *Encyclopedia of Philippine Art* (1994) of the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) has a sole volume allotted to the art of cinema. In the encyclopedia’s “12 Forms and Types of Cinema,” Joel David and Lena S. Parejo already cited horror along with action, animation, bomba, documentary, drama, experimental, historical, comedy, musical, and period. While the number of genres has already doubled from the previous listings, it is conceivable that these categories still adhere to the initial studies on cinematic genres initiated by Lumbera.

While all is salutary to the various genres in Philippine cinema, the encyclopedia’s entry on horror does not offer a rigorous definition and description. David and Pareja further explains: “[T]he horror film seeks to induce fear and terror in the audience. It features preternatural beings like vampires, ghosts, goblins, and imaginary monsters. The appeal of such material stems from the Filipino penchant for ghost stories, tales of the supernatural, and for the ‘delving into’ the unknown.”¹⁸ While an encyclopedia entry is only expected to provide basic descriptions, it seems like the horror film genre is defined in a reductive and simplistic manner. The entry assumes that the cinematic code and narrative conventions of horror films can be defined by depicting supernatural and parapsychical phenomena such as the inclusion “vampires, ghosts, goblins, and imaginary monsters.” In this sense,

The most interesting detail from the data collected in 1982 and 1987 is that no horror film was released in theaters during the said years. Action, drama, and comedy were the dominant genres comprising half of the total number of films produced.

the horror film genre loses its liberty and openness to new interpretations and perspectives on its codes and conventions.

The encyclopedia offers classifications for several types of horror films: “straight horror” that features traditional types of horror such as *Gabi ng Lagim*, *Kababalaghan* (1969), *Halimaraw* (1986); “comedy horror” that combines the two forms of horror and comedy such as *Omeng Satanasia* (1977), *Takbo, Bilis, Takbo!* (1987), *Katabi Ko’y Mamaraw* (1990); “drama horror” that combines the two forms of drama and horror such as *Itim* (1976), *Haplos* (1982), and *Vampira* (1994); and “sex horror” or “sexploitation” that blends sexy-titillating and horror such as *Ibulong Mo sa Hangin* (1966), *Ang Batuta ni Dracula* (1971), and *Silip* (1985). These films exemplify the tendency of limiting the genre according to the prescribed inclusion of characters like “vampires, ghosts, goblins, and imaginary monsters” as essential elements of horror.

In 2018, the CCP released the second, revised, and updated edition of the *Encyclopedia of Philippine Art*. While the encyclopedia admirably reframes the forms and types of cinema by adding local nuances to the bomba and “drama,” stressing the difference between “historical” and “period,” and including the “short film” as a major form of cinema, there was no revision to the definition and description in the entry on “Horror.” Recent examples of films that dramatize narratives borrowed from “preternatural beings,” such as *Shake, Rattle and Roll* series, *Magandang Hatinggabi* (1998), *Spirit Warriors* (2000), *Feng Shui* (2004), *Sigaw* (2004), *Cinco* (2010), *Pridyider* (2012), and *Tiktik: The Aswang Chronicles* (2012), were only added.

The MPP’s *The Urian Anthology 1980–1989* observes that horror has sustained its eminence as an important genre in Philippine cinema.¹⁹ But while it is already imagined as a major genre, along with action, drama, comedy, bomba, and fantasy, horror ironically continues to be an elusive form in terms of production. Its rarity is reflected in the number of films produced during the said decade. *The Urian Anthology 1980–1989* validates this speculation with the data it gathered from 1982 and 1987. These are the classifications of the 154 films released in 1982: 74 action films, 39 melodrama films, 35 comedy films, three fantasy films, and three bomba films. In 1987, only 97 new films were released: 31 action films, 24 bomba films, 21 comedy films, 14 melodrama films, six fantasy films, and one historical film.²⁰ From these statistics, one can

deduce that action was the most favored genre by producers in 1982 and that 1987 was a rough year in the Philippine film industry in terms of the number of films produced. It is important to note here that the decade of the 1980s marks the production of the first installment of *Shake, Rattle, and Roll* – considered to be the longest and most successful horror film series in the Philippines in terms of its commercial viability.

The most interesting detail from the data collected in 1982 and 1987 is that no horror film was released in theaters during the said years. Action, drama, and comedy were the dominant genres comprising half of the total number of films produced. In Philippine history, 1982 and 1987 are significant years in the country’s sociopolitical and cultural consciousness as they follow the period when Martial Law was lifted in 1981 and when the EDSA People Power Revolt happened in 1986. These moments in Philippine history—the decline of the totalitarian government and the restoration of the nation’s “morals” from its dictatorial days—may have contributed to the realities of the country’s cinematic modes of production.

In *The Urian Anthology 1990–1999*, the constellation of the studio, star, and genre systems is said to be one of the primary reasons for the decade’s bittersweet ironies and contradictions.²¹ The decade of 1990s is remembered as the “best of times and worst of times.” On the one hand, the decade celebrated milestones in Philippine cinematic history: the 75th anniversary of Nepomuceno’s *Dalagang Bukid* (1919); the 100th anniversary of the first public screening of the Lumiere brothers’ film; and the 100th anniversary of the Filipino revolution of 1896 and 1898. On the other hand, the decade also marks the time when film production gradually weakened in terms of quality and viewership. In addition, bureaucratic problems, high taxation, and greedy film producers triggered “one of the darkest periods in local cinema.”²² It is also estimated that about 90 percent of the 1,426 films produced during this decade were from big studio companies. Horror, numbering only to 29 films, is said to have yielded the lowest number among all of the genres.²³

While the fourth volume of *The Urian Anthology 2000–2009* continues to recognize horror as a major genre along with drama, bomba, comedy, romantic comedy, and action, it problematically merges horror and fantasy into one category.²⁴ Under the horror/fantasy genre, the anthology lists down *Sigaw* (2004), *Spirit of the Glass* (2004), *Mulawin: The*

Movie (2005), *Mag-ingat Ka sa Kulam* (2008), and *Shake, Rattle, and Roll X* (2008). These aforementioned films feature characters from folklore and supernatural phenomena such as ghosts, spirits, mangkukulam, and engkanto. With the exception of the fantasy film *Mulawin*, the anthology follows the traditional definition and description of the horror genre—it “features preternatural beings like vampires, ghosts, goblins, and imaginary monsters.” Needless to say, this solidifies the earlier contention about homogenizing the cinematic codes and narrative conventions and rendering them limiting and reductive.

An interesting take on genre studies is Guieb’s “Taksonomiya ng Sineng Filipino: Mga Kinagisnan at Umuusbong na Genre o Anyo, at mga Paglihis o Paghulagpos sa mga Kumbensiyon” from the book *Sining ng Sineng Filipino* published by the Young Critics Circle. While the taxonomy follows the early classifications made in the *CCP Encyclopedia of Philippine Art*, the essay forwards the concept of hybridity in film genres. Guieb narrows down the film taxonomy into only seven: drama, action, comedy (komedi) or humor (katatawanan), bold or erotic, fantasy (sineng kababalaghan), horror (sineng katatakutan), and musical. But these seven genres are all comprised of sub-genres. For example, the drama genre covers melodrama, political drama, gay and lesbian drama, historical or period, and experimental narrative; the action genre covers war films, sword films/costume films, tulisan films, gangster films, pancit western, espionage or detective films, and martial arts/kung fu/karate; and the comedy genre covers katatawanang mapanlait, sineng kasilyas/katatawanang bastos, sex comedy, sitcom, slapstick, spoof, and satire.

Guieb’s taxonomy of films priming the ground for genre studies in the Philippines looms large on the complexity of cinematic forms and types. But within the mechanism of the taxonomy, he nevertheless defines the horror genre in the same way the previous academic and cultural institutions defined it. According to Guieb:

“[K]aramihan sa sineng horror na Pinoy ay tungkol sa mga lamang-lupa (aswang, duwende, tiyanak, kapre, bampira, engkanto). . . Marami ring sineng katatakutan ang tungkol sa mga kaluluwa o espiritong gumagala na maaaring palakaibigan o, na siyang kadalasan, nakikipag-ugnay sa mga buhay na tao dahil may mensahe itong nais ipaabot sa kanila. . . Puwedeng ang horror ay halaw o batay sa mga totoong pangyayari na kinakitaan ng elemento ng misteryo, e.g., ang ilang sineng masaker ay may langkap ng horror. Sa katunayan, ang hinulmang sindak ng *Kisapmata* (Mike de Leon 1981) ay mas nakakatakot kaysa kalakhan ng sineng horror sa Filipinas; halaw sa totoong pangyayari ang materyal ng pelikula, at ang pelikula ay hindi ikinakategorya sa sineng horror kung ang pagbabatayan ay ang mga nakaugaliang kategorisasyon para sa pelikulang ito.”²⁵

Such a mapping of the genre expresses a form of independence against the previous prescriptive and singular perspectives on horror. Moreover, Guieb’s observation reframes the conventions of horror from the limiting description of inducing fear and terror through the depiction of “preternatural beings” to the more alternative and unorthodox interpretation of grotesque phenomena that invite jump scares and shock. This critical turn on defining the horror genre is exemplified by his reading of de Leon’s treatment in the film *Kisapmata*. While there are no “preternatural beings” in the film, Guieb argues that *Kisapmata* can be categorized as horror because it portrays the fears and terrors of a decaying society that perpetuates the abuse of power. This approach in horror extends and widens the ways of discerning the aesthetics of the genre.

Deviations and Diversions

Postulating that horror films in the Philippines elicit fear and terror through folkloric and supernatural beings is limiting and understudied. Perhaps the nexus between horror films and folklore can be traced back to the influence of Spanish colonialism and Judeo-Christian beliefs on Philippine culture. Some folkloric and preternatural beings such as the aswang, manananggal, kaluluwa (spirit) are antagonized creatures in the accounts written by Spanish chroniclers and missionaries like those of Loarca (1582), Plasencia (1589), Alcina (1668), Ortiz (1731), and San Antonio (1738).²⁶ These chroniclers were relentless in their attempts to purge the folkloric and indigenous belief systems and practices in the early Philippine history. In their accounts, the image of the aforementioned creatures were reconfigured to become the subject of fear and terror, who can only be pacified through the interventions of the Judeo-Christian faith and its paraphernalia—the use of the crucifix, blessed palms, incense, and agua bendita (holy water).

Cultural studies critic and scholar Rolando B. Tolentino proposes another concept for horror genre studies, which he imagines to be the *horrific real*. It can be surmised that the horrific real appellation refers to “the translation of historical terror in filmic horror, or the conversation between historical and filmic terrors.”²⁷ The opportunity to revisit the horror genre provides Tolentino with a scaffold to explicate the liminal sites between pleasure and terror in both the historic and filmic experiences. As an example, Tolentino cites Jonathan Beller’s analysis of Lino Brocka’s *Orapronobis* (1989), a film about human rights violations in the post-Marcos period right after the EDSA People Power Revolt that saw Corazon Aquino’s rise to the presidency in 1986. Beller suggests that Brocka’s film launches a critique of the national and global totalitarianism that perpetuates the hegemony of the ruling establishment.²⁸ It is the horrifying images and shapes of totalitarianism in *Orapronobis* that contribute to the affect of pleasure and terror in the aesthetics of horror.



Still from Alyx Ain Arumpac’s *Aswang* (2019).
Courtesy of Arumpac.

Tolentino’s notion of the horrific real is comparable to Jonathan Lake Crane’s concept of quotidian and mundane horrors. Crane interprets horror films as manifestations of everyday terror and as “metaphorical assaying of the primary human condition.”²⁹ Having posited this assumption, Crane digs up Julia Kristeva’s concept of *abjection* that provokes the expression of aggression toward the seemingly ideal representation of one’s self. In horror films, these objects and abjects appear to “restyle the unsullied self images we manufacture for ourselves.”³⁰ In short, horror is undeniably the articulation of anxieties and discomforts produced by a troubled society. It is an analog of terror in all of its forms and contents.

American film critic Robin Wood affirms these conjectures by elucidating the prominence of “the repressed/ the Other” in many horror films.³¹ Wood is of the mind that horror film is a site where all that the civilization oppresses and represses, such as marginalized groups, alternative ideologies, deviations from mores, and ethnic differences, can reemerge. These elements are dramatized as nightmares, objects of horror, and matters for terror that typically return and are customarily restored in the narratives of horror films whose primary aim is to interrogate the status quo.³² In Philippine film studies, the same ideas are exemplified by scholarly works on horror that rightfully critique the anxieties of the postcolonial nation. Such works include Bliss Cua

Lim’s *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique* on how horror expresses resistance toward the despotic and tyrannical homogeneous historical time that is continually celebrated over the multiple “immiscible times”;³³ Alvin Yapan’s “Ang Kaalamang-Bayan sa Penomenon ng Sapi sa mga Pelikulang Katatakutan” on the concept of *sapi/sanib* (possession) as a cultural trope of what are perceived to be the “real” and the “imaginary,” limning the indigenous belief systems and the colonial doxa;³⁴ [34] Patrick F. Campos’s “Ghostly Allegories: Haunting as Constitution of (Trans)National (Cinema) History” on the configuration of the figures and figurations of national and transnational aspirations through overseas labor and globalization;³⁵ and Katrina Ross A. Tan and Laurence Marvin S. Castillo’s “Urban Anxieties in Davao Horror Short Films” on the urban excess articulated in selected films that depict extrajudicial killings, rural-to-urban migration, and metropolitanism in Davao City, where the first Mindanawon president of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte, hails.³⁶

In 2019, Alyx Ain Arumpac produced the controversial documentary *Aswang* that narrates the horrific effect of the Duterte administration’s “war-on-drugs.” The documentary uses the viscera sucking “aswang” as a trope for *tokbang* (neologism from the Sugbuanong Binisaya words “toktok” (to knock) and “hangyo” (to plead) that connotes extra-judicial killings) that is rampant in urban poor areas

and cities all over the Philippines. In Arumpac’s imagination, the “aswang” is both a character and aesthetic that shapes the documentary’s genre – horror. The “aswang” is a haunting device that is uttered in the poetic narration, heard in the rhythmic pulse of the musical scoring, and aurally and visually visible in the aestheticized yet voyeuristic moving images. In all this, the documentary tries to combine the early and more recent discourses by academic and cultural institutions on the ways of and pathways to the conventions and formulations of the horror cinematic genre.

It can be stressed that horror has established its stature as one of the most enduring film genres in the Philippines. While there is a need for new critical formulations and reappraisals of existing materials on horror, it can be assumed that the genre articulates the “terror of the everyday life.” The cinematic codes and narrative conventions of horror films are conspicuously deconstructible and should overcome the impasse because the world and its lifeworlds and processes, as we know them today, are pregnant with vexing possibilities.

Jay Jomar F. Quintos teaches at the University of the Philippines and is an independent filmmaker. With his research interests on cinema, folk studies, and Philippine literature, his critical and creative works have appeared in national and international publications. He is the editor of the anthology, *The Invisibility of the Visible: Emancipated Mindanao and Sulu in Philippine Cinema*.

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Director and screenwriter Irene Emma Villamor is at the forefront of remaking the romance movie from the perspective of the contemporary woman. To date, she has directed six films and a number of television dramas. She made her film directorial debut with the teen romance, *Relaks, It's Just Pag-ibig* (2014), which she co-wrote and co-directed with Antoinette Jadaone. Her next film is the hysterical romantic romp *Camp Sarwi* (2016). Much of its tone and humor are arguably due to her mentor, Joyce Bernal. In 2018, she made her undeniable directorial mark in the romance genre when she released in quick succession two critically well-received and box-office hit romantic dramas, *Meet Me In St. Gallen* and *Sid and Aya: Not a Love Story*.

Not long after, she released *Ulan* (2019), which confirmed the trajectory of her cinema—moving as it is toward more nuanced mise-en-scène and imagery, more complicated emotions and structures of storytelling, and riskier characterizations and endings, at least as far as audience expectations are concerned. *Meet Me In St. Gallen* is a sad love story, *Sid and Aya*, a romance film refusing to be a love story, and *Ulan*, a love story that begins in the realm of the romance movie and ends in a new territory. In her most recent film, *On Vodka, Beers, and Regrets* (2020), she remolds rom-com by refusing to romanticize the sensitive issue of alcoholism, while at the same time experimenting with subtle gender role reversals.

In this interview, Villamor looks back at her journey from being an intern to being a director and shares her thoughts on making her movies.

On Making *Romance* Movies:

AN INTERVIEW WITH IRENE EMMA VILLAMOR

Patrick F. Campos

Villamor and Nadine Lustre behind the scenes.
Photos courtesy of Irene Emma Villamor.

Some people may not realize that before your recent creative outburst, you have been working in the film industry for quite some time.

I started working in the industry while finishing my film degree in UP. I got a spot as an intern in Joyce Bernal's *Kailangan Ko'y Ikaw* in the summer of 2000. But I went on working, running errands even after my internship. I joined the dubbing and editing sessions at Sampaguita Pictures, back when editing was still done with a Moviola and dubbing was still in "loops."

Then, in my senior year, while working on my thesis, I joined Direk Joyce in her next project as a talent coordinator, crowd director, and production assistant. I followed the production to Sagada and Baguio and insisted on joining them even if it meant traveling with the caterers or the crew. I was just glad to be there and learn in the midst of chaos. After graduation, I worked for Direk Joyce full-time, as a production assistant, and then a script continuity supervisor, and then her assistant director, until she gave me the chance to write the screenplay for her Star Cinema movie, *Bakit Hindi Ka Crush ng Crush Mo* (2013).

That's the difference with that period. It was a long climb. You had to do every kind of job to get to the "top." There weren't as many producers or opportunities. I was exposed to all the aspects of production, worked with all kinds of people, from utility personnel to movie stars. I did creative work like write scenes as well as menial tasks like count paper cups. I relish that time. It taught me about patience and perseverance and prepared me for my turn to be the captain of the ship.

You witnessed the transition from celluloid to digital filmmaking.

IEV: The biggest change in the transition is the discipline involved in filmmaking. You couldn't say "fix it in post." We'd do a lot of preparation and rehearsals because we didn't have unlimited negatives. Ninety thousand feet of celluloid was the maximum footage you could have as a director. One hundred twenty thousand feet is Chito Roño level. Imagine, 400 feet is roughly four minutes long. Now, you've got hard drives that can contain hours and hours for coverage.

And because it got cheaper to produce films, opportunities opened up for people. A fresh graduate can be a director right away. Sometimes, with the right connections, you can even wing it. There are festivals giving grants and new platforms to show your work. The ladder isn't that steep anymore.

There's also a difference in how people approach the work. I see it on set with the millennials I work with. They are free-spirited. They know how to have to fun. They offer solutions that I appreciate. They're kind of my different set of eyes.

Did the working conditions change along with the filming technology?

In fact, what remained unchanged are the working conditions. We still don't have laws to protect workers. The hours are still long. The hierarchy on set is still very evident. Intellectual property laws don't have teeth and don't benefit the artists. And there's still that struggle against Hollywood for theaters and audiences.

So, in my set, we try to clean up our house by enforcing safety protocols and shortening working hours. Making movies may be your passion, but you have to show compassion for the people you're working with.

How did you break through as a director?

When Neil Arce of N2 Productions broached this movie about a camp for the brokenhearted, initially, it was supposed to be directed by Direk Joyce. When she turned it down, Neil asked me. I was all sorts of afraid. Directing *Relaks* was okay because I had Antoinette beside me. Though she was younger, at least we could hold hands and take the leap together. But I had all these ideas and I couldn't shut up about them, so Neil told me to write my version and direct that instead.

That's the difference with that period. It was a long climb. You had to do every kind of job to get to the "top." It taught me about patience and perseverance and prepared me for my turn to be the captain of the ship.

What was the process like of co-writing and co-directing with Jadaone?

Antoinette applied for an apprenticeship with Direk Joyce while I was Direk's script continuity supervisor. So she started much like how I did. We worked hand in hand as Direk's minions for her movies and teleseryes. We wrote scenes and revised scripts according to Direk's inputs. A friendship was formed. We let each other read our own stuff until Spring Films asked us to pitch for a movie. And we did. That was *Relaks*.

Our process of writing went like this: she'd write complete scenes, then I'd write my own, and then we'd meet to brainstorm and assess which scenes worked. It was the same process for the direction. She'd direct the scenes she liked, and I'd direct the ones I liked. It was fun. Our cinematographer,

Dan Villegas, was our balance. There was a lot of respect because we're both strong-headed, and there's a lot of sisterhood, too. Even today, I'd do anything for Tonet. And I can count on her to be there for me. Someday, I want to write a movie that she can direct, and vice versa. It hasn't happened yet, but hopefully, one day.

What do you think are the opportunities and limitations of working in the mainstream industry?

The budget is the most obvious advantage. There's more leeway for creativity when you get the proper budget, when you don't have to pack in so many sequences in a day, and when you get the right equipment to fulfil your vision. Plus, your movie gets to be seen by more viewers. But that budget comes with a limitation. Producers have a say on what you put out there because it's their money, and they have a brand. So that affects your story and the way you tell it. It's the opposite when you take the indie route. You are as free as your imagination, and you can be bold. But you have to work within a budget. It's give and take.

I've been fortunate that, so far, I had almost complete control in my films, and the compromises I've made are the compromises I was willing to make. It takes a lot of negotiation, but since *Camp Sawi*, my producers have given me a lot of freedom.

Do you find that being a woman in a male-dominated industry still presents gender-related challenges to your practice?

These days, there are more women in the industry than before. I'm grateful that there's more awareness now, that women are more outspoken. Personally, I have not experienced any discrimination. But I have heard of other people's experiences. Sexual harassment is an issue. There should be a sense of community here. Women in power should lift other women up and be a voice for those who cannot speak.

Your choice of genre has been romance. Is this a result of industry trends, your being a woman (with romance being conventionally considered as addressing women), your inclination, or something else?

It's a combination of everything you've said. Romance movies do sell. They're the biggest hits in mainstream cinema so producers are inclined to do more of them. And since I was mentored by Direk Joyce, who has done mostly romance movies, there's an inclination for me to do the same. But I like to take the genre to another level, or at least from another perspective. I like to read and get inspiration from books. I grew up watching romance movies, and there's always an angle to a love story. So I always ask myself, "What else is there to say? How else could I look at it?"



Villamor with cinematographer Neil Daza.

How much do audience expectations figure in your creative process?

I love romantic films. Audience din ako. So I write what I wanna see. And I read a lot, kahit hindi related sa mundo ng script ko. I do a lot of research, too. I reread what I write every three sequences, pabalik-balik. Madulas ba sa dila? Kinikilig ba ako? Sa panahon ngayon, mahirap na masabi ang taste ng audience. It's hit or miss. So I try not to think of the audience when I write. If it works for me, go.

Are you conscious of breaking genre rules?

People say that my films are anti-romance. Though it isn't a conscious effort for me to break the genre rules. It's more of how I view the world. I love the melancholic, the lonely, but also I believe in happy endings. But whenever I write, my characters tend to walk the lonely path, and they don't always choose the happy ending. I like to see what my characters are made of when they're hurt, but they bring back the questions to me. My characters become extensions of myself. Kapag ramdam na ramdam ko na, totoo pala iyong sinasabi na "the character will write themselves." So I follow my characters. I usually have this big theme in mind, and the theme would be my secret. I anchor everything on it but don't talk about it. I just hope that the audience would get it. And most of the time, I would read reviews and find that people do get it. That makes me happy. All the torture it took me to write is worth it kapag may naiyak o kinilig o lalo na kung mas malalim pa iyong nakita nila sa pelikula ko kaysa sa una kong naisip.

People say that my films are anti-romance. Though it isn't a conscious effort for me to break the genre rules. It's more of how I view the world. I love the melancholic, the lonely, but also I believe in happy endings.

Would you say that there are shifts in the trends of romance movies, for example, in recognizing the OFW [overseas Filipino worker] experience as central to the Filipino story or in resorting to not-so-happy endings?

Shifts, yes. The OFW experience is a story that resonates with many Filipinos. OFWs have been our biggest export, so naturally their stories are reflected in our movies. As for the not-so-happy endings, much of it, I think, can be attributed to our growing exposure to the world through the internet and other movies. We are exposed to all kinds of stories, and sad endings are now normal.

When Tonet's *That Thing Called Tadhana* (2014) came out, it was a major hit. We recognized that a well-made story is good regardless of its ending. You go to the movies not because you want a happy ending but because you want to see a good story, a good movie. Maybe there's also a happy-ending fatigue.

You wrote *Meet Me In St. Gallen* and *Sid and Aya* at the same time and directed them one after the other. How did making one inform the other?

About the same time, in 2017. Parehong matapang na babae. Parehong exploring relationships. So yes, inevitably they were connected. There's an awareness na ilayo sila style-wise, but the core of the stories is about women trying to take control of their own fates.

With *St. Gallen*, the viewers were heartbroken. Hindi nagkatuluyan, eh. But people were accepting. It was a box-office hit, so there was pressure for *Sid and Aya* to achieve the same, higit pa nga, because it's Anne Curtis and Dingdong Dantes. But since the script was finished, I didn't do any rewriting.

Direction-wise, I wanted to differentiate the two. Malaki ang *Sid and Aya* while *St. Gallen* was very intimate. *Sid and Aya* was speaking for so many things, so maraming visual and aural layers. From music to production and sound design, it had a bigger world. There was emphasis on style, using anamorphic lenses, complex color palettes. Even in the performance,



Villamor directing Dingdong Dantes and Anne Curtis.

there's a pervading cynicism in *Sid and Aya*, while *St. Gallen* was full of heart and optimism.

How about *Ulan*, how does it relate to these works, if at all?

There is no single statement across the films, but I want all these women characters to be strong. Hindi kailangang hindi natitibag pero lalaban. They can be flawed, but that's okay because they can rise above it.

You seem to be questioning the expected gender roles in love stories, especially apparent in *Ulan* and *On Vodka, Beers, and Regrets*.

I am not consciously questioning expected gender roles, but I always write from my point of view. I put my convictions in my films. My male characters stem from how I view men. I lost my father at an early age, and I grew up in a macho environment where men are like the action stars of the 1980s. Through the years, especially throughout college, I learned about the trouble with patriarchy as I became more aware of the world. At the same time, I know of men who are sensitive and articulate and don't have that macho bone in their body. So I was reconciling all these experiences in my films. Women have notions of what men are supposed to be, based on the stereotypes in their minds: the prince charming, the one who got away, the misogynist. In *Ulan*, Peter is the perfect guy, but one whom Maya can never be with. Here, we see how Maya has to deal with men, like her boss or Peter, and how she has to decide to form herself apart from them.

In *On Vodka*, I decided early on that it would be about Jane's journey, and so in a way, Francis didn't *do* anything to help Jane in her recovery. But Jane is complicated and human, and she clings to men and discards men or lets them destroy her depending on her needs, so it is up to her to sort her mess out. Francis cannot fix her. In fact, Francis *did* something for her, and that was to be there for her. Then leave her to figure her life out. Because that's what he represents. That is how hard love is.



Villamor and Bela Padilla on location with the crew of *Meet Me in St. Gallen*.



Do you consider yourself a feminist filmmaker?

Feminism is a big word that entails a bigger responsibility. So when you acknowledge yourself as a feminist, you should be able to rise up to it. Panagutan mo. And I'd like to. I want to be a feminist filmmaker. I say it in that sense because I am trying to be one. There's a lot of discourse about what feminism is. There's a lot of nuances to it and nuances on how it is realized in cinema. But I like the definition by Nigerian writer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. The problem with gender, she says, is that it prescribes how we should be rather than recognizes who we are. She insists on the goodness of being one's true individual self without the weight of gender expectations. She says a feminist is a man or a woman who says, "Yes, there's a problem with gender as it is today and we must fix it, we must do better." So I take that to heart, try to do better every time. My women characters are complex because I am. They are imperfect but they are trying their best.

There's a contention about this misogynist character in *Ulan*, Maya's boss. Maya would just take his snide remarks. For some, that character was offensive. And I was aware of that. But I was also trying to show the culture where women could not fight back right away. Maya had an inner world that is impervious to what's happening outside, but she is also wearing a mask. Her defense, perhaps.

The important thing for me is that the audience recognized Maya's boss as misogynist, and they would not put up with

him. I wrote *Ulan* ten years before I wrote *St. Gallen* and *Sid and Aya*, films that had very strong female characters. They speak their mind. They make decisions. They own their lives. But I didn't change anything in *Ulan*. It was a journey for me. To see how I was then, and to see how I am now. So this is one way how I know that I'm trying to be better.

Feminism is a big word that entails a bigger responsibility. So when you acknowledge yourself as a feminist, you should be able to rise up to it. Panagutan mo. And I'd like to. I want to be a feminist filmmaker.

Patrick F. Campos is a film scholar, educator, and programmer. His book *The End of National Cinema: Filipino Film at the Turn of the Century* was published by U.P. Press in 2016. He is the editor-in-chief of *Pelikula: A Journal of Philippine Cinema*.

For an ENDLESS CINEMA:

John Torres's *People Power Bombshell: The Diary of Vietnam Rose*

Chris Fujiwara

In general I think that any closure,
even the closure of a great work of art, smells a bit of death.

—Mikhail Bakhtin

SHORT TAKE

Since my choice of epigraph may be misleading, I should make it clear that I don't regard John Torres's *People Power Bombshell: The Diary of Vietnam Rose* (2016) as primarily a film about death. It has something to say about closure, especially about the lack of it, but death is present in the film mainly as a play, a sham, and Torres neither shares in the recent worries about the imminent death of cinema nor contributes another dithyramb to the perennial mourning for a cinema that is already dead. Certainly, decay is a major theme of the film. The degradation to which the surviving reels of Celso Ad. Castillo's unfinished *The Diary of Vietnam Rose* have been subjected is, however, an organic process, which Torres's film renders as constant, dazzling motion. Seen magnified, over the course of the film, decay appears as something lively. Instead of pronouncing a post-mortem, *People Power Bombshell* seeks to sustain a direct connection between cinema and life.

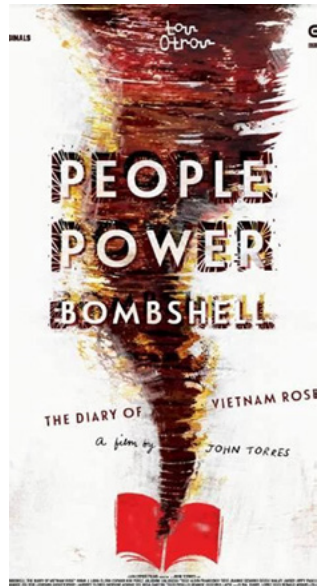
To clarify what I mean by "life," I refer to the text by Gilles Deleuze called "Immanence: A Life," in which he writes:

A life is everywhere, in all the moments that a given living subject goes through and that are measured by given lived objects: an immanent life carrying with it the events or singularities that are merely actualized in subjects and objects. This indefinite life does not itself have moments, close as they may be one to another, but only between-times, between-moments; it doesn't just come about or come after but offers the immensity of an empty time where one sees the event yet to come and already happened, in the absolute of an immediate consciousness.¹

Elsewhere, Deleuze and Félix Guattari describe this immediate consciousness as "a pure contemplation without knowledge."² Torres's cinema is dedicated to this contemplation and to the preservation of the "between-times, between-moments" that constitute life. For Torres, cinema is above all the rediscovery of fragmentary images that are no longer, and perhaps never were, attached to the "moments"—the "subjects and objects"—that actualized them. In freeing themselves from those actualizations, the images make available to the viewer an ever-renewable source of energy and mystery.

The project of rediscovery involves a certain incompleteness. To function as images for pure contemplation, the images from *The Diary of Vietnam Rose* must be opened up, reimagined outside their original context, and endowed with the consciousness of their own status of not ending in a work, of being outside a work. This process can be understood as a making-explicit of the condition of being an image, a recorded performance (that of a director, a cameraperson, or an actor), in cinema. The state of the footage from Castillo's abandoned project makes all too clear the condition of cinema as a "material ghost," to use Gilberto Perez's term.³ Furthermore, the images acquire a dual status, specific to the circumstance that they now function, simultaneously, as the images of two films. The titles of these films—*People Power Bombshell* and *The Diary of Vietnam Rose*—appear on-screen some minutes apart (the same device is used for the alternate titles of Torres's earlier *Ang Ninanais/Refrains Happen Like Revolutions in a Song* [2010]), indicating that we are indeed watching two films, neither of which has started at any definite moment, neither of which will necessarily end at any definite moment, and whose beginnings and endings may or may not coincide with each other.

The images of *People Power Bombshell* move progressively farther away from the photographic reproduction of reality and closer to animation, eventually, in the final minutes of the film, losing all dimension and relief. Everything in the film is phantasmal, both the original images from Castillo's film and the new scenes filmed by Torres. Everything exists in a state of abeyance between real and unreal. The first shot shows a waterspout spinning over the surface of a body of water onto the shore. It is difficult to say whether this shrouded image was taken by night or by day, just as the waterspout itself is an uncanny figure that partakes both of the animate and the inanimate. The waterspout is an anticipatory form of the kind of premonitory existence, located within what Deleuze calls "the immensity of an empty time where one sees the event yet to come and already happened," that belongs to the figures of the film.



Movie poster of John Torres's *People Power Bombshell: The Diary of Vietnam Rose* (CinemaOne Originals, 2016).

Opposite & next pages:
Stills from *People Power Bombshell*.
Images courtesy of Torres.



The second shot shows the courtyard in front of a sort of bar (or brothel), the single light bulb over the entrance flickering on and off. This flickering links the shot to the preceding image of water, in which, faraway on the horizon, a bright light is visible. Throughout the film, lights appear within the frame, aimed at the camera from behind actors' bodies, from the back walls of sets, from flashlights in the actors' hands, or from the far distance. The lights (especially those that flicker on and off or that move within the frame) perform vision, making vision visible. They designate vision itself as the theme of the film. In a scene in a boat cabin, a male voice tells the on-screen characters to turn around while he and a woman make love. The light behind the addressed group flares the lens. Everything in the film is watched over by light, and everything aspires to light, the dematerialized state of pure luminosity.

In the third shot of the film, a young woman enters the space of the bar. This space is subsequently revealed as a vice den in which women are the objects of a fascinated gaze that circulates over the surface of the degraded film footage much as the waterspout circulates over the water. Everything visible gets referred to the play of cinema, in an elaborate *mise en abyme*: the war from which Castillo's characters are fleeing is understood, thanks to the overdubbed dialogue, to be the Vietnam War as restaged by the American crew shooting Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986). One sequence edits together a series of slates, some of them marked "FLASHBACK." So Castillo's film, too, like Torres's, had a flashback, its own film-within-the-film.

The care and vigor that characterize Castillo's footage still comes through, but the fragmentary nature of the footage is made to dominate. Instead of completing Castillo's film or doing a documentary on it, Torres creates a meditation on the fragmentary nature of all cinema. This meditation takes its mordant tonality from Torres's awareness of the conditions of Filipino cinema, both those of its production and those of its dissemination, and how these conditions accentuate the

precariousness of the cinematic image. This meditation is not at all alien to Castillo's film. On the contrary, watching *People Power Bombshell*, one becomes aware not just of the instability that has accrued to Castillo's original footage, but of the instability that was already present in it: instability of foreground and background, for example, in scenes involving moving characters.

On the soundtrack of Torres's film, actress Liz Alindogan recounts Castillo's infatuation with her. Is this why he doesn't want to finish the film: because he wants to keep her with him as long as possible? Castillo's film would then be not just an unfinished film, but a film that intentionally lacks completion. Or perhaps the incompleteness of *Vietnam Rose* is the result not only of Castillo's desire for Alindogan but of his commitment to an idea of cinema that, in this case at least, went beyond the parameters of the individual work—as if, for him, this one film had become the whole of cinema, so that to see it finished would mean an end to his activity as a filmmaker.

There is an extraordinary scene in which a bearded American (Richard Boyle) paws at the heroine of *Vietnam Rose* while she collects tinned and packaged food items. Her mixture of defiance and passivity, working in mesmerizing combination with the obsessiveness of Castillo's extended takes, makes it understandable that the American should seem to be rendered powerless in the face of her refusal to give herself.

If *People Power Bombshell* enters the ranks of films undone by cinema and that chronicle the undoing of cinema, films that struggle with the very obsession that inspired their creation,⁴ Torres's film adds a further level of complexity, in that cinema becomes not only the medium in which the struggle plays out; it becomes also a desired object. Liz Alindogan's aspiration to become a famous actress is a surrogate expression of Torres's own relationship to cinema, a relationship determined by his consciousness of his own practice as a *minor* one, in the sense established by Deleuze

and Guattari in their book on Kafka.⁵ Moreover, Torres's filmography invites analysis of his relationship to cinema in Oedipal terms. The absconded fathers of *Years When I Was a Child Outside* (2008) and *Lukas the Strange* (2013) leave their children burdened with enigmas of identity and of language. In *People Power Bombshell*, the father figure is very much present: it is Celso Ad. Castillo, master of cinematic language, "messiah" of Philippine cinema—a physically imposing actor in his own film, armed with a gun and costumed as a priest. How can Torres rival him? Not on the level of the image. On the contrary, Torres has, since his first short films, willfully assumed a degraded image as a condition for his filmmaking. It is on the level of sound and the word that Torres tries to develop a practice that can dispute with Castillo the possession of the beloved object of cinema.

Perhaps the most direct instance of this in the film is the scene in which Castillo is made to repeat, "Cut. . . Action. . . Cut"—the magic words that define a film director, but here uttered without visible effect, as if on his own set Castillo were no more than a wandering stranger, dreaming aloud. Meanwhile, in counterpoint, a woman's voice repeats "Silent" (or perhaps she should be heard as invoking a filmmaker who represents a very different model and course for Philippine cinema than Castillo's—Kidlat Tahimik).

Dispossessing Castillo of his work, Torres overlays the remnants of *The Diary of Vietnam Rose* with the polyphonic reading of texts. These texts enable Torres to stage the awareness of the incompleteness of *The Diary of Vietnam Rose* as a foreknowledge. The characters of the film are made to appear to be reacting to a situation that does not advance, and to comment on the experience of taking part in the film as, precisely, endlessness, the condition of never finishing.

A group of women, associated with Alindogan and the diary, become prominent, assuming a choric function and implicitly advocating for the values of community. Through the soundtrack, Torres also links *Vietnam Rose*, filmed in 1986, to the People Power Revolution of the same year, incorporating sound recordings of events of the uprising, including the capture of the government TV station MBS-4 and Jaime Cardinal Sin's radio appeal to the citizens of Manila. *People Power Bombshell* thus continues Torres's

exploration of the relationship between love and revolution, begun in *Todo Todo Teros* (2006) and pursued more obliquely in *Refrains Happen Like Revolutions in a Song*. The hidden structure of *Vietnam Rose* is laid bare: Castillo's film is made to reflect on its own position, pinned between two moments: that of the crystallization of the economic-institutional-political structures that made the Philippines a Hollywood back lot in the 1980s, and that of the People Power Revolution.

Torres poses the question of what is an end, in film. "Are we still in the film?" a woman's voice asks at one point. Her question calls attention to the ambiguity of the limits of the film, either film (Castillo's or Torres's). The characters even come to wonder if there is a film at all—a sign that the endlessness of the film is about to merge with a different endlessness. Again and again, the characters ask to be released from their imprisonment. They seek escape not only from the demands of the production of the film, but from the film as idea: its narrative and its conceptual and ideological underpinnings. They are also seeking escape from the desire of the director, which is an expression of his desire for cinema.

The end of any artwork is the moment when the work meets everything that circulates outside it, rejoining the time and space that the work has interrupted with its appearance. For *The Diary of Vietnam Rose*, this moment never came. By doubling *Vietnam Rose* with *People Power Bombshell*, Torres diverts the unfinished trajectory of Castillo's work into a different endlessness—that of history. This means avoiding closure and choosing instead the indefiniteness of life.

1 Caryl Emerson, *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 36, note 6.3456

2 *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life*, trans. Anne Boyman (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 29.

3 What Is Philosophy?, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 213.

4 Gilberto Perez, *The Material Ghost: Films and their Medium* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

5 A short list might include Josef von Sternberg's *Anatane* (1953), Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Beware the Holy Whore* (1971), Wim Wenders's *The State of Things* (1982), and Ruggero Deodato's *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980).

6 Among the characteristics of "minor literatures" highlighted by Deleuze and Guattari, perhaps the most relevant to Torres's work "is that everything in them is political... In major literatures, in contrast, the individual concern (familial, marital, and so on) joins with other no less individual concerns, the social milieu serving as a mere environment or a background. . . Minor literature is completely different; its cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics." Kafka: *Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 17.

Chris Fujiwara has written and edited several books on cinema, including *Jacques Tourneur: The Cinema of Nightfall*; *The World and Its Double: The Life and Work of Otto Preminger*; and *Jerry Lewis*. He was the editor of *Undercurrent*, film critic for the Boston Phoenix, and Artistic Director of the Edinburgh International Film Festival. He is a film lecturer, organizer, critic, programmer, and mentor.

MAHALAGA ANG MARAMI:

REBYU NG *MANILA BY NIGHT: A QUEER FILM CLASSIC* NI JOEL DAVID

Chuckberry J. Pascual

Maaaring basahin ang *Manila by Night: A Queer Film Classic* (2017) ni Joel David sa maraming paraan, dahil tulad ng pelikulang multiple-character na kinakampiyan ng libro, laksa rin ang naratibo at diskursong naglipana sa aklat.

Narito ang isa: ang pelikula ay kasaysayan. Ikinakabit ni David ang naratibo ng pelikula sa naratibo ng bansa, na maaaring basahin bilang patuloy na paggigiit na ang panonood ng sine ang ating pambansang libangan. At bakit hindi? Sa unang kabanata, minapa ni David kung paanong nakatali ang pusod ng kasaysayan ng pelikula at kasaysayan ng bansa. At ang kabilang mukha nito, na bihirang mabanggit dahil hindi masyadong magaang pakinggan at tanggapin: ang kolonyal na ubod ng bayan (33) (na sinasalamatin rin ng pagkakautang ng obra ni Bernal sa *Nashville* ni Robert Altman.) Marami pang ganitong paglilina—pagpapaalala—si David sa aklat, tulad halimbawa ng karaniwang pagtanggap sa mga taong nasa pagitan ng dalawang Ginintuang Panahon ng Pelikula. Taliwas sa naging hatol ni Lumbea na ito ay panahon ng “rampant commercialism and artistic decline,” kontra ni David, “In fact, the 1960s was marked by a pioneering, taboo-breaking, politically-charged vulgarity never seen before or since in the country, which is essential to explaining why the Second Golden Age (1975–86) held far more promise and managed to meet more expectations than the first.” (30–36) Mahalaga ang pahayag na ito dahil ito rin ang panahong tinuntungan ng *Manila by Night*, partikular sa paglalahad nito ng mga naratibong may diin sa kasarian at seksuwalidad, sa mga indibidwal na itinuturing na tagalabas, kakatwa, kung hindi man mga patapon.

Sa kanyang historisasyon ng *Manila by Night*, napalutang ni David ang naratibo ni Bernal bilang direktor. (Nakakatukson gamitin ang “pag-unlad,” pero tulad ng kanyang pelikula, hindi rin naman isang diretsong linya ang tinahak ni Bernal. Ani nga ni David, “mid-career work” ang *Manila by Night*, bagaman hindi rito nagsimula at nagtapos ang paglikha ni Bernal ng mga pelikulang may multiple-character format.) At hindi mauunawaan nang lubos si Bernal

Opposite page: From the scanned cover by Amauteurish Publishing. Courtesy of Joel David

at ang kanyang obra kung hindi isasangkot ang kanyang kontemporaneong si Lino Brocka. Itinatambis ni David ang *Manila by Night* sa *Maynila: Sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag*, at lumilitaw na tumanggap rin ng mga batikos ang huli dahil sa pagtindig sa isyu ng kasarian at seksuwalidad (bagaman nang maglaon ay maaaring ilarawan bilang problematiko: binalatan ni David ang “homoeerotikong” sanaysay ni Ave Perez Jacob at sininsin ang mga dahilan kung bakit maaaring ituring na anti-queer ang *Maynila*), pero mas madaling natanggap ng publiko at iba’t ibang institusyon at humamig pa ng samot-saring parangal. Samantalang mas matinik ang landas na tinahak ng pelikula ni Bernal: ginunting-gunting ng censors ang mga eksena, isinadlak ng mga kritiko ang halaga sa taglay na politika, at minaliit ang hindi maunawaang estetika. May padaplis ding pagtatambis sa mga persona ng dalawa bilang direktor: malambot at madaldal si Bernal, matigas at halos ayaw makipanayam ni Brocka.

Narito ang isa pang diskursong taglay ng aklat: ang pelikula ay sining. Integral sa pag-unawa sa sining ang usapin ng anyo, ng kasanayan (craft). Ani David, hindi lamang sa representasyon ng mga tauhan at ng mga naratibong queer nagmumula ang kapangyarihang manuligsa ng *Manila by Night*, mas maiuugat ito sa naratibong estruktural at pormal na elemento ng pelikula. (89) Sa pagtukoy sa politikang taglay ng estilo ni Bernal—na unang itinuring ng mga kritiko bilang kahinaan ng direktor, lalo na kapag itinatambis kay Brocka at sa isa pang kontemporaneong si Mike De Leon (98)—at muli, nililina—ipinapaalala—ni David na hindi naman talaga magkahiwalay ang nilalaman at anyo, at kung hindi man posibleng mismong ang anyo at nilalaman ay iisa. Aniya, “Bernal determined that documentary aesthetics would provide the most apposite (or the least objectionable) way of matching what was, after all, Western-sourced technology with Third World realities.” (98) Rekuperasyon ito sa pagkakasadlak ng *Manila by Night* sa pagbasang maka-nilalaman, at pagtatanghal din ng kapangyarihan ng apropiasyon: ang estilong naglalayong humuli ng “actualities”—ang taguri sa mga likha nina Dean E. Worcester at Thomas Alva Edison—at teknolohiyang minsang ginamit para manakop, para manikil, ay kinasangkapan ni Bernal, na kabilang sa lahi ng sinakop, sa mapagpalayang paraan. Hindi nga lamang diretso, maingay, at sa tuwina, pakindat-kindat pa ang apropiasyong ito, kaya napagkamalang “slapdash” at “flawed.” (Gaano karaming nilalang ba ang agad na makagagagap sa “reflexive sequence” na inilarawan ni David bilang serye lamang ng “in-jokes” sa unang malas?) (103–106) Ngunit kapag tinitigan, mapapatunayang hindi hamak na mas sopistikado kaysa mga pelikulang itinuturing na malinis at makinis.

Heto ang pangatlong diskursong mahuhugot sa aklat: ang pelikula ay ang tauhan. Karamihan sa mga pelikulang ipinalabas bago ang Ikalawang Ginintuang Panahon ay nagtatampok ng isang bida, pero nang maglaon, tinanggap din ng madla ang mga pelikulang maraming tauhan. Ang isang itinuturong dahilan ni David ay ang pagkakahawig ng mga sinehan at ng mga simbahang itinayo noong Panahon ng Kastila (81). Interessante at nakakapukaw ang mungkahing ito, lalo na dahil nanganganak ng mga implikasyon—sunod-sunuran pa rin ang mga manonood, sabayan ang pagsunod at pagsuway (iisa ang Diyos, pero maraming santo, iisa ang altar, pero maraming dinadasalan)—lalo na kapag itinambis sa kanyang pagbasa sa produktibong pagbasag ng *Manila by Night* sa mga tradisyonal na nosyon tungkol sa tauhan, na nakakapukaw ring tinukoy ni David bilang mayroong lesbiyanang oryentasyon (153–154). Ani David, “the constant shifting of identification from one subject to another without any singular subject predominating enables the envisioning of a social formation—an abstract super-character that is literally socially-constructed.” (156) At mula rito, imumungkahi ni David ang radikal na potensiyal ng super-character na ito, na lesbiyana ang pagiging queer, at kung paano nito maaaring patumbahin, kung hindi man paulit-ulit na multuhin at gambalain ang dominanteng kaayusan.

Nagsimula at nagwakas ang aklat na *Manila by Night: A Queer Film Classic* sa personal na diskurso. Sa panimula, tinukoy ni David ang hindi maitatwang pagkakasangkot ng kanyang buhay sa pelikula ni Bernal (at maaaring isipin, sa buhay rin ni Bernal mismo). Nagwakas naman ang aklat sa isang panayam sa namayapang Bernardo Bernardo, ang aktor na gumanap bilang Manay Sharon, na siyang madalas ituring na “protagonista” ng pelikula. Babanggitin ulit ni Bernardo ang sapantahang si Manay Sharon ang “kumakatawan” kay Bernal sa pelikula. Maraming dinaanang diskurso si David, para ikutan ang pagbasang ito. Pero sa ganang akin, akmang-akma lamang ang pag-ulit ng puntong ito sa dulo, kahit pa manganib na baligtarin ang lahat ng naunang argumento. Dahil ang *Manila by Night* ni Bernal at ang *Manila by Night* ni David ay pareho at magkaiba, pero kapwa sila likha nina Bernal at David. At sa pagtutuos, ang *Manila by Night* nina Bernal at David ay kapwa rin lumalampas sa kung sino silang dalawa.

Si **Chuckberry J. Pascual** ay Pilipinong manunulat at awtor ng *Pagpasok sa Eksena: Ang Sinehan sa Panitikan at Pag-aaral ng Piling Sinehan sa Recto* (2016), atbp. Nagtapos siya sa U.P. Diliman, nagtuturo sa University of Santo Tomas, resident fellow ng U.S.T. Center for Creative Writing and Literary Studies, at research fellow ng U.S.T. Research Center for Culture, Arts and Humanities.



Under the Neon Lights

A Review of Brocka, Bernal, and the City

De La Salle College of Saint Benilde's School of Design and Arts. Jan 25-July 27, 2019

Tito R. Quiling, Jr.

REACTION SHOT

Throughout the city, variations of street and utility lights allow people and vehicles adequate movement and for objects and signage to be accurately seen. Over time, the luminosity of these lights starts fading—corners give way to newer structures and inhabitants from elsewhere take over some spaces.

Manila serves as a stage for important events in national politics, social struggle, and economic polemics. The physical changes in the city can be seen in the expansion of the districts, in the spaces and places whose functions are shaped by dwellers and visitors. For instance, Quiapo and Binondo continue to pulsate with an interesting mix of denizens and goings-on. On Escolta Street, shops selling products of all kinds used to stand alongside cinema houses. These structures have seen ties forged and relationships destroyed—all under their glittering neon lights.

The city is a primary image in *Brocka, Bernal, and the City: An exhibition on the life and works of National Artists for Cinema Lino Brocka and Ishmael Bernal*, curated by Architect Gerry Torres in cooperation with the Cultural Center of the Philippines and the National Commission for Culture and the Arts. Produced by the Center for Campus Art, the retrospective stands as a contributory project to nationwide celebrations of the centennial year of Philippine Cinema.¹ Walking past the glass walls of the gallery and into the lobby, one looks up at brightly-colored sintra boards bearing words from curators and contributors that hang alongside monitors playing looped interviews from film artists and selected scenes from Lino Brocka's and Ishmael Bernal's films.

Stepping into the exhibition space, one walks through a rather long pathway that resembles Escolta. The neon signs of movie theaters like the Lyric, Ever, Capitol, Avenue, State, and Rizal, among others, designate entrances and exits throughout the exhibit. These cinema palaces are art deco jewels from the pre-war years, made by National Artists for Architecture Juan Nakpil and Pablo Antonio. On the eastern side are three small screening rooms, each projecting films helmed by the two National Artists for Cinema. Outside are re-imaginings of classic film posters made by Edz Gatdula and watercolor paintings featuring main characters from Brocka's and Bernal's films created by Maurice Cordero. The western end are structured into several right-angled spaces focusing on a work by each filmmaker—accompanied by remarks from colleagues and by film artists influenced by Brocka and Bernal's ideologies, work ethics, and films.

Their works from the 1970s and the 1980s frame Manila as a primary locale for their narratives and as a silent character affecting the lives of city dwellers. Apart from showcasing each of the directors' filmographies, the exhibit anchors on one of Brocka's most resounding works, *Maynila, Sa Mga Kuko ng Liwanag* (1975), and Bernal's *Manila by Night* (1981) as classic references. Looking at their filmic landscapes, one sees how city living entails numerous struggles, dealing with its multi-faceted inhabitants and its textured layers to survive. In addition, the dialogue on the supposed growth and the margins between the urban and the peri-urban landscapes continue.² Are modern cities moving towards sustainability or habitability? Do their industrial nature accommodate decent living? How do trade and rampant commercialism manipulate the way people live? In what ways does the government assist in city living? Despite the projections of optimism, success, and opportunities, images of desperation, fear, and struggles linger.

In between the production notes are stories from people who have engaged with Brocka and Bernal. On display, writers and filmmakers



Re-imaginings of classic film posters by Edz Gatdula. Photos by Tito Quiling, Jr., courtesy of Ar. Gerry Torres.

Opposite photo: Promotional photo of the exhibit, from qcinema.ph.



Curated by Ar. Gerry Torres, and produced by the DLS-College of Saint Benilde Center for Campus Art.



Re-imaginings of film posters by Edz Gatdula.

Opposite page:
Watercolor paintings of main characters from Brocka's and Bernal's films by Maurice Cordero.

like Peque Gallaga, Jose Javier Reyes, Mel Chionglo, Ricky Lee, Raymond Red, Sari Dalena and Keith Sicat share some insights into the production processes of Brocka and Bernal. Scholars like Ed Cabagnot, Doy del Mundo, and Nicanor Tiongson also highlight the significance and the legacy of their works on a national scale. Directors and actors Nonong Padilla, Bembol Roco, Ronnie Lazaro, Gina Alajar, and Cherie Gil reminisce about their working relationship with the two important film artists from the Martial Law period, who defined the Second Golden Age in Philippine Cinema. Also notable were collective memories from family members Danilo Brocka and Kokoy Brocka Anupol. Following its run at the De La Salle College of Saint Benilde on Taft Avenue, the exhibition had a rerun in line with the opening of the QCinema International Film Festival. This reboot of the exhibit was supported by the Film Development Council of the Philippines (FDCP), through Chairman and CEO Liza Diño-Seguerra, along with Quezon City International Film Foundation and Executive Director Ed Lejano.³

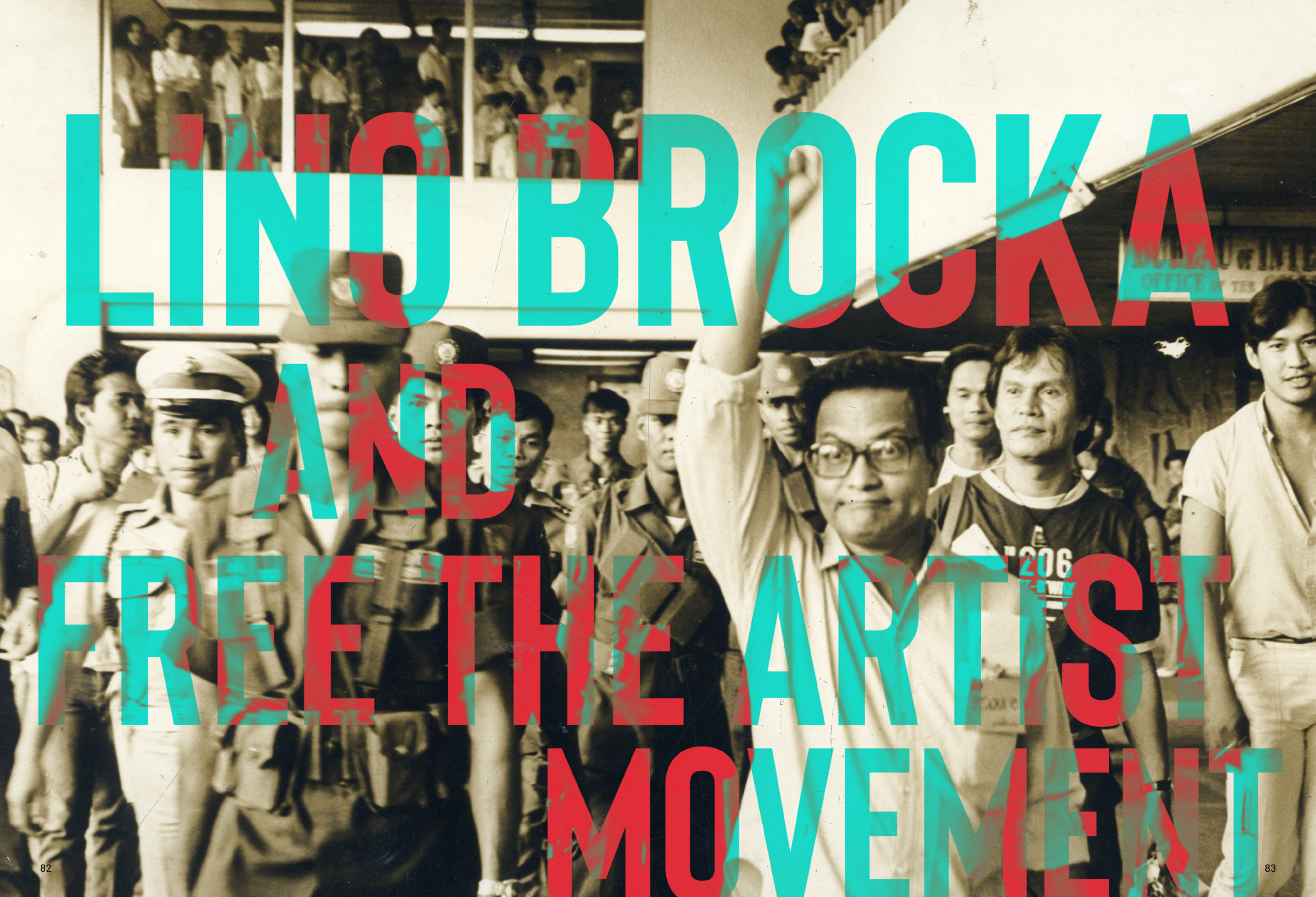
While the physical function of city lights is to provide illumination on roads and other pathways, its allegory incites individual and collective enlightenment for the ones navigating the urban area. This is similar to the characters in Brocka's and Bernal's films, who depended on the neon lights of Manila to find their way—whether towards home or elsewhere. The characters of cities across the globe constantly shift with the changing times, under different conditions influenced by confusing political intramurals, by the social dynamics of the period, and by economic growth and decline. Traversing the congested roads of Metro Manila, from the districts of Malate to Cubao, the exhibition on Brocka and Bernal journeyed through two cities inhabited by dwellers, students, film workers and enthusiasts.

Set in the heart of the city, one is reminded that academic institutions and entertainment centers run on a schedule, and as their utility lights close for the day, the numerous lights around the city turn on for the night.

- 1 The "Brocka, Bernal, and the City" exhibition was installed at the 12/F (Main Gallery) of De La Salle College of Saint Benilde's School of Design and Arts. It opened on January 25, 2019 and ran until July 27.
- 2 *Peri-urban* (*periurban*) refers to spaces in between the urban and the rural. These were located in the fringes of cities prior to urbanization. See the article by Laurent Astrade, Céline Lutoff, Rachid Nedjai, Céline Philippe, Delphine Loison, and Sandrine Bottollier-Depois, "Periurbanisation and natural hazards" in *Revue de géographie alpine*, 2007.
- 3 QCinema International Film Festival opened on October 13, 2019. The exhibit was located at the Gateway Gallery, on the fifth floor of the mall in Cubao, Quezon City and ran until October 23.

Tito R. Quiling, Jr. has an MA in Media Studies (Film) from the University of the Philippines Diliman and teaches at the University of Santo Tomas. His works have been published in *Humanities Diliman*, *Plaridel Journal*, *Espasyó*, *Unitas*, *NANG Magazine*, *Screen Bodies*, among others. He is a member of the Young Critics' Circle Film Desk.





LINO BROCKA AND FREE THE ARTIST MOVEMENT



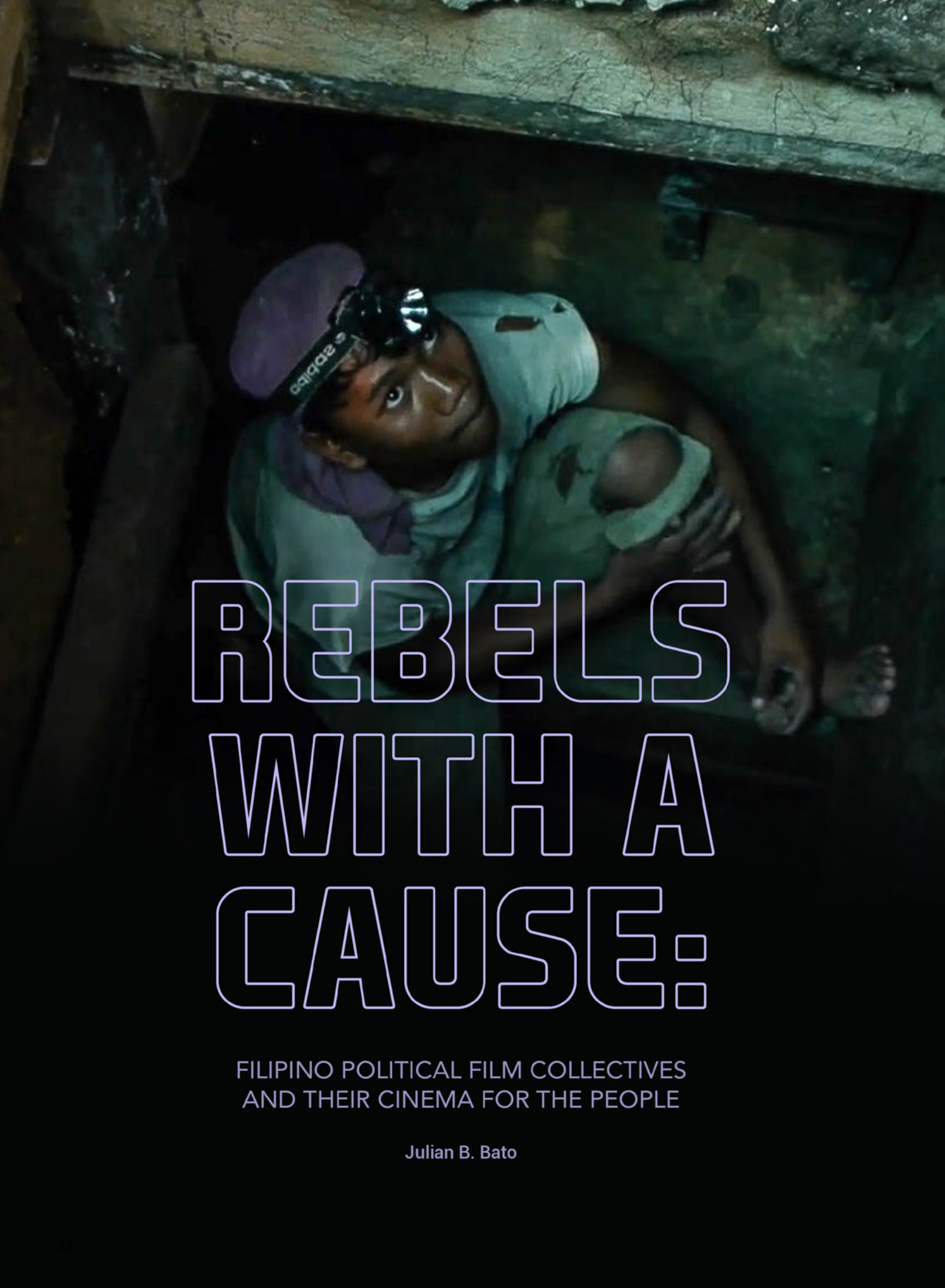
With Executive Order 868, President Marcos strengthened the powers of the censor board and restructured it to include jurisdiction over all live performances. [...] During the following weeks, a Free the Artist movement, led by Lino Brocka, organized a series of protest rallies against the Executive Order. Brocka was joined by other directors, opera singers, painters, sculptors, and actors. [...] They won a partial victory: the plan for the licensing of artists was shelved. [...]

Brocka and Mike de Leon [...] are currently involved in the widening protest movement—one including students, workers, priests, and nuns—against a recent Presidential Commitment Order, which, they claim, is a continuation of martial law. Under this PCO, the military has been given the power to arrest and incarcerate those *suspected* of being subversive, without any legal machinery for the determination of evidence for the arrest.

—Elliott Stein,
excerpts from “Manila’s Angels,” *Film Comment* 19.5 (1983): 48-55.



Elliott Stein (1928–2012) was an American journalist who wrote for *The Village Voice*, *The New York Times*, *Rolling Stone*, *Sight and Sound*, *Film Comment*, and many other publications. He was also a film critic, historian, screenwriter, and programmer, who constantly championed Filipino film.



REBELS WITH A CAUSE:

FILIPINO POLITICAL FILM COLLECTIVES
AND THEIR CINEMA FOR THE PEOPLE

Julian B. Bato

Political film collectives stand at the convergence of Philippine cinema and the mass movement. Activist and artist both at once, these filmmaker groups are fervent acolytes of cinema for social change. Their manifold agenda is to wield films as weapons of truths, arming mass audiences in an ideological battleground polluted by propaganda and fake news.

Dubbed in film scholarship as People's Cinema,¹ these collectives operate in the margins of Philippine society, immersing in the spaces of their marginalized subjects while collaborating with vanguards of the mass movement. In effect, a radical current energizes the spirit of their work—angry at the villains of injustices but also awash with hope for a better world—a cinema for the people.

Origin Stories

Political film collectives in the Philippines emerged during the twilight years of the Marcos dictatorship.² This grim period is significant to local film scholars as a golden period in Philippine film, one fueled by a barrage of films critical of the ruling government's many sins.

In 1982, AsiaVisions Media Foundation (AsiaVisions) came in the midst of this renaissance of political cinema in the Philippines. It is considered by film scholars as the country's original political film collective.³ Having roots in the protest movement, AsiaVisions embraced the politically-charged spirit of the era. Their documentaries such as *Sabangan* (1983) and *The Arrogance of Power* (1983) countered reports published in state media and directly criticized the Marcos government. AsiaVisions pioneered filmmaking practices that departed from the film industry's rigid norms, preferring to work as equals rather than in a hierarchical setup.⁴ Decisions were made as a group, often in debates in meetings vis-à-vis their political line. Members frequently rotated roles during production, and often multitasked due to limitations in funds. This meant that creative power is distributed far more equally than the specialized compartments of their industry counterparts.

AsiaVisions also centered their practices in the grassroots spaces of their marginalized subjects.⁵ Often, the filmmakers immersed themselves among community members whose feedback was often sought for script development. Once cutting their videos, they organize mobile screenings at spaces of the mass movement: communities, households, basketball courts, and schools. The film group took the form of a non-government organization (NGO).⁶ This gave them the semblance of an institution that afforded them to acquire grants from local and international agencies. External funding allowed them to pay for daily operations, while members practiced resourcefulness to keep their production costs low.

The grassroots-centered film activism of AsiaVisions caught the attention of screenwriter Roy Iglesias, who in his *Malaya* column, described their films as part of an emerging People's Cinema, a moment in Philippine film where the

Opposite page: *Dula-anan* (2017) sheds light on child labor practices in a Compostela Valley mine. Courtesy of Film Weekly.

camera finally assumed a militant role.⁷ Once a predominantly commercial medium, the cohorts of AsiaVisions and other cause-oriented groups practiced a form of guerrilla art. Iglesias likened acolytes of People's Cinema to freedom fighters, praising their practical use of any available resource—may it be borrowed equipment or leftover film stock—to create militant films. The act of filmmaking therefore was transformed from a factory of dreams into an arsenal of ideas, a repository of the movement's wealth of experience.

AsiaVisions was not a lone figure of this movement. The Alternative Horizons Media Cooperative (AlterHorizons), the country's first media cooperative, was another important collective of the period. Like AsiaVisions, AlterHorizons also produced films and videos on issues championed by the anti-dictatorship movement. Their documentary *Edjop* (1986) meshed the personal history of mass leader Edgar Jopson with the institutional history of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines, radically differing in treatment from the state media's red-mongering. Both groups were not made to last. AsiaVisions and AlterHorizons dissolved in the late 1990s and mid-2000s respectively, a symptom of the economic precarities that plague alternative media entities in the country. However, their legacy survived in the form of a new generation of filmmakers that embodied the militant spirit of the movement they started in the 1980s.

Following its dissolution, AsiaVisions found itself a second life in retrospective screenings of their films at forums and cultural nights organized by mass organizations, exposing younger generations to the People's Cinema. The new millennium also saw new collectives spring from a renewed fervor to continue the original group's legacy. In Manila, Tudla Productions, Kodao Productions, Mayday Multimedia, Film Weekly, and the now-defunct Sine Patriyotiko came together to create politically-charged videos using the collective film practices of their forebears.⁸ At the same time, groups in the provinces emerged as regional purveyors of the People's Cinema. Groups such as Breakaway Media, Kilab Multimedia, and Southern Tagalog Exposure (STEx) committed into video the important issues of militarization, agrarian reform, and labor disputes—doubly heightened by the unique mechanisms of state violence in the countryside.

The rise of the new breed coincided with rapid advancements in digital media technology and modern paradigms in mass communication. In effect, their adjacencies to the Filipino protest movements of the 21st century became tighter than ever—reliably present on ground and online. While all subscribed to the People's Cinema's oppositional film philosophy, the groups had their own unique approaches to their work, branching out to different endeavors outside of film activism.⁹

The New Breed

Tudla is one of the most active political film collectives in the country. Since 2003, the Metro-based film group has captured the hopes and struggles of their marginalized subjects in diverse formats, from short video features for online publication to full-length documentary films such as the seminal *Sa Ngalan ng Tubo* (2005).¹⁰ Their work encompasses the breadth of issues affecting their marginalized audiences, but also an incisive look into the struggles of urban poor communities such as the residents of the Manggahan Floodway and the people behind the Occupy Bulacan movement. Their work produced outside Manila also carries this theme of displacement. In the past years, Tudla covered indigenous people's fight for ancestral domain with documentary videos such as *Buhay Bakwit ng mga Higaonon* (2018) and *Lumad Bakwit School* (2018).

The collective aims to snowball the visibility they offer to win supporters and to preempt mainstream media from monopolizing the tone of the discourse.¹¹ Some of their videos also function like non-profit marketing materials, soliciting donations that benefit communities hit by natural disasters. Their *YouTalk* video series (2017–present) is a fresh approach on vlogging, co-opting the format's casual vibe to engage online audiences about relevant issues. Indeed, this immersion in the realm of the grassroots makes the group's audiovisual work unique from the usual fare of political media.

Likewise, these key aspects of Tudla's activist films are shared by the works of their contemporaries. Along with Tudla, Kodao Productions (Kodao) is another active and long-surviving political film collective in the country. Kodao formed during the late months of the year 2000, right at the cusp of the second People Power that ousted Joseph Estrada.¹² At the time, they were angry that the movement's contributions to EDSA I's success were largely ignored by mainstream media in favor of political personalities.¹³ In light of this as well as the Left's schism that rocked the 1990s, a reassertion of militant values that ousted the Marcos regime through media was overdue.

This motivated the founders to finally mobilize as a collective, and just in time for another major uprising—EDSA Dos. Using borrowed equipment, the founding members shot their first video *Oust!* (2001)—a documentation of the historic protest.¹⁴ Since then, Kodao has produced documentary films dealing with issues of national scope,¹⁵ often picking up on requests by mass organizations. The group fulfilled their promise to make activism more visible in the discourse of nation-building. Their short films *Ruta ni Ka Roda* (2006) and *Abogado ng Bayan* (2008) combined documentary and fiction in a sympathetic tribute to two leaders of the mass movement. The group also produced *Nanay Mameng* (2012), a full-length documentary on the life of urban poor activist Carmen Deunida. *Nanay Mameng* won several awards and screened frequently in urban poor communities.

Aside from documentaries, Kodao also channeled their creativity by producing videos in other genres. The film collective produced *Nasaan si Jonas Burgos* (2013), a narrative short film on the still-missing activist. Their Skype-recorded video series *Itanong Mo Kay Prof!* (2016–2018) featured Jose Maria Sison, the controversial founder of the Communist Party of the Philippines, answering questions from viewers. Political figures are easy fodder for their humorous, satirical videos. Just last year, Kodao produced *The Great Pretender (NUPL Parody)* (2019), a music video that parodied a matrix of alleged plotters who wanted to oust the government.¹⁶

The group also ventured into journalism, opening community



(Counter-clockwise)
Films by Tudla Productions: *Sa Ngalan ng Tubo* (2005), *Buhay Bakwit ng mga Higaonon* (2018), and *Nanay Mameng* (2012), Film Weekly's "Marawi City sa Kuko ng Agila" (2017), and Mayday Multimedia's "Kontrata" (2017) and *Ka Bel* (2011).

radio stations and a website for alternative news. Their website offers not only alternative news in written and video formats, but also long form essays and poetry. This move reflected the collective's aspirations to be a more holistic counterpart to mainstream media and also made good use of the diverse skills and interests of the collective's core members.¹⁷ Another fixture of Philippine activist media is Mayday Multimedia, a film collective with a special focus on labor rights. Like Kodao, Mayday also emerged during a pivotal time in the Philippine protest movement. The group originally began in 2004 as the video unit of the Ecumenical Institute for Labor and Education Research (EILER).¹⁸ The labor organization tapped cultural activists who would become Mayday's founding members to produce *Proletaryo* (2005), a documentary tribute commemorating the centennial of the Philippine labor movement.

In the middle of production, reports of a major strike by Hacienda Luisita workers reached activists in the Metro. The film group rushed to Tarlac, where they eventually shot footage of what went down as one of the most violent protests in recent memory—the Hacienda Luisita massacre. Some of their footage were included in the final cut of *Sa Ngalan ng Tubo* and used in mainstream reports and even as evidence during the Congress investigation.¹⁹ Branching out in 2005, Mayday continued to work with EILER, receiving research guidance as well as some funding for important works such as the tribute documentary film *Ka Bel* and their *Kwentong Obrero* video series. In 2014, the group moved to the spaces of Kilusang Mayo Uno,²⁰ a mass organization, where they continue to make short films such as the viral short film *Kontrata* (2017).

Their proximity to labor groups proved beneficial to every aspect of production. Their documentary work relies on. Likewise, Mayday's educational videos creatively reflect the pro-worker advocacy of its affiliate vanguard, such as the stop-motion animation video *Bakit Nananawagan ang mga Manggagawa ng National Minimum Wage?* (2016) and *Compressed Work Week Bill: Pasado o Palyado?* (2017). In the 2010s, Mayday increased their documentary output covering labor struggles outside Manila. The outward focus onto the provinces parallels the continuous expansion of multinational-led factories operating in designated economic zones in developing regions. Mayday's active participation in picket lines yielded documentary shorts such as the two-part *Manggagawa ng Dong Yun* (2016) and *Manggagawa ng Nutri-Asia* (2018). Their documentary *Ang Tunay na Puso ng Saging* (2017) uncovered the effects of martial rule in Mindanao on banana plantation workers.

Meanwhile, Film Weekly is a relatively new addition to the collective filmmaking scene in Manila. The film group had a similar birthing as Mayday, having formed in 2013 as an informal video group under the PinoyMedia Center.²¹ During their early years, Film Weekly produced various media for the progressive media outfit, including the early seasons of the video series *Eskinita* (2013–2015) and the documentary short *Didipio* (2013), an exposé on intrusive foreign mining in Nueva Vizcaya. The group established themselves as a collective in 2016, but retained their strong links to their parent organization. They also linked up with mass organizations, artist groups such as the Concerned Artist of the Philippines, and other film collectives through the AlterMidya network.²²

Despite being relatively new, Film Weekly's practice benefits from a mature appreciation of historical movements. The collective's chosen name directly references Dziga Vertov's *Kinonedelja* (Kino-Week), the newsreel film series that captured Russia in the throes of social upheaval.²³ Local influences were also formative. Film Weekly even honored Lino

Brocka by naming their short documentary *Marawi sa Kuko ng Agila* (2017), a callback to the gritty social realism of the renowned director's film. Film Weekly's aspiration of witnessing major reckonings in society is a hallmark of militant cinema. Political film collectives throughout history did indeed flourish as companions to social movements. The Newsreel group formed in the US as antiwar sentiment gained momentum in the late 1960s.²⁴ The May 1968 protests saw the emergence of political film collectives, including the Chris Marker-led SLON, emphasizing issues of class struggle and solidarity with their proletarian subjects.²⁵

Meanwhile, Third Cinema film-groups worked with underground associations and guerrilla fighters in originating a film practice outside and opposed to the dual forces of capitalism and colonialism.²⁶ They also advocated for new film aesthetics that cannot be coopted by mainstream and auteur cinema. This adjacency to armed struggles perseveres into the 21st century. For instance, Film Weekly keeps a sharp eye on the longest-running armed struggle in Asia. A notable work is the short documentary film *People's War. People's Peace.* (2017), a unique perspective on the New People's Army. However, Third Cinema's rejection of prevailing aesthetics clash with the propagandizing function of the People's Cinema. Film Weekly, along with fraternal groups, defers instead to another major treatise of revolutionary artmaking in the Third World—Mao Zedong's "Talks on the Yenan Forum" (1942). Zedong's speech preaches the importance of making art using aesthetics and language familiar to the masses. Film Weekly filmmaker JL Burgos said this instructs "peti-burgis" artists to immerse themselves among their subaltern subjects, which Film Weekly does through integrations.

On Ground and Online

Media technology made significant leaps and bounds in the 21st century, introducing new tools for affordable and faster content creation. In recent years, collectives used newer portable shooting equipment, such as GoPros and even their own smartphones, in place of their usual DSLRs. This makes shoots significantly lightweight, a small blessing for the always-commuting members. The increased mobility also benefits their clandestine shooting styles and makes disengaging from violent scenes safer.²⁷ Smartphone use also opened more genres of content for their online film activism. Through their phones, collectives use Facebook Live to livestream events of the protest movement for their online audiences. One of Koda's most popular posts is a Facebook livestream of a mob commemorating Martial Law victims. Over 21,000 users watched the stream, attracting supporters and the reliably omnipresent trolls to the comments section.

Even before smartphones, collectives have long been tapping into the internet's expansive pool of media resources. They also patronize free educational resources as alternative learning tools on film craft. Editing tutorials are

Mayday's hope is that new film groups will rise among the ranks of urban poor communities, factories, and other sectors. They are also counting on future innovations in media technology and improvements in rural infrastructure to make filmmaking more accessible for their mass audiences.

popular choices, as well as DIY tutorials on creating makeshift equipment using cheap materials.²⁸ Media libraries are beneficial to small content creators, and collectives likewise reap the harvest of free resources in the public domain, may it be graphic assets or audio tracks for background music.²⁹ Open-source media, meanwhile, allow possibilities for copylefting. Thus, their content with open-source assets can be modified and redistributed by all. This potentially opens problems in content theft by the groups' political enemies. On the other hand, the gesture itself aligns with People's Cinema's core tenet of their work belonging to the public. That said, collectives also use copyrighted intellectual property in their works. Media assets by local and foreign media populate the credit billboards of their videos. Sometimes, videos simply credit the "World Wide Web," revealing their free-for-all approach on a communal internet.

Digital piracy further levels the playing field for these collectives who operate in the margin of media industries. Industry-standard software is expensive, and, thus, frequently acquired through "torrenting" or other piracy methods. Some form of grey hat hacking is also practiced through installing cracked operating softwares and bypassing inherent hardware restrictions for customization. This is a testament to digital piracy as a guerrilla film practice as well as to the technical ingenuity of some collective members. If new media technologies further enhanced alternative modes of production, it also gave them a new channel to propel stories of the voiceless into the realm of the visible. Since the mid-2000s, collectives have been cultivating an online counterpublic through blogs, social media, and video streaming sites.

To this day, film collectives keep active online presences on popular platforms, and the varied features of social media allow them to wear many hats at once. They are activist filmmakers, but they are also educators through their informative short-form videos. Their frequent live-

streams and breaking news posts also make them citizen journalists. Sometimes they're grassroots organizers, sharing posts from mass organizations and fundraising campaigns for marginalized communities. Their digital existences also harmoniously sync with the thrust of their People's Cinema forebears. Having their films publicly accessible on platforms used by mass audiences is a political choice, a sharp contrast to the recent boom of paywalled digital content.

Boosting accessibility for mass audiences is a challenge, especially in a country with low media literacy. During their first months, Film Weekly wrote their posts and captions in English. Upon realizing their mistake, they shifted to Filipino and received good feedback during consultations with their subject communities.³⁰ Another hiccup in digital media strategy also concerns the choice of platform. For instance, Mayday initially uploaded their work on Vimeo, where their video metrics did poorly than expected. They migrated instead to YouTube, and then Facebook in 2014.³¹ Mayday's move to the latter improved their visibility among their target audiences, even garnering a million views for *Kontrata* (2017), a short narrative film illustrating the economic precarity of contractual workers.

Accessibility also extends toward improving film craft and the literacy of their audiences. Mayday started working toward this goal in 2018, organizing workshops for labor union workers in the Southern Tagalog region.³² Their film workshops emphasized use of available resources, such as their phones, and taught them to edit on free apps like KineMaster. Mayday's hope is that new film groups will rise among the ranks of urban poor communities, factories, and other sectors. They are also counting on future innovations in media technology and improvements in rural infrastructure

to make filmmaking more accessible for their mass audiences. This opens People's Cinema to traverse a future path that is more transformative and personal.

Survival Tactics

The onus of keeping the collective afloat falls on its own members. Filmmaking, even in small-scale and low-budget modes of production, requires resources. This perennial problem breeds issues such as lack of equipment, shortage in human resources, and the need to sacrifice time and energy to search funds crucial for their survival. A significant lifeline of their day-to-day operations is funding sourced from grant-giving bodies. Usually these grants are awarded by advocacy-based NGOs who are often credited as producers of the commissioned videos. At Koda and Tudla, hunting grants is a task for everyone, and a potential giver is debated with respect to project feasibility.³³ Potential red flags are also discussed, taking care to ensure an alignment of values. The entire collective also ideally works on the application together, usually led by a veteran member.

Interestingly, these collectives benefit from government grants, particularly from the National Commission on Culture and the Arts (NCCA), for their film productions. The state agency even sponsored nine editions of Tudla's Pandayang Lino Brocka (PLB) Film and New Media Festival.³⁴ In this light, state patronage becomes a regular concern for artists in protest movements, an anxiety rooted in the elite wielding cultural capital to preserve the status quo. The unwavering fierceness of their work does justify this pragmatic reasoning. Their grant-subsidized documentaries, in exposing the inequalities of Philippine society, becomes a



"Kapayapaan" (2018) experiments in style and form. Courtesy of Film Weekly.



Promotional poster of the 2018 Pandayang Lino Brocka Political Film and New Media Festival. Courtesy of Tudla Productions.

form of public service in an idealist sense. For example, all screenings of the PLB film festival are free, and any leftover budget is used to tour marginalized spaces in Manila, such as Sitio San Roque, and in the provinces.³⁵ At the same time, the NCCA Cinema Committee’s support for film collectives demonstrates the nuances of institutional, political, and personal dynamics.

Maximizing grant money is an important goal, and this entails creative solutions on the filmmakers’ end to achieve project goals. Often, the remainder of the fund, although not much, are channeled to daily expenses, equipment, or other projects. Guerrilla shooting, DIY or borrowed equipment, and help from mass organizations considerably lower production costs.³⁶ Resourcefulness has its own rewards. For Tudla, it’s their current shooting equipment, bought gradually through the years from secondhand stores, a welcome upgrade from the days they operated with none at all. Meanwhile, leftover money from a Canadian grant secured Kodao a new PC for editing, which they used to edit their Yolanda documentary. The availability of an extra editing machine also opened new learning possibilities for student interns, mostly from state universities, who did not have their own equipment.

For all the good they bring, grants remain elusive and highly competitive. While receiving grant-sourced funds from their parent organization, Film Weekly does not put grants on top of their priorities, bemoaning the laborious bureaucracy work that might compromise their workload.³⁷ This is a major caveat for film collectives that usually have few active members and are always stretched thin. Meanwhile, Mayday learned to deprioritize grant-seeking work after having trouble balancing bureaucracy work and film activism.³⁸ With grants on the back burner, Mayday had to find other ways to resolve their financial woes. The collective shifted to freelancing in the mid-2010s, taking on “harmless” media projects with humanitarian slants but without the social analysis of their political work. Mayday also worked on projects not related to their advocacies. A memorable gig was producing a video on *kiti-kiti*, a project that earned them PHP 30,000. The group also worked in events manning photo booths or doing videography. These were Mayday’s go-to jobs, affording them their own DSLR and some inexpensive audio recorders.

Likewise, other collectives also venture into the freelance economy. Tudla labors together on “principled rakets” and various freelance jobs to supplement their grants. Film Weekly’s only video camera, a Panasonic GH4, is also a modest harvest from their freelance endeavors. During tough periods, some collective members are known to voluntarily step up through personal contributions. Tudla members individually worked on small projects, such as transcriptions and editing gigs, to keep daily operations running. Meanwhile, a Mayday member took a sideline job as an equipment caretaker to provide small donations to the group.³⁹

Income-generating endeavors alone are not enough to keep these film groups afloat. These collectives exist in symbiotic relationships forged by their shared radical politics. The benefits of these strong links come in many forms, particularly a hearty sharing of resources. Borrowing equipment has been a frequent practice through the years. Kodao’s tripod alone saw the country more than the average Filipino in the many times it was borrowed for shoots.⁴⁰

Borrowing is not limited to equipment. When Tudla made a documentary in Mindanao, a member contacted her friends at Kilab Multimedia and Breakaway Media. The Davao-based collectives provided volunteers, equipment, and spare beds for sleeping, saving expenses in extra plane tickets, baggage fees, and transient accommodations.⁴¹ Collectives also borrow each other’s media assets, usually footages whenever they couldn’t field members. Protest events are sometimes spontaneous, and collectives don’t have company vehicles to ferry them from one point in the city to another. Credits are visible marks of this practice, frequently embedded in their videos. Cloud technology only made this practice a lot easier,

streamlining the sharing workflow for collectives all over the country.

“Not only [do] we get to save time and [other] resources, we also become more familiar with each other’s work and visual styles,” said a senior member of Film Weekly. Knowledge is also a valuable resource, freely flowing from one collective to the other. Honing of skills happens naturally within the groups through mentorships, but collectives also organize informal skill-shares, usually on film craft or digital media strategy, where best practices are passed on. A recent example is a workshop held by a Film Weekly core member for Mayday, an important activity for the collective’s rebuilding efforts.

“We all belong to one movement. We will not survive without each other’s help,” said a veteran Mayday filmmaker.

Fight for the Future

The state’s all-too familiar history of violence against media casts a long shadow into the present. Just this year, Philippine media suffered a tremendous blow with ABS-CBN’s franchise denial. Despite their cynicism of mainstream media, the film collectives decried this political move in support of the workers whose livelihoods were uprooted in the middle of a health crisis. As the government’s critical watchdogs, political film collectives are not exempt from harassment. Up to now, Kodao continues to suffer from varied attacks from legitimate and phantom forces. A senior member of Kodao alleged that the collective had been under surveillance by the police since late 2018, by virtue of having their office in the same building as several mass organizations. This culminated in a publicized inspection by the Commission on Human Rights of the office, which proved the absence of illegal materials and equipment.

Anonymous hackers and phishers also terrorize online operations. Kodao’s website suffered at least ten DDoS attacks since 2017, the hackers taking it down for short periods as well as permanently erasing media content uploaded that year.⁴² Meanwhile, an anonymous Facebook page named “Todla Productions” appeared in 2017. The page used Tudla’s logo without permission and reedited Tudla videos in a manner that antagonized their subjects.⁴³

These incidents called for digital safeguards, such as posting disclaimers and cloud-hosting services, and a renewed effort in physical archiving with the help of film scholar Rosemarie Roque.⁴⁴ Kodao is also fighting cyber-censorship via legal action. The collective, along with other victims, filed a civil complaint against the sources of the IP addresses identified by the Swedish nonprofit Qurium as the alleged hackers, the first case of its kind in the Philippines.⁴⁵ With these adverse threats, these political film collectives remain in a limbo of unease and caution. What remains certain is their persistence to produce important work in the new decade with no signs of standing down. Almost four decades since the first documentary films of AsiaVisions came out, the People’s Cinema of political film collectives will continue to be a beacon of militant filmmaking in the Philippines—carrying dreams and hopes of the subjects they capture.

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Julian B. Bato is currently an advertising agency creative and a freelance video editor. He recently earned his undergraduate degree in film from the University of the Philippine Film Institute.

FROM *ENGKWENTRO* TO *WATCH LIST*:

PHILIPPINE CINEMA AS A BATTLEGROUND

Francis Joseph Cruz

Deep in the heart of the slums of an unnamed city that serves as a foil for Davao, two brothers are at odds with their respective fates. The older brother, a drug runner who is being chased by a vigilante group tasked to rid the city of its petty criminals, is planning to fly to Manila where his mother is, for a possible second chance in life. The younger sibling is on his way to be initiated into a gang, treading recklessly toward a life that his older brother is desperately trying to escape from. Through labyrinthine alleyways where poverty is a norm, drugs are peddled openly, and amorality is blatant, the tale of two brothers ends not with one besting the other, but with the unseen but very dominant character of the city mayor getting his way with an abrupt and arguably unfair execution.

In 2009, Pepe Diokno inadvertently invented a genre with his debut film *Engkwentro*.

In tackling the inauspicious activities of a rumored death squad via a parable that overtly pits the urgent concerns of marginalized lives with the ominous grip of an oppressive regime, Diokno has paved the tropes that populate films whether they are meant for some advocacy or escapist entertainment. In 2016, Rodrigo Duterte was elected the 16th president of the Philippines, vowing to eliminate drugs and crime from the nation by replicating the same tactics that presumably kept Davao free of crime and drugs. Within a few months since his inauguration, the body count, mostly of the poorest of the poor whose indignity in life is only matched by the indignity of being made examples of the dangers of drugs with haphazardly prepared cardboards labeling them as either addicts or pushers, has alarmingly increased.

It is inevitable that concerned filmmakers and enterprising producers would follow suit, turning the dark cloud of a corrupting mentality where human life is trumped by supposed nationalism into art, propaganda or a dubious mixture both. Duterte's drug war isn't just waged in the slums but also in movie houses, with creatives churning out film after film with overt slants, either worshipping the drug war as a necessary tool to strengthen the nation or decrying it as anti-poor and prone to abuse.

Brillante Mendoza's *Ma' Rosa* (2016) ends in the indelible image of Jaclyn Jose, after finally being released from jail using the bail money collected by her children through their own unsavory methods, teary-eyed, munching on skewered fish balls, a paltry meal that becomes a piece of luxury and comfort amidst the suffering that she has faced and will face given her predicament. The film, a surprisingly humanist portrait of a family that thrives on peddling illegal drugs, premiered in Cannes 2016 where Jose rightfully received a prize for her heartbreaking portrayal of the titular character.

In a surprising move, Mendoza was hired by the government to direct Duterte's first State of the Nation Address, where he incorporated, in an otherwise humdrum proceeding, cinematic techniques that were likened to

Duterte's drug war isn't just waged in the slums but also in movie houses, with creatives churning out film after film with overt slants, either worshipping the drug war as a necessary tool to strengthen the nation or decrying it as anti-poor and prone to abuse.

Leni Riefenstahl's methods when she was tasked to create propaganda for the Nazi Party. In a Rappler interview, Mendoza explains the low angles he employed to depict Duterte's speech, saying that "I really wanted that shot because I wanted to show power...or authority." The following year, the celebrated director again directed the president's annual speech, this time, sporadically giving close-ups of the president during key moments. "In the aesthetics of cinematography, you get close to the person because you want to see his soul, part of his soul. You want to show his sincerity, genuine sincerity. And that's what I want to show—his genuine sincerity. And that he's looking, watching after the people. I mean, if we listen to what he's saying. He means business."

Mendoza shifts his stance from humanizing the people from the margins who have been victims of the abuses of government and its bureaucracy to crafting a semblance of both strength and soul to the man whose policy is to kill for the sake of the war on drugs. He professes that his films are bereft of a political slant, which could be true. What has become apparent, however, is that having lost the intent to criticize, his films have become neutered, unable to direct anger or frustration at anything except for the easiest targets which are either corrupt cops or drug dealers. The humanity that he grants the poor has been replaced by genre aspirations. *Alpha: The Right to Kill* (2018) is fashioned like an actioner where the supremacy of drugs overwhelms any opportunity for any character to shine as human beings instead of pawns in the drug war. Even more telling is how his Netflix series, *Amo* (2017), absolutely eliminates character development in an effort to build a world where the drug war is absolutely necessary.

Opposite page:
Still from Pepe Diokno's *Engkwentro* (Cinemalaya Foundation, 2009).
Courtesy of Diokno.

While there's a sliver of ingenuity in the way Mendoza discards storylines to shine a light on the preponderance of drugs in a society where class divisions are apparent, there is no escaping the notion that the series' goal is to paint a picture of such urgency for Duterte's drastic methods.

Mendoza is simply a more sophisticated filmmaker. Leveraging goodwill, prestige, and the appurtenant implication that his films deserve more than just derision for its unsavory portrayal of his so-called truths, he has veiled propaganda with the subtleties of art cinema.

However, the intent is comparable to the lot of haphazardly made films that have been churned out by lesser filmmakers out of their deference to the president. Films like Dinkydoo Clarion's *Durugin ang Droga* (2017), Carlo J. Caparas's *Kamandag ng Droga* (2017) and Njel de Mesa's *KontrAdiksiyon* (2019) conveniently portray drug dealers as animals and drug addicts as zombies, echoing a message that there is no room for mercy, compassion or even human rights for those who have gone the path of being dependent on drugs. The films bluntly manipulate, crafting weepy melodramas at the center of the drug problem, sprinkling soundbites or videos of Duterte's or his lackey's tirades and orders, all for the purpose of distorting mindsets and desensitizing audiences to the brutality and violence that are requisites for a popular drug war.

The other end of the spectrum focuses on what Mendoza was once a master of, which is the emphasis on the inherent humanity of the victims of the drug war. Treb Monteras's *Respeto* (2017) utilizes the blossoming subculture of street rap to conjure the likelihood of second chances even in the bleakest corners of the slums. Mikhail Red's *Neomanila* (2017) centers its narrative on the operatives who are tasked with the extrajudicial killings, depicting their eventual fall from grace with both style and sensitivity. Ben Rekhi's *Watch List* (2020) exhausts the psychological and social effects of the death of an extrajudicial killing victim on his widow and children, depicting their collective plight and eventual tragic fate with agonizing urgency. Adolfo Alix, Jr.'s *Madilim ang Gabi* (2017) is consumed by its intent on depicting a community wrestling with the threat of the drug war.

Stills from Treb Monteras III's *Respeto* (Cinemalaya Foundation, 2017).
Courtesy of Coreen Jimenez.

As can be seen, the drug war is no longer just limited to propaganda. It has seeped into the mainstream, allowing the resurrection of action films with a glimmer of relevance.

If Mendoza's and Alix's filmmaking turned flaccid with their integrity being put into question, Lav Diaz's cinema became more confrontational. *Ang Panahon ng Halimaw* (2018) is a scathing indictment of Duterte, with the film depicting him as a noisy but pointless rabble-rouser emboldened by heartless lieutenants. Paul Soriano's *Mañanita* (2019), the screenplay of which was written by Diaz, is more sober in its point, focusing its long takes not on the excesses of the government but on the psychological impact of violence.

Erik Matti, who has expertly merged the demands of genre with his political inclinations with films like *On the Job* (2013) and *Honor Thy Father* (2015), enters the fray with two movies— *Seklusyon* (2016), a horror film whose undertones criticize the disconcerting blind faith that has allowed atrocities of a charismatic leader to exist, and *BuyBust* (2018), a thrilling actioner with an unclear messaging that can either be seen as anti-poor with its depiction of the masses as a crazed horde of disposable lives or anti-EJK with its twist that linked all the death and destruction with dastardly ulterior motives.

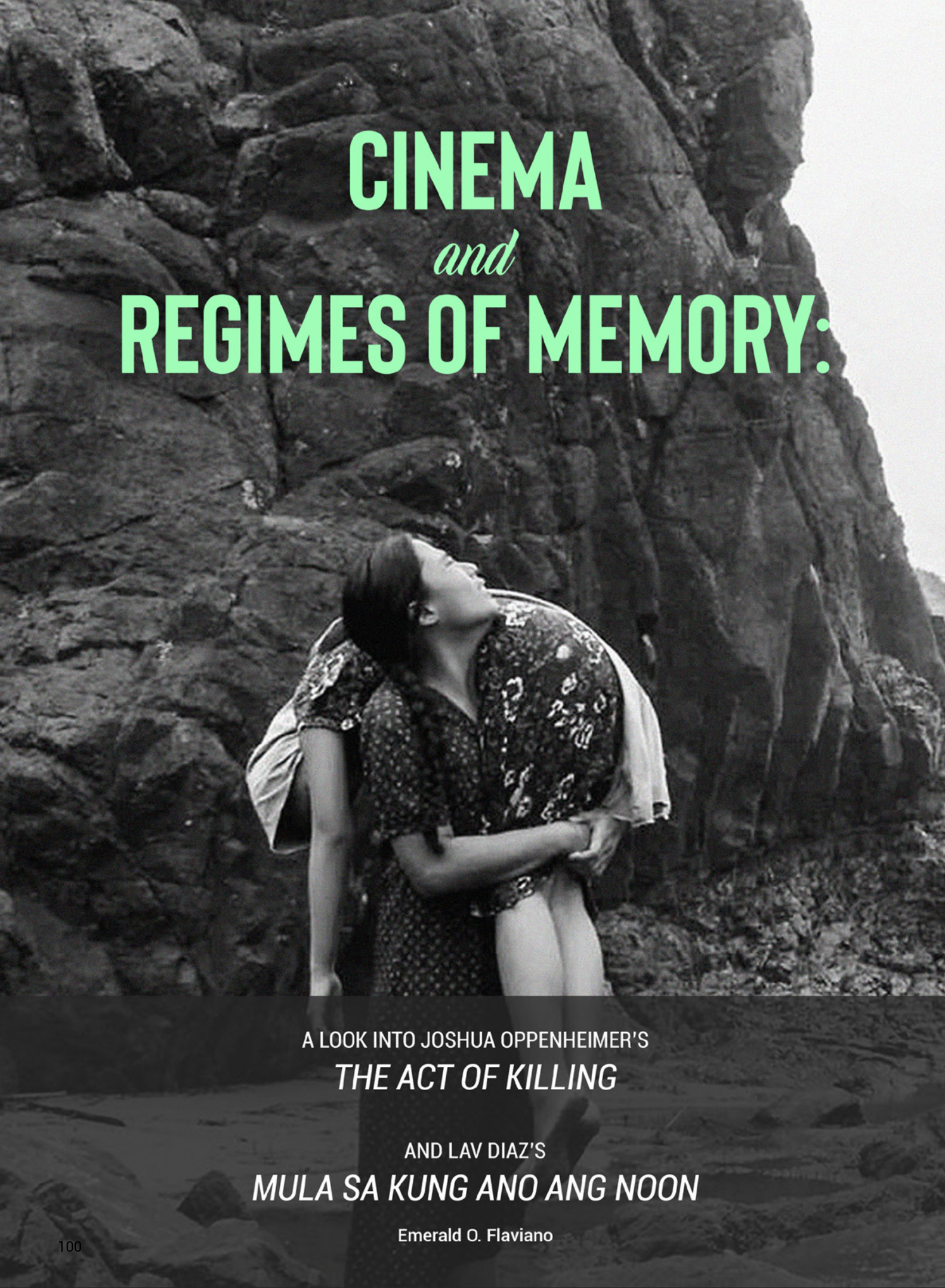
As can be seen, the drug war is no longer just limited to propaganda. It has seeped into the mainstream, allowing the resurrection of action films with a glimmer of relevance, with films like *BuyBust* and Toto Natividad's *Double Barrel* (2017), whose gun-slinging and alleyway brawl scenes are coupled with the currency of an existing issue. It has inspired horror films, such as Kip Oebanda's *Nay* (2017) and Kevin Dayrit's *O* (2019), that supplement its revisions of supernatural beings with a preoccupation with drugs and the violence surrounding it. Socially relevant melodramas are now coupled with narrative threads involving addiction and its many complications, with Real Florido and Arturo San

Still from Erik Matti's *On the Job* (ABS-CBN Film Productions, Reality Entertainment, Star Cinema, 2013).
Courtesy of Matti.

Agustin's *Kabisera* (2016), Joel Lamangan's *Bboy Intsik* (2017), and Ronald Carballo's *Jesusa* (2019) having their emotional pulls reliant on tragedies resulting from drugs. Kerwin Go's *Mina-Anud* (2019) attempts to add levity to the dire situation, without compromising the message.

What is most alarming, however, is the fact that the drug war has penetrated films meant for the general populace's consumption. Joyce Bernal's *Super Parental Guardians* (2016) has Vice Ganda joking about extrajudicial killings. It implies that what used to be a grim and grisly parting shot in Pepe Diokno's first film that won him two prizes in Venice has been turned into a laughing matter, a silly thing, and an avenue for escape for those fortunate enough to have the excess income to spend on cinema. Projected in air-conditioned halls reserved only for those who can afford a ticket, all the arguments for and against the drug war, all the genre experimentations based on an existing plight, and all the gags and punchlines further stretch the gap between the haves and the have-nots, enforcing the indisputable fact that the drug war and its observable effect on cinema are agents of division and discord. As Filipinos have considered the ongoing war as a fact of life with its permutations being turned into negligible details in their daily entertainment, it seems that there is already a victor in this battle.

Francis Joseph Cruz is a corporate and maritime lawyer who has written for publications such as *BusinessWorld*, *The Philippine Star*, *Rogue Magazine*, and the *Philippines Free Press*. He has taken part in various festivals as selection committee and jury member, including the Berlinale Talent Press, Cinemalaya, CinemaOne Originals, QCinema, Jogjakarta International Film Festival, and Bangkok Short and Video Festival.



CINEMA *and* REGIMES OF MEMORY:

A LOOK INTO JOSHUA OPPENHEIMER'S
THE ACT OF KILLING

AND LAV DIAZ'S
MULA SA KUNG ANO ANG NOON

Emerald O. Flaviano

SHORT TAKE

It was for a conference in Jogjakarta, Indonesia in 2015 that I wrote a paper that looked into Joshua Oppenheimer's documentary *The Act of Killing* (2012) and Lav Diaz's *Mula sa Kung Ano ang Noon* (2014). It was the same year when Indonesia—or at least some Indonesians—commemorated the 50th anniversary of the 1965 PKI (Partei Komunis Indonesia) purge, and a year before the 2016 Philippine national elections, when there was considerable buzz around Bongbong (Ferdinand Jr.) Marcos's prospects of successfully campaigning for either a presidential or a vice presidential post. While I was well aware of the context of *Mula sa Kung Ano ang Noon*, I only knew of the forgetting of the 1965 PKI purge after seeing *The Act of Killing*, which was on quite a number of Best Films of 2013 lists.

Any call to memory—or forgetting—is political. In Indonesia, where the 1998 regime change has proved superficial and the old mechanisms of oppression and exploitation have never been disturbed, *The Act of Killing* is as much an appalling revelation of the extent of the PKI purge as it is an investigation of how the status quo has endured. Stasis also preoccupies *Mula sa Kung Ano ang Noon*, an indictment of government neglect under the Marcos regime—disproving the loyalist assertion of economic progress brought about by the dictatorship—and the governments that came after it. Both films ask why the old structures of oppression and exploitation endure and remain strong and find the answer in the unacknowledged truths of the past.

In *The Act of Killing*, Anwar Congo, a mass executioner, re-lives memories of his part in the 1965-1966 mass killings of members of the PKI and other left-leaning groups in his neighborhood in Medan, the capital city of the province of North Sumatra, for a film within a film. With some of his friends in the local wing of Pemuda Pancasila, a national paramilitary group, he returns to the places where he carried out the tortures and killings, recollecting and reenacting scenes of violence. Congo's memories are part of the bloody aftermath of what has since become known as the Gerakan September Tiga Puluh (Thirtieth of September Movement), a coup attempt against Sukarno's government blamed on the PKI. During this time, the Indonesian military supported—and in many instances directly participated in—the campaign of extermination of all members of the PKI and PKI-associated groups that lasted from October 1965 to March 1966. Congo's killings in Medan account for a fraction of the 400,000 to 500,000 deaths, a conservative estimate of the purge's casualties.¹

Oppenheimer aims to understand how killing on such a massive scale is possible primarily by looking into the stories that perpetrators such as Congo tell. Congo is not ashamed of his role in the mass killings, and proudly affirms the importance of his role as preman during a time when the Indonesian nation was at its most insecure: "*Ini lah sejarah. Ini lah kita* (This is history. This is who we are)." Congo deals with

Opposite page:
Itang and Joselina in Lav Diaz's *Mula sa Kung Ano ang Noon*
(Sine Olivia Pilipinas, 2014). Screengrabs by Emerald Flaviano.

his newfound monstrosity by "having fun": dancing the cha-cha, and partying hard with alcohol, marijuana, and ecstasy. He sets aside the wretched reality of nightly rituals of violence and death—and his part in them—by enveloping himself in fantasies fed by the Hollywood films he so loves. Congo returns to a fond memory of emerging from the cinema across the street, elated from a recently watched Hollywood film, to the Medan post office to torture and kill—smiling and dancing while interrogating and "killing happily." However, the affected preman bravado ultimately proves a flimsy defense against the enormity of what he had done. Herman Koto, a sidekick, advises Congo to "[not] think too much about it," but it is what occupies his mind all the time: in his sleep with his nightmares and in his waking life wondering why he can never shut the eyes of a man he had decapitated in a mad fit of violence. He sees the full extent of his atrocity, though this understanding is manifested by the nightmares of his vengeful victims and their imaginary children.

"The thing about cinema is that it is like memory. Cinema retains our memory," says Diaz in an interview following a retrospective of his work in São Paulo in 2014.² Cinema endures, and so does its truths. In *Mula sa Kung Ano ang Noon*, Diaz presents his truth of the years leading up to the declaration of martial law in the Philippines. Set in a village meant to recollect his own childhood hometown in Maguindanao province, *Mula* draws entirely from his memories. It zooms in on the sisters Itang and Joselina, the shifty winemaker Tony, Tata Sito and his foster son Hakob, the parish priest Fr. Guido, the poet Mang Horacio, and the military undercover agent Heding. Their lives simultaneously unravel as a number of inexplicable events visit the barrio and unsettle its residents: three huts burn simultaneously in the middle of the night; cows are hacked to death; terrifying howls are heard from the forest; and a dying man with bites and scratches on his neck is found by the crossing.

As these horrors come upon the barrio, the secrets, lies, and rumors that permeate its social fabric are also laid bare. For years, Tony has been sexually abusing the disabled and feeble-minded Joselina, claiming an affair when he confesses to Tata Sito. Itang chooses to kill Joselina and herself after confirming Tony's abuse of her sister instead of reporting the rape. One of the witnesses to Itang's murder-suicide, Fr. Guido, hides the truth about the sudden disappearance of the sisters. Tata Sito keeps secret the true origins of Hakob and lies about the boy's birth. Heding, the itinerant peddler-slash-military undercover agent, spies on the barrio dwellers and claims that Joselina is the child of a kapre. Meanwhile, as Marcos' declaration of martial law draws near, military forces arrive in the barrio, fueling further fear and, later, the flight of the barrio's dwellers.

While it is ultimately Marcos that is the great evil whose shadow looms long across time, his hold on power would not have been as total and its effects as enduring if not for the lies, half-truths, and bizarre fancies that take perverse precedence in Philippine society, where. Many believed state propaganda that trumpeted progress under Marcos, despite the fact that media and opposition were silenced and unable to challenge such claims. Many chose to turn a blind eye to the human rights abuses committed by the police and the military. Many still believe that life was better under Marcos despite countless evidence to the contrary following the fall of the dictatorship, and well-supported data that reveal the true cost of the regime’s perceived “achievements”—mostly the building of infrastructure, monuments to Marcos’s deluded vision of a great Filipino nation with him as its all-powerful leader—to generations of Filipinos. The idyllic village of his childhood that Mang Horacio remembers never was after all. As Tata Sito points out to the old poet, everyone is culpable.

An image from Joshua Oppenheimer’s documentary sticks: Koto brushing his teeth inside the bathroom of the apartment he shares with his family. With a pink toothbrush, he brushes his tongue, letting the white froth of his spit cascade down his chest to his protruding belly. He retches, as he pokes the toothbrush down his throat too far. The scene is unpleasantly intimate, shot inside the strange space of a private bathroom. As Koto retches, the scene invites a physiological response from the viewer, a replication that is half in unconscious sympathy and half in revulsion. I think it is representative of the film as a whole. In *The Act of Killing*, audiences face the gross reality of massive violence and its perpetuation in national memory. At the same time, we are also put in the position where we might perhaps know Congo, a mass killer, and fathom how he deals with the burden of so many lives he has caused to end. Its aim is urgent—half a million Indonesians lost their lives in a massive killing spree at the hands of perpetrators who still walk free, brandishing their role in the killings proudly while they remain in power. Victims and their families continue to suffer even after the killing: ostracized in their communities and under constant surveillance by the state, they are also unable to access educational and job opportunities available to other Indonesians.

While *Mula sa Kung Ano ang Noon* has aims that are no less urgent, it takes form very differently. As Robert Nery³ and Adam Nayman⁴ note in their reviews of *Mula*, Diaz’ long takes, his indifferent camera, and the almost equal amount of duration of shots force audiences to pay attention to all moments of a life, be these dramatic or banal. His slow cinema goes beyond the vicarious to allow audiences to live through time passing and to contemplate more meaningfully national trauma, what for Diaz is the enduring condition of Philippine society throughout history. Diaz accounts for this trauma in much of his body of work, tracing its roots in Marcos’ martial law and the unacknowledged and unaccounted for social,

economic, and political damage that the dictatorship wrought.

Two apparently very different regimes of memory provide the backdrops to *The Act of Killing* and *Mula sa Kung Ano ang Noon*. On the one hand, a near-total suppression of memory work about the PKI purge by the Indonesian state, reinforced by mandatory screenings of the propaganda film *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* (1984) to captive audiences of students, civil servants, and military personnel which made sure that generations of Indonesians were conditioned to believe the purge necessary—even desirable, as the communists were equated with the godless and the evil—for the good of the nation. On the other hand, a surfeit of memoirs, studies, visual media, official holidays, and ritualistic ceremonies to mark the end of the Marcos dictatorship are ultimately rendered irrelevant by supposed loyalist groups who trumpet the dictatorship’s “achievements”, even as they conveniently leave out the means by which these were obtained (i.e. repression of civil rights, massive government corruption, crippling national debt, cronyism).

The Act of Killing, released the same year that Komnas HAM (Indonesian National Commission on Human Rights) announced the findings of their inquiry about the PKI purge, prompted thousands of Indonesians to deal with the knowledge of the truth of the massive killings and to try to exact what accountability and recognition they can get from the government. Though the documentary’s Indonesian audiences are inconsequential relative to the country’s total population, the fact remains that by its very existence, *The Act of Killing* will continue to undermine official histories. Screened at international film festivals, the documentary also brought the killings to broader international attention, putting some degree of pressure on the Indonesian state to acknowledge the issue and on other national governments to own up to their support of the killings. On the 50th anniversary of the PKI purge, an International People’s Tribunal (IPT) held in November 2015 in The Hague decided that the killings constituted crimes against humanity for which the Indonesian state was responsible. The IPT also recommended steps to guarantee justice for the victims and their families. The IPT’s judgment bears no real and immediate consequences for the perpetrators just yet, but as AS and Gerry van Klinken point out, one of the Tribunal’s significant interventions is bringing the PKI purge to greater public attention—and discourse—in Indonesia.⁵

Bongbong Marcos ran for vice-president in 2016 national elections, but lost—only by a very narrow margin—to Leni Robredo. His sister, Imee Marcos, on the other hand, was successful in her 2019 senatorial bid, despite exposés about her questionable claims of educational background. The recent rise to such heights in political power by the Marcoses is all the more frustrating, given the seemingly solid memory work that the contra-Marcos forces have firmed up through the years since 1986. Countless memoirs of the dictatorship’s persecuted and accounts of their hardships have been published by both

leftist radicals and moderates, by opposition politicians, and by members of the press. Special features on the Marcos regime and the 1986 EDSA People Power movement are published on national broadsheets and news magazines, while TV documentaries on the dictatorship and its downfall are likewise in abundance. Academics have devoted books to studying the Marcos dictatorship and how it had devastated the Philippine economy and set precedents in blatant government corruption, massive looting of the national coffers, and state thuggery. Conspicuous annual commemorations of both the declaration of martial law and the 1986 movement are regularly held, as are ritualistic ceremonies at the EDSA shrine, Mendiola, Liwasang Bonifacio, Plaza Miranda, and other significant sites of memory.

Supporters of a Marcos-friendly history of his regime have pointed out the apparent failure of succeeding governments to put into effect substantial economic and social changes to challenge the status quo, and reforms that would deliver the democratization of wealth and opportunity promised by the 1986 movement. This failure can only follow an event so shrouded in religious mystique, such that its origins among the elite sidelined by Marcos in his willfully selective redistribution of wealth and power are obscured. As the political resurgence of the Marcoses becomes apparent, it is no longer in the interest of the elite to keep another Marcos from holding public office—and with it, memories of government abuse and corruption.

During the Cold War, both Indonesia and the Philippines suffered US-backed dictatorships. As foreign investment and aid from the US and its allies flowed into these countries, markets were opened and natural resources exploited.⁶ The Indonesian military who were installed in political offices and Marcos and his cronies were given free hand to plunder national treasuries, suppress opposition,

and perpetuate themselves in power. Suharto’s and Marcos’s dictatorships left behind legacies that go beyond looted billions, dead bodies (both found and lost), and ravaged communities. They also crippled institutions and reinforced a culture of impunity among those who abuse political power. The refusal to acknowledge past violence only serves to build on these legacies and to promise the rise to power of other fascist regimes.

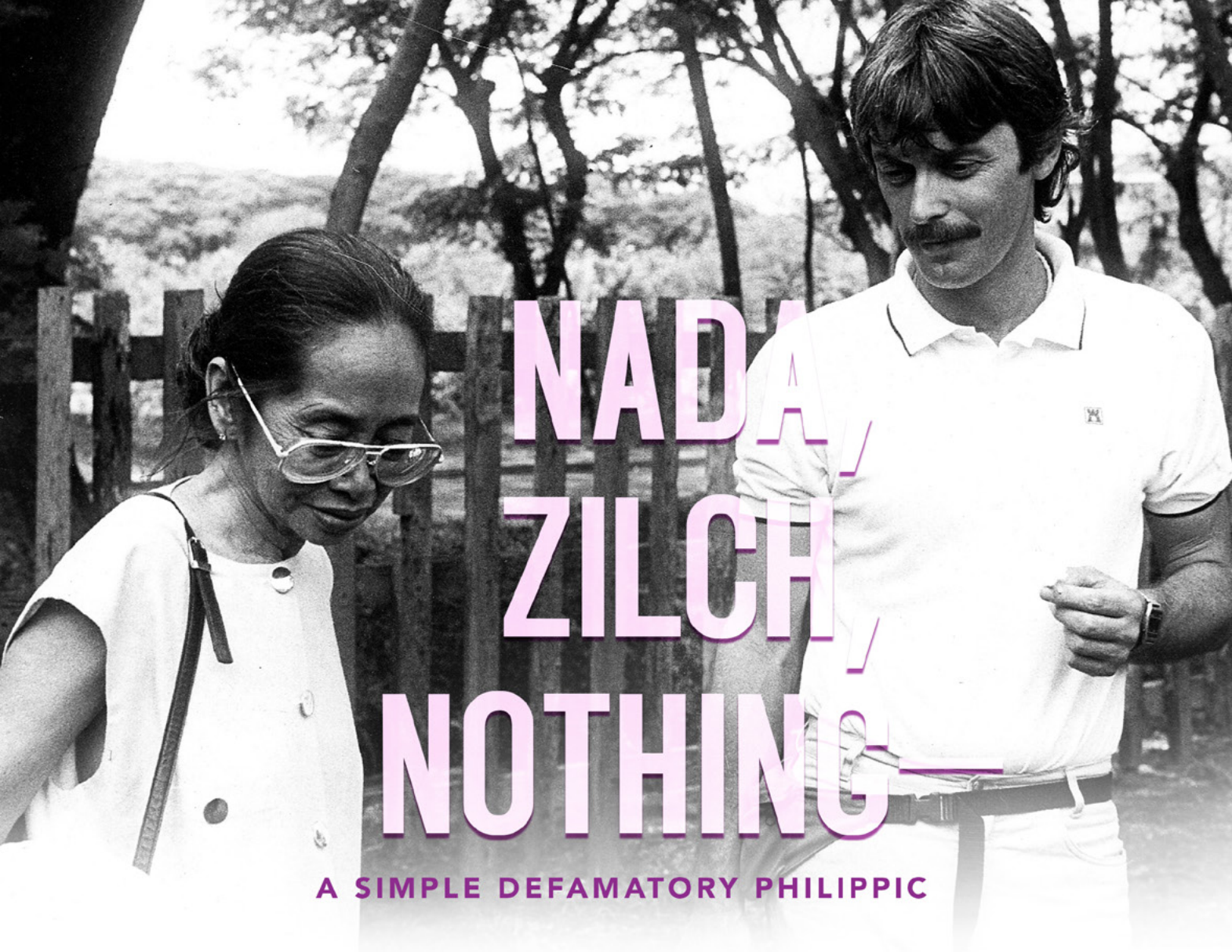
In both *The Act of Killing* and *Mula sa Kung Ano ang Noon*, histories are owned and told in efforts to account for bleak presents and, perhaps, to help determine as yet formless futures. Cinema proves to be an important instrument in this process, its sensuality bringing to memory a present-ness that dissolves time that has passed. It also brings urgency to the plea to see what is now as rooted in pasts that are stubbornly not recognized and to vividly imagine and be wary of future that persist in forgetting.

1 John Roosa and Joseph Nevins, “The Mass Killings in Indonesia,” *Counterpunch*, last modified November 5, 2005, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2005/11/05/the-mass-killings-in-indonesia/>.
2 Filipe Furtado, “Time Is the Greatest Struggle – A Conversation with Lav Diaz,” *CINETICA: Cinema e crítica*, last modified May 13, 2014, <http://revistacinetica.com.br/english/inter-view-with-lav-diaz/>.
3 Robert Nery, “An Ideal Patience: On Lav Diaz and *From What Is Before*,” *Senses of Cinema*, July 2016, <http://sensesofcinema.com/2016/feature-articles/lav-diaz/>.
4 Adam Nayman, “Review: *From What Is Before*,” *Sight & Sound*, last modified May 12, 2015, <https://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/reviews-recommendations/from-what-is-before>.
5 Aboeprijadi Santoso and Gerry van Klinken, “Genocide Finally Enters Public Discourse: The International People’s Tribunal 1965,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 19, no. 4 (2017): 594-608.
6 Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, “Indonesia: Mass Extermination, Investors’ Paradise,” in *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014), 233-246.

Emerald O. Flaviano is a Research Associate of the University of the Philippines Third World Studies Center and a member of the Young Critics’ Circle Film Desk. She has done research on social memory in Mendiola, Cinemalaya and Philippine independent cinema, and the history of Metro Manila railways. She is doing her master’s degree in Art Studies in U.P. Diliman.



Congo in a Pemuda Pancasila parade. Still from Joshua Oppenheimer’s *The Act of Killing* (Final Cut for Real, DK, 2012).



Ingo Petzke

Here it came at last. The once-in-a-lifetime chance to indulge in Philippine culture. Art, literature—and particularly film. I was offered spending a whole semester as Visiting Professor at the Film Institute of the University of the Philippines, Diliman (UPFI). After decades of direct contact with the country—well, at least on and off—it was time to really get involved. And enjoy. So obviously I accepted enthusiastically.

But four months passed and my time in Quezon City drew to a close. I had to return home—and was simply frustrated. Nada, zilch, nothing. I hadn't indulged half as much in the desired fruits of culture as I had been hoping and longing for.

No, here I won't start ranting about the unbearable transport situation in the metropolitan area. A situation that converts a planned short visit to an exhibition or a gallery in Makati into a day trip and thus almost untenable. Well, at least I made it to the National Museum in Ermita—once. And that was enlightening indeed. But more often than not, for simple practical reasons, I had to stick to QC (and mostly to the Vargas Museum)—chance missed. Visual and Fine Arts: more or less unticked.

With literature I fared better—at least comparatively so. Thanks to a kind colleague who loaned me a set of books early on. Very different books, by very different writers. Books he thought were stimulating one way or the other but typical of style, content, atmosphere. They proved an excellent collection and provided a good insight into what the Filipino soul struggled and still struggles with. Some of the writers were appealing so much so that I was curious to further explore their works. But here the problem started: immediately I was reminded of the sad state of literature in former socialist countries. When I asked there for an author, astonished eyes would stare at me, the naïve visitor. How could I ask for a book that had been published, though maybe already a decade ago?

Opposite page:
The author with UP Film Center founding director, Virginia Moreno, in 1984. Courtesy of Ingo Petzke.

But as the Philippines is not a socialist country: why are all these books unavailable? Does no publisher want to make money with the country's very own best? Are they not in demand? Why is there only one Solidaridad bookshop? Wouldn't it be an idea to publish a—maybe small—collection of books that always were held in stock? A canon that perhaps experts (writers, critics, professors of literature) had agreed on? And that one of the many government agencies was sponsoring as national heritage? Books that perhaps could be presented and/or sold to foreign visitors? And even more important: in a young society, so eager to learn—where could aspiring kids get hold of these national treasures, at affordable prices at that?

At first glance, the situation seems similar once we start looking into film, my teaching subject and the main object of desire and my longing for Filipino culture and heritage. But in fact, it somehow is even more desolate. How can I watch the masterpieces of the likes of say Lino Brocka, or Brillante Mendoza, not to talk about Lav Diaz? What about José Nepomuceno, Mike de Leon, or Khavn de La Cruz, to name just a few springing immediately to mind? The DVD bootlegger of my trust (Hello Jok-Jok!) can't even offer me a single one of their discs—though I was able to buy from him a steel box edition of four of Fassbinder's greatest films that I had never come across back home in Germany. Doesn't really look correct, does it?

Sure, I can find a couple of films in pretty inferior technical quality on YouTube. But what about a proper edition of maybe the best or most important 30 or whichever number of feature films in the country's history? What about some epochal documentaries? In good quality and—where necessary—with English subtitles? And wouldn't that call for a fantastic conference of all stakeholders to decide about such a core or nucleus of “worthy” films? Imagine all those academics, critics, concerned government agencies, and what-have-you battling it out in one place? I for one would love to listen. But then again: maybe there wouldn't be much discussion? Also, to thoroughly study this agreed upon core of Philippine feature films would be mandatory for all serious film students.

Talking about film students: what perplexed me was the absence of a moving image library on the premises of UP due to copyright limitations; professors use their own personal archives. How can we teach film(making) without constant reference to good (or sometimes even bad) examples? As film is a visual medium, we can't rely on “describing”—film has to be seen and preferably “experienced” to be properly understood. And there isn't half the time to do that in the classroom. I am pretty sure there must at the very least be a

huge collection of VHS tapes—somewhere. These days, they can easily be transferred to a digital format—if of inferior technical quality. Some films on tapes have never made it to digital anyway. Together with a proper catalogue, all these films—including newer DVDs—can be made available to students on campus for in-house watching. And in case we'd like to prevent copyright infringement in a water-tight way, the films could be streamed as Video on Demand (VoD), readily available online on UP servers but never downloaded to students' devices. And among all these pearls from all over the world, one would naturally find also the Filipino ones.

As film is not only a valued material asset in the entertainment industry but likewise a product of art and national culture, it should be treated as such. And there shouldn't be problems in clearing the rights once the economic best-before-date has been passed. Clearing the rights for DVD release, the rights for streaming, the rights for “fair use” in educational institutions. Already, there should be a couple of agencies involved in making this possible, preserving this part of national heritage, and converting it into digital format for public access.

What work has been done by the National Film Archive of the Philippines? What has the state invested in the agenda of preserving and promoting the nation's motion picture heritage? Why is no support for building film libraries, physical or virtual, and making films accessible even to state universities like UP being extended?

But being old-school, and a *cineaste* on top of that, I insist that film has to be watched in all its glory and splendor on the big screen. Well, obviously this doesn't happen in most places. At least not to the best of my knowledge. As luck has it, we find Cine Adarna, the UPFI Film Center, on campus. A big, stately cinema, legally free of governmental influence. Wouldn't it be an idea to reserve one day a week—e.g., Mondays—for Philippine film history? For the screening of the aforementioned canon of films and not just specialized film programs or film festivals? With short—and I really mean short—introductions by one of the in-house film scholars? In a similar way to what in many other countries we find called art house cinemas, municipal cinemas, or even plusher ones labeled cinematheques? Both for generally interested audiences and film students (who then would have the additional benefit of having more time to analyze and discuss the films properly in class)?

What a floating dream of an outsider of how things could run. As they say: hope dies last.

Ingo Petzke has over 40 years' experience as a filmmaker and curator specializing in experimental film. A co-founder of four film festivals, he has written prolifically on cinema, taught at universities and arts academies in 31 countries, and supervised around 2,000 student films. A special connection to the Philippines was forged through workshops and seminars in 1984, 1985, 1986, and 2019.

CALL TO ACTION: DISSOLVE THE ACADEMY TO SAVE THE GUILDS

Wilfredo C. Manalang

One thing that the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us is that the Filipino people are resilient and that we, as a nation, can carry a lot of burden and even joke about it. In the middle of the pandemic, the distracted government has been shoving a lot of unwanted juju medication down our throats, suppressing our media, and passing the draconian anti-terror bill. The recent hash tag #KayaPaBa playfully asks how much the citizenry can take in facing all of these trials. Turning around the infamous *mañanita* held by a police officer director during lockdown and using its image as a form of protest is classic Pinoy proof that #KayangKayaPa.

Like the parties in the 2018 commercial hit *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018), it's not an Asian party without the drama and the bitch slapping. Before the lockdown, the disruption on social media with photos to boot of honoring the defunct Marcoses inside the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP)—the mecca for artists and home to the beloved Cinemalaya Independent Film Festival—on January 15, 2020 opened the old wounds of some and gave space for the bravura of devotees. The chi-chi party received mixed feelings from those who recognize Imelda Marcos's contribution to cinema and those who see her as one of the all-time infamous thieves who ever existed.

Taking center stage in the hoopla is Nick Lizaso, CCP president and the newly appointed chairperson of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts. His credentials spread quickly across the internet including his supposed membership and presidency of one of the most

active organizations in the film industry—the Director's Guild of the Philippines (DGPI). The members of the guild, especially the old guard who lived and fought for freedom during the EDSA People's Power Uprising that toppled Marcos's regime, quickly pointed out the mistake.

As a reaction to the negligence of writers and journalists relying on Google alone or hearsay, DGPI released a statement to the public correcting the claim:

Several publications have reported that Nick Lizaso was president of the Directors' Guild of the Philippines (DGPI) during the years 1983–85.

These reports are erroneous. Eleven directors resigned from the KDPP (Kapisanan ng mga Direktor ng Pelikulang Pilipino) in the early 1990s, then founded and incorporated the DGPI in 1994. Mr. Lizaso was not among the original eleven founders, nor has he been a member (or President) of the DGPI since its incorporation.

—DGPI Board of Directors

The debacle sparked a reaction from the youthful DGPI Board of Directors led by Paolo Villaluna about its own history. How did the guild start? Why is there a DGPI when there's already a Kapisanan ng mga Direktor ng Pelikulang Pilipino (KDPP), also known now as Philippine Motion Pictures Directors Association (PMPDA)? Who were the original members of the guild?

In one of Ricky Lee's workshops, of which I was privileged to have been part, the prolific writer, who has worked with most of our respected directors and written some of the most important screenplays in Philippine cinema, shared with us stories about the time in the 1980s and early 1990s when directors such as Lino Brocka, Ishmael Bernal, and Marilou Diaz-Abaya gathered regularly to socialize and talk about anything and everything. I imagine a lot of these gatherings, like any artist salon, included debates about films, exchanges of opinions on their works, the airing of their frustrations, and the sharing of dreams for the industry.

Directors Carlitos Siguion-Reyna and Joel Lamangan, pioneering members and present Board Members of DGPI, remember fondly how Brocka, Bernal, Diaz-Abaya, and a band of directors wanted to form a new guild that would uphold their ideals and their vision for the industry. Somehow, during those times, KDPP wasn't enough for them. They were not happy. I imagine what their regular salon must have been like—overflowing with debates, ideas, and love for art. And their inspired rebellion toward the old ways and the norm likely triggered the creation of the new guild.

On February 2, 1994, 11 active working directors filed the incorporation of the Directors' Guild of the Philippines, Inc. as a non-profit organization. And on March 14 of the same year, the guild was officially registered under the Philippine government signed by directors Diaz-Abaya, Siguion-Reyna, Emmanuel Borlaza, Luciano Carlos, Carmelo Chionglo, Manuel "Fyke" Cinco, Jett Espiritu, Laurice Guillen, Rudy Meyer, Maryo J. De Los Reyes, and Romy Suzara. Brocka, who passed away on May 21, 1991, must have looked down with pride and hope at the next generation of filmmakers as he watched his colleagues form the new group.

A generation later, improving the film workers' conditions is still an issue, welfare for aging filmmakers remains non-existent, the freedom of artists to express is still a struggle, and the list of trials goes on, but the DGPI continues to be hopeful that someday, its dreams will be realized.

In 1981, the government under Ferdinand Marcos recognized the need to organize guilds and to improve the industry. That year, the Film Academy of the Philippines (FAP) was established [Executive Order No. 640-A, s. 1981]. There's quite a lot already written about the Academy's functions, its not functioning, and its funk, so I will not go over them here.

As Executive Director of the Film Development Council of the Philippines (FDCP) [2016–2019], my exposure to the FAP was both exciting and challenging. I wanted to help. I wanted to fix things. My innate nature to jump into a problem and help solve it kicked in. I, together with Chair Mary Liza Diño Segueria, wanted our agency to help the dying organization, especially since the Director-General of FAP is a de facto board member of FDCP. Leo Martinez, the Director-General during my time in office, actively sought our help. I learned his version of history. He

ANGLES



Members of the DGPI after the election of officers in 2019. Photos courtesy of Wilfredo Manalang

shared the financial burdens of the organization. He candidly opened up the dysfunction of the guilds. I learned a lot about his struggles, and judging from the way he explained things, the situation wasn't easy. He had been in that position for 16 years, and I was amazed at how long he was able to sustain his work without giving up. His was an appointed position by the Office of the President through the CCP, and, given the length of his stay, I supposed that the position and FAP, in general, have not been a priority of any of the previous administrations. I personally suggested to the seemingly exhausted Director-General, point blank, that there needed to be a change.

And change came in November 5, 2019, when Leo finally turned over his position to the newly appointed Director-General, Vivian Velez. But her appointment was a surprise to a lot, with people murmuring and grumbling during her first few months in the position. And the Chinese New Year did not send good fortunes either. An entertainment headline in the *Manila Times* dated January 25, 2020 asks, "Vivian Velez, Not Welcome at FAP?" A better question would have been, "Is Vivian Velez, an avid supporter of the current administration, the right person to lead all the guilds, including DGPI?"

With cronyism a norm in our current government, we pray to the gods that one or two of them would actually do good for the country. Luckily, a handful of people have surprisingly stepped up to the plate. Unfortunately, not all of them have.

To make the much needed drastic change to the already dwindling film industry, we need a leader who can actually lead, who knows how to listen, who has the smarts to understand the rule of law, who has the vision to make the necessary change, who has the compassion for all the constituents, who prioritizes others before themselves, and who has the respect of their peers—it is only when we have that leadership that others can follow.

It took 16 years before Leo got replaced.

We have yet to see what the new FAP can do in its term (for however long that will be). It's been several months since Velez's appointment. The COVID-19 excuse for inaction can only last for so long. Who knows, maybe the new



Officers and board members of Directors' Guild of the Philippines, Inc. Wilfredo Manalang, Baby Ruth Villarama, Paolo Villaluna, Joel Lamangan, Sari Dalena, Ed Lejano, Rica Arevalo, and Carlitos Siguion-Reyna.



DGPI officers during a Zoom meeting.

leadership under Velez is one of the handful who could step up to the plate? But based on her reaction to the ABS-CBN franchise shutdown, she seems to be more of an enabler of the current repressive political order than a protector of the welfare of the 11,000 workers in the industry under her care. Her apparent ineptness and lack of compassion maybe telling of what the future holds for film workers under her leadership.

Before the pandemic, moviegoers were already getting fewer. And just recently, Hollywood shifted some of its releases toward streaming platforms. Habits are dramatically changing with the evolving technology on how we view films. The globe is getting smaller. With COVID-19 disrupting the norms, earning from cinema is going to be much harder, and filmmaking is not going to be the same as it used to be. So we question yet again, is she the one to lead the guilds in these volatile times?

We may not have another 16 years to wait for real change.

I call on the Guilds to organize on their own. I call on the Guilds to be self-sufficient. I call on the Guilds to be like our forebears in cinema, to rebel if they're not happy anymore. I call on the Guilds to be relevant to the practitioners of their craft. I call on the youth to be like Brocka, Bernal, Diaz-Abaya, and the directors who dreamed big not for themselves but for the future of Philippine cinema.

The Academy will cease and desist if the Guilds are alive and well. If the Guilds organize themselves to help one another, then we will be able to create a stronger and better Academy according the standards we know we should have—not dictated by one, but by the many. If we do a good enough job, the people would follow, the government would listen, and real change will come.

Like the early days of the founders of DGPI, there are pockets of artist salons among filmmakers right now—from the beer sessions at Richard Somes's crib, the wine parties of Ed Lejano and his group, the female-led Dokyu Peeps tea parties, the growing Ricky Lee community of workshopppers, the Viber-based actors' chat groups, the

newly formed Regional Filmmakers Network (RFN), to the emerging animation and gaming coalitions like the Creative Content Creators Association of the Philippines (SIKAP).

It is exciting to see how the Inter-Guild Alliance (IGA), which was organically formed to address the issues and needs facing the filmmaking community amid the pandemic, is morphing into a solid organization with active professional representatives from various industry organizations like DGPI, the League of Filipino Actors (AKTOR), Alliance of Producers, Line Producers, and Production Managers (ALP), Advertising Suppliers of the Philippines (ASAP), Commercial Production Houses Group (CPHG), Filipino Film Editors (FFE), Guild of Assistant Directors and Script Supervisors (GADSS), Kapisanan ng mga Assistant Directors ng Patalastas (KAPS), Lupon ng Pilipinong Sinematograpo (LPS), Production Design Technical Working Group (PDTWG), Philippine Independent Producers Group (PIPG), Philippine Motion Pictures Producers Association (PMPPA), Sound Speed Philippines (SSP), TV and Film Screenwriters Guild (TFSC), United Post Group (UPG). The coming forward of these groups, for me, is a sign of a bright future, this moment an incubator of ideas and visions, the meeting of minds a movement of action. These are signs that times have changed.

I call for the dissolution of the old and the formation of a new Academy.

Wilfredo C. Manalang is a board member of the Directors' Guild of the Philippines and the Creative Content Creators Association of the Philippines (SIKAP). He was also former executive director of the FDGP. He has participated in major film markets and festivals, and is known for his award-winning independent films, *Compound* (2006), *The Caregiver* (2012), and *In Nomine Matris* (2012).

AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE LOCKDOWN CINEMA Club

Ilsa Malsi

March 17, 2020. In a move that would lead to one of the world's longest lockdowns, President Rodrigo Duterte placed the entirety of Luzon under Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) in an effort to limit the transmission of the COVID-19 virus as it had been characterized as a pandemic by the World Health Organization six days earlier. All non-essential work activities were suspended; film productions, constituting work that automatically fell under mass gatherings, were stopped immediately and indefinitely. The suspension greatly affected film workers who were daily wage earners—grips, set men, utility men, crowd control directors, boom operators, and all sorts of production and post assistants—and at the beginning of the pandemic lockdown, there was no concerted industry response to the loss of income for these workers.

It only made sense that a movement from the independent film scene would emerge to help film workers at this time of need. After all, independent filmmakers were used to working with smaller crews, and thereby had more direct and continuing relationships with them, and were used to nimble workflows.

The Lockdown Cinema Club (LCC) started as a 13-member group of filmmakers who used a social media platform to show films donated by filmmakers themselves to raise funds. LCC was able to raise PhP4,701,035.08 that would go towards helping 1,549 film workers. The initiative was predicated on this call to all film lovers: "Watch all you want, and give what you can."

What follows is a recollection of the initiative by its own members and volunteers:

Carl Chavez, filmmaker, founder of Lockdown Cinema Club: May European programmer na naglabas ng database ng experimental films. Naisip ko, ang ganda naman. Pero ang focus nung kanya ay manood, kasi perfect time na manood ng experimental films dahil may lockdown. Ang dami kong in-approach na filmmakers, Southeast Asian at siyempre mga Pinoy filmmakers tapos natuwa sila sa idea ng pag-program nung short films online.

Pam Miras, filmmaker, Programming: As filmmakers ourselves, Dodo and I contributed our work to LCC; that's what got us involved in the first place. Carl invited filmmakers he knew, and in turn we invited other filmmakers we knew to pledge their films, and so on.

Dodo Dayao, filmmaker, Programming: Outside of those we invited, there were also a lot of filmmakers who volunteered their work. It was decided unanimously that we would include all the films, because of the two-pronged charity aspect of the whole effort, the fact that a lot of filmmakers were willing to help in whichever way they can, and the fact that our thrust was also to make as many films available to people in quarantine.

Pam Miras: We ended up with a selection of 200 films, short, experimental, documentaries, and features, which made up six volumes.



24 hour-cinema pubmat.
Images courtesy of Ilsa Malsi.



Filmmakers who pledged films: Allan Balberona, Jet Leyco, Jim Libiran, Keith Sicat, Khavn De La Cruz, Lav Diaz, Pam Miras, Quark Henares, and Timmy Harn.

Carl Chavez: Dahil ang daming nag-donate ng films, yung unang volume ginawa kong fundraising para sa Office of the Vice President, Red Cross, at iba pang charities. But then I realized I can only do so much. Naisip ko na mas may impact kung yung fundraising ay targeted closer to home, which is the film industry. Why not try? So I posted a message asking for help on Facebook. Alem and Camille called me. That night, March 18, Lockdown Cinema Club started.

Camille Aragona, assistant director, cofounder of LCC, External Affairs:

Nag-aalala ako nun para sa sarili ko. Paano ako magbabayad ng tuition fee ng anak ko? Naisip ko, “Eh paano yung iba?” Nakita ko yung ginawa ni Carl na fundraising online. Tinanong ko siya kung gusto niya gumawa ng fundraising effort para sa film workers. Sa pag-uusap namin narinig ko na sa kanya na may balak na nga siyang ganun. Sabi ko, sige tawagan natin si Mackie kasi LPS (Lupon ng Pilipinong Sinematograpo) president ‘yun eh, baka alam niya kung paano yung crew.

Mackie Galvez, cinematographer, Finance: Among the cinematographers, we were having conversations about whether we were already giving our own gaffers and assistant camera operators money. Ina-anticipate ko rin na maraming magtatanong sa akin soon na crew at wala rin akong masasagot kasi hindi ko sila kayang bigyan lahat, lalo na alam ko namang yung head count ng department ko ang pinakamataas. That’s initially why I decided to join so that I could give them a better answer when they ask.

Alemberg Ang, independent producer, Finance: Ang naisip ko nun, sana may way na tulungan ang film suppliers na magkaroon ng trabaho habang lockdown para may kita sila. Pero hindi ko kayang mag-isa lang ako. I don’t have the machinery or the group to act on it. So when I saw Carl’s post, I said, “Ah, this is the opportunity.” Naisip ko, mahalagang may representative galing sa bawat department.

Ilsa Malsi, film editor, community organizer of Filipino Film Editors, Disbursements: Tinanong ako ni Alem, “Ikaw na ba ang lider-lideran ng editors?” Sa totoo lang wala namang lider-lideran ang editors pero may org na kami nun kung saan may existing message board na yung mga editors.

Xeph Suarez, assistant director, Disbursements/IT Department:

Tinanong din ako ni Alem niyan! Wala naman kaming org pero may group chat kami. Nagtanong ako sa ibang assistant directors kung sino’ng gustong sumali sa pagyaya ni Alem na tumulong. Walang nag-rereply kaya ako na lang sumali.

Maolen Fadul, production designer, Disbursements: Ako hindi na niya ako tinanong! Sinabi na lang niya sa akin, “Napag-usapan sa group chat na ikaw na daw ang lider-lideran ng production designers.” Gustong-gusto kong tumulong pero naisip ko nung una baka hindi dapat ako dahil wala akong social media presence. Baka kailangan yun. Sinabi ko yun kay Alem, ang sabi niya, “Gusto mo ba tumulong o hindi?”

Pat Sumagui, line producer, Disbursements: Sabi sa akin ni Alem may grupo daw siya na tutulong sa 50 o 100 na film workers. Pero yun lang.

Hindi ko naisip na magiging lagpas 1,500 ang tutulungan tapos magkaka-dalawang rounds ng disbursement.

Maolen Fadul: Natatakot ako nun kasi nung unang nagpapagawa ng database ng film workers, halos 100 na agad yung sa art department. Natatakot ako sabihin sa chat kasi baka maubos ng art department yung slots nung 50 o 100. Pero sa group chat naman ng LCC napaka-supportive ng mga tao, sabi ninyo idagdag ko lang nang idagdag.

Pat Pamintuan, film student representative, Social Media Response:

Bago pa kami makipag tie-up with LCC, gumawa na kami ng group nina Tine ng mga film orgs, starting with our org UP Cineastes. Nakita ko na shinare ni Ma’am Jaja Arumpac (documentary filmmaker) yung open letter ni Carl. Nag-message ako na interested kami tumulong sa initiative.

Christine dela Paz, film student representative, HR and Marketing: Nagstart kami with a focus on making a database of film workers, so nung nakita naming parehas yung ginagawa ng LCC, naintindihan ko na parehas naman kami ng objective na ang tutulungan ay yung film workers na “no work, no pay.”

Ilsa Malsi: The addition of the two film student representatives, Pat and Tine, and volunteers from the industry Bam Manlongat, line producer, and Kara Moreno, cinematographer, completed the core LCC team.

Pat Pamintuan: Pinasok namin yung film student volunteers namin para mag-manpower ng LCC. At one point, I counted 60 volunteers. It was the first time we were able to unite the different film orgs to work on the same cause.

Josiah Hiponia, film student volunteer, Marketing: I was really motivated to help out because I kept seeing posts from people I’ve worked with in shoots like the utility and set personnel I’ve worked with. Without social media, I couldn’t have known that they were really struggling that early on in the lockdown.

Ilsa Malsi: Lockdown Cinema Club used a system of volunteer groups arranged into departments organized by discrete group chats on Messenger and Zoom and chained together by common work documents on Google spreadsheets. It was this “fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants” arrangement that determined the workflow of the group and allowed all volunteers to be flexible to the needs of the beneficiaries, who at this point were engaging with the group directly through their Facebook page and through the person-to-person messaging done by the disbursement team. This transparency carried over to the initiative’s live tracker, which enabled the public to see when disbursements were happening.

Maolen Fadul: Buong araw siya na trabaho kasi yung mga volunteer-assistants natin ang nagtetest sa mga beneficiaries para kunin ang data nila. Tapos tayo naman sa disbursement team ang gagawa ng priority list at magdidisburse ng pera kasi kilala natin ang mga film workers na nasa departments natin. Emotionally tedious rin yun kasi kailangan mong alamin kung sinong pinakanangangailangan.

Ilsa Malsi: Eight a.m. pa lang may tumatawag nang beneficiaries. Makikilala mo talaga sila kasi ikukwento nila sa’yo ang mga pangangailangan nila.

Pat Sumagui: Kapag nagsimula na ako magtrabaho para sa araw na yun, wala na talagang tayuan. Nakahanap ako ng productive na gagawin kaysa sa magalit at malungkot sa nangyayari sa pandemya.

Alemberg Ang: In the early days, Mackie and I would check constantly if donations were coming in. Sinulatan ko talaga lahat ng heads—festival heads ng Cinemalaya, Cinema One, network heads gaya ng Solar, Dreamscape, in-email ko sila ng letter soliciting money. Kasi nagpapanic ako na baka magkulang ng pera.

Pat Pamintuan: At one point our Facebook page had 300,000 followers, most of whom were the film workers. So we had to figure out how to communicate with them effectively—for example, how to answer their questions on our Facebook comments about remitting money.

Christine dela Paz: We changed how we wrote copy in order to make our page more approachable. We would also use copy, even if it was just to announce a new volume of films, as a way to comment on the news of the day. It became a bit like a game for us in the marketing department, how to craft the LCC voice that was friendly but also politically aware.

Xeph Suarez: Sa IT department naman, gabi kami nagtatrabaho kasi icheck namin kung nagma-match ba ang disbursements na nagawa para sa araw na yon dahil iupdate ang live tracker para makita ng public. I’m proud that our volunteers and I were able to come up with a pretty sophisticated system which could check for mistakes like double-listings in the disbursement sheets. Maski ang beneficiaries nakakapag-check kung talagang nabigyan na ba sila, kaya rin alam nilang pwede silang magtanong sa atin.

Carl Chavez: Tapos nagpapadala sila sa direct messages natin ng picture ng mga nabili nila sa perang inabot natin. Napapaiyak talaga ako nun kasi naisip ko na dati panggastos ko lang sa luho ko yung Php 2,000. Pero nakikita kong nagamit nila para sa mga pamilya nila.

Ilsa Malsi: LCC released their third volume of short films by the first week of April, and collaborated with the Director's Guild of the Philippines (DGPI), the Lupon ng Pilipinong Sinematograpo, and the Ricky Lee Film Scriptwriting Workshop in order to raise more than two million pesos for 1,000 film workers through talks by guests like Hollywood cinematographer Matthew Libatique and various local cinematographers, and workshop sessions by Ricky Lee.

Mackie Galvez: I would consider two of our milestones regarding donations to be our smallest donation of PhP40, and our single largest individual donation which came through our partnering with the DGPI. For our smallest donation, I could imagine that it may have been a student or just a film lover who understood what we meant when we said “Give what you can.”

Ilsa Malsi: However, donor fatigue was quickly becoming a consideration, especially amid the group fielding more requests for help from beneficiaries. LCC made the decision to shift the call for donations outside the immediate periphery of the industry by hosting film nights of popular movies, called LCC Nights, and providing 24-hour video on demand links for certain pledged films during Holy Week. The group determined it was only fitting to start with Victor Villanueva's *Patay Na si Hesus* (2016) on Good Friday and end with the Ishmael Bernal-Ricky Lee classic, *Himala* (1982). The filmmakers in LCC, in collaboration with ABS-CBN Sagip Pelikula and the Ricky Lee Scriptwriting Workshop, coordinated with the actor-director teams, figured out the logistics of shooting on Zoom, and secured volunteer post-professionals to edit the culminating program, an online fundraiser called Gabi ng Himala: Mga Awit at Kwento.

Alembert Ang: Para tayong nagpatakbo ng limang productions na sabay-sabay! Siyempre dahil Holy Week nun, at mahirap talagang mag-schedule ng mga artista, not to mention figuring out how to shoot the reinterpretations of scenes from *Himala* on Zoom. Mabuti na lang may post coordinator tayo sa grupo at tinulungan tayo ng editors!

Christine dela Paz: Gabi ng Himala was the most visible milestone for us since we were able to collaborate with ABS-CBN. It was surreal to hear the iconic ABS-CBN voiceover artist voicing the materials for our event. Kahit papaano, naintindihan na ng mga magulang ko ano yung kinabubusyhan ko.

Camille Aragona: Yung mga nanay na nasa Viber group ko for Ateneo football, pinanood nila yung Gabi ng Himala! Naimpluwensiyahan ko silang manood at ma-appreciate yung short film ni Lav Diaz na pinalabas nun, kaya tuwang-tuwa ako sa achievement na yun. Pagkatapos nun, nagagawa ko nang irecommend yung short films sa volumes natin. Pakiramdam ko, nakadagdag ako sa audience ng Filipino films.

Ilsa Malsi: Gabi ng Himala, which united original cast members Nora Aunor, and Joel Lamangan, producer Charo Santos-Concio, and scripwriter Ricky Lee for a live panel, and which featured artists from independent and mainstream cinema, was viewed live by some 582,000 people and raised more than one million pesos in additional donations. LCC continued to show donated films and engaged in special projects in film education like a panel discussion on the documentary *The Kingmaker* (2019) by Lauren Greenfield, among others. The platform's continued visibility throughout the lockdown spurred on similar initiatives in the theater arts and advertising like Open House and Aidvertising



Final donation tally.



Example of LCC film education program.



Memories of Overdevelopment art card.



Gabi ng Himala art card.



The Kingmaker (Lauren Greenfield, 2019) Q and A art card.



As of April 22 – PHP 3,851,737.58

respectively, both of whose founders have publicly credited LCC for being their fundraising model.

In the time that Lockdown Cinema Club was running as a private initiative specific to the pandemic lockdown, several of its members participated in town halls to discuss how to transition into sustainable practices for the post-COVID film industry in preparation for the lifting of the ECQ.

The pandemic and ensuing lockdown served as a reckoning for the industry to review its own practices, a realization shared by the members of LCC.

Pat Pamintuan: I was really happy to see how involved the different technical working groups were in writing the safety policies for production especially since I attended a meeting of the location managers, but also saddened by the realization that many of these policies should have been in place already.

Josiah Hiponia: Most film workers are freelancers who have no employer-employee relations with the production houses they work for, so at times like this pandemic, they have no financial stability. Most film workers don't really have savings since their talent fees go straight to living expenses. And as much as working in LCC has made me realize how resilient we are as a community, there clearly is an imbalance in resources.

Christine dela Paz: It would be interesting to see where we go from here. I wonder if we'll keep discussing industry issues after our initiative is over. There's been a wake-up call for filmmakers to organize themselves, to form the various new guilds and technical working groups because of this pandemic.

Patricia Sumagui: Whatever happens, at least we know we can go back and there will be a structure in place in LCC. Pwede rin tayong lapitan ng mga film workers, and they know we can raise awareness for their causes.

Carl Chavez: Lockdown Cinema Club was a good reminder to be human first and an artist second. I thought I would be spending my quarantine revising my script for my first feature. Instead I was reminded that the industry doesn't just exist to create art or make a name for yourself, but because there are film workers whose livelihoods depend on this work. So as artists, when we step into film festivals or film workshops or shoots now, we should remind ourselves to actually relate to the people there, the people we work with.

Ilsa Malsi is a film editor, community organizer of the Filipino Film Editors, and core member of the Lockdown Cinema Club. Her work spans fiction-features, long and short documentary formats, and commercial advertising. Her works have been screened in CinemaOne, FAMAS, Asian Youth Indie Film Festival, Locarno International Film Festival, and Osaka Asian Film Festival.

ONLINE FILM LAB



FOR REGIONAL STORIES

Forming Associations During the Pandemic

Jerome Dulin
Joseph Arcegono

On March 15, 2020, President Rodrigo Roa Duterte declared the whole island of Luzon under enhanced community quarantine or ECQ because he preferred to not use the word “lockdown” but the essence is basically the same. With that, all our plans for 2020, our scheduled shoots, and our scheduled film workshops were put to a screeching halt.

After five days of being locked down and getting tired of the continuous routine of just waking up and watching YouTube Videos, we came up with an idea to bring us back to filmmaking sanity. We received messages from our former students asking for recommendations for films to watch during quarantine. We thought, “Aside from watching films, why not help them learn from the films’ very creators, the filmmakers themselves?” Thus, the Online Film Lab for Regional Stories was born.

The Lab started out as a way to keep emerging filmmakers and artists inspired and productive during the ECQ. It is a free online film lab. The film lab focuses on lectures and discussions that will help participants in drafting their screenplays and planning out their films in the near future. Mentors were picked from the movie industry and are experts in their field. They shared their experiences and processes in creating their films that may also spark inspiration and encouragement in the participants.

We started the film lab in a Google Classroom where we invited some of our former students. Then we tapped filmmaker friends who could share their knowledge and experience in writing screenplays. The first batch of mentors was composed of Arvin Belarmino, Tim Rone Villanueva, BJ

Lingan, Noel Escondo, Zig Dulay, and Carlo Catu who are all filmmakers from the regions and who all agreed to share their expertise in writing. Back then, we were using Skype as a platform for the classes. Since we started it with friends, we clarified that the classes would not be monetized in any way; we believed that one problem that impeded the improvement of regional cinema, especially in our home base in North Luzon, was that film education was hardly accessible, thus, offering the class “free” online was our way of giving back to the film community.

On March 27, we realized that Google Classroom was difficult to access, so we resorted to the most commonly used social media app by the participants: Facebook. Thus, the birth of the FB Group, Online Film Lab for Regional Stories. We allowed participants to invite their friends whom they knew were also eager to learn about filmmaking. From 30 participants, the group grew to about a hundred.

In our early weeks, we ensured that there would be time set aside for bonding with guests and participants, when they could ask their non-film related questions. It was during these refreshing and bonding moments that budding regional filmmakers from different areas in North Luzon were able to chat with established filmmakers like they would with a friend during a typical drinking session. It was also our way to give back to the speakers, showing them that even while miles apart, we were with them during the lockdown.

In the midst of late-night chats of randomness, the group Online Tsaa (Online Tea) was born. We talked about the inept government, our day-to-day conditions, our love lives, and other random things. This openness also helped

Batara, and Polaris Sagabea came up with ideas about what classes to hold and whom to invite. It was then that we decided that the classes would not end with just the written screenplay; we started tackling the other processes in making film. The original plan was to fill up the whole remaining days of the lockdown period with discussions on other parts of filmmaking.

From being composed of filmmakers solely from North Luzon, the Online Film Lab for Regional Stories spread to other major islands of the country. Inviting Victor Villanueva, who later also became a member of the Online Tsaa, to talk about how to pitch a story, opened the FB group to Visayan filmmakers. Inviting Rynne Murcia to talk about how to coach actors opened the group to Mindanaoan filmmakers. From that point on, hundreds of new member requests came flooding in. As of press time, we now have more than a thousand members.

Carlo Obispo, who also became a member of the Online Tsaa, said that in this quarantine period, the online classes of the Lab had become an essential part of his routine every night. He would wait for the 8:30 p.m. classes to keep him sane. He was the one who asked, “What happens next after everything has been discussed?” At that time, we initially planned to end the classes with discussions by Professor Rolando Tolentino on the impact of regional cinema and by director Arnel Mardoquio on the notion of cultural appropriation. Our hope then was that the quarantine would be lifted by April’s end. But no, the quarantine continued.

So, the Online Tsaa Group started planning for the longer term. Aside from discussions, the Lab, in partnership with mentors and donors (MetaPixel and Kase Lens Philippines), gave one-on-one acting workshops (with Murcia) and Premium Filmmaking Apps to Mobile Lenses for its online film festival. It also launched Quarantines: Short Films from the Region as a platform to exhibit films made by our participants.

Online Film Lab for Regional Stories also launched Panday Pluma, which aimed to help filmmakers improve their story development and facilitate possible collaborations with mentors. Some of the mentors for Panday Pluma were BJ Lingan (Head of Creatives, Star Cinema), Carla Pulido (Habi Collective), and Villanueva (Film&TV Productions).

Concurrently, aside from online lectures and discussions, we held free online film screenings featuring regional and emerging filmmakers from all over the Philippines. We also prepared online roundtable discussions about various topics, from artistic restrictions brought about by COVID-19 to projecting the narratives of the Philippines onscreen.

Months since its establishment, the Online Film Lab for Regional Stories continues to uphold its vision of advocating the development of cinema in the regions through the technology accessible to the participants, mentors, and organizers while on lockdown. As we continued with our program, we also witnessed the formation of filmmaking associations that sought to comment on social issues and take part in contemporary political discussion. One such group is the Luzon Regional Filmmakers Assembly, which issued a statement on July 6, 2020 that denounced the Radio-Television Malacañang’s attempt to shoot footage for the President’s State of the Nation Address in Sagada without the local government’s prior consent. There is also the Regional Filmmakers Network (RFN) that filmmakers from Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao participate in. On July 7, 2020, the RFN issued a statement declaring that regional filmmakers must assert their voices in all discussions that affect Filipinos and that a regional cinema must be allowed to be organically developed by the artists and not the people in power.

Behind the scenes of the Online Film Lab. Images courtesy of Jerome Dulin and Joseph Arcegono.

Jerome Dulin is the Managing Director of the North Luzon Cinema Guild, Inc. and part of the Secretariat of the Regional Filmmakers Network. He is a graduate of the University of the Philippines Los Baños and a recipient of an International Publication Award from the U.P. System for his thesis in 2013.

Joseph Arcegono is a graduate of Development Communication from the University of the Philippines Los Baños. He is currently the Festival Coordinator of the North Luzon Film Festival and member of the secretariats of Regional Filmmakers Network.



WALANG PIPIKIT =

The Film Community Playbook on Resistance

Alexandra Maria Poblete
Alyssa Mariel Suico
Leni Velasco

“Without making a difference,
cinema is not useful.”

—Mohsen Makhmalbaf

A Dear Industry in Dire Need

With the economic shutdown causing the indefinite cancellation of production shoots, thousands of film workers, many of them earning less than Php 2,000 per day, lost their source of income. In response, a number of groups extended financial help to this sector.

A fund-raising initiative, the Lockdown Cinema Club, was organized by a group of independent filmmakers to ease this unexpected burden on the workers of the film industry. The initiative set up a video-on-demand library of films by local and Southeast Asian filmmakers available for the public to watch for free and organized live Q&A with filmmakers, all to encourage the public to donate. A notable collaboration done by the group was the online show, “Gabi ng Himala: Mga Awit at Kwento,” produced in cooperation with ABS-CBN’s Film Restoration Group, Star Cinema, and the Ricky Lee Film Scriptwriting Workshop. The event brought together performers and actors like Lea Salonga, Bituin Escalante, Aicelle Santos-Zambrano, Dingdong Dantes, Marian Rivera, Jericho Rosales, Nadine Lustre, Piolo Pascual, John Lloyd Cruz, Angelica Panganiban, Agot Isidro, Shaina Magdayao, and Maja Salvador to support the fund-raiser. The show’s highlight was the reimagined scenes from Ishmael Bernal’s *Himala* (1982) performed by the likes of Lav Diaz, Olivia Lamasan, Ricky Davao, Joyce Bernal, and young-blood directors Sigrid Andrea Bernardo, Dan Villegas, and Petersen Vargas.

The Film Development Council of the Philippines (FDCP) launched its DEAR (Disaster/Emergency Assistance and Relief Action) program to support the needs of displaced freelance audio-visual workers. It later expanded the coverage to members of the entertainment press. In a parallel move, the National Commission for Culture and the Arts allocated a part of its budget to support artists and cultural workers.

Numerous other initiatives sprang up during the lockdown. TBA Studios, Regal Films, and Cineme One Originals offered their films for free to the public for a period of time and organized talks with filmmakers and artists to encourage people to stay at home. Filmmakers and celebrities organized civic actions to generate resources for health workers and the marginalized sectors. A number donated bail money for protesting citizens demanding food and other assistance who were unjustly detained by the police.

Bayanihan Republic: The Coming Together of the Film Community

With the direct economic impact of the pandemic on film, the film community gathered to ensure the survival of the industry and its workers. Various groups and guilds poured their quarantine times over countless Zoom meetings to formulate guidelines that will guarantee safety when the “new normal” kicks in. In the process, the Inter-Guild

Alliance (IGA) was formed, uniting many of the industry’s directors, producers, production designers, cinematographers, sound designers, editors, and actors to create safety protocols for production shooting in observance of the Department of Health’s safety guidelines on COVID-19.

Members of the Philippine Motion Pictures Producers Association, the Philippine Independent Producers Group, the Commercial Production Houses Group, the Directors’ Guild of the Philippines, Inc., AKTOR, Filipino Film Editors, Sound Speed Philippines, Lupon ng Pilipinong Sinematograpo, TV and Film Screenwriters Collective, Alliance of Producers, Line Producers and Production Managers, and the Guild of Assistant Directors and Script Supervisors worked together on the guidelines, which underwent a rigorous process of consultation among the stakeholders.

As the IGA protocols covered mainly production standards within the National Capital Region (NCR), regional filmmakers asserted their voice through the formation of the Regional Filmmakers Network. The need for localized versions of the IGA protocols accelerated the formation of the network that in turn sought to protect each locality from context-specific abuse of power done in the name of health and safety protocols in filming.¹ This show of solidarity among filmmakers outside the NCR spurred other local film groups such as the Luzon Regional Filmmakers Assembly to organize.

All the efforts initiated by the film community in response to the pandemic have shown the innate *bayanihan* spirit of Filipinos. The film industry may have long had an issue with regard to standardizing labor practices, but all the initiatives during the lockdown have proven that the film community is ready to look out for each other and are able to come together for the survival and progress of the film community.

In the Face of Terrors

Despite the overwhelming spirit of solidarity, the spread of the other virus from Malacañang continued. The devaluation of democracy tied up with an environment that diminishes citizens’ rights, freedoms, and dignity are the perfect host to cultivate this other virus. It is important to note that the film community has always actively taken part in social struggles. Apart from films such as *Respeto* (2017), *Citizen Jake* (2018), *Liway* (2018), and *BuyBust* (2018) that comment on the Duterte administration, a series of events have been mounted where filmmakers have voiced out their stance on fundamental human rights. In 2018, for example, the community came together to denounce the red-tagging of filmmakers, films, and film screenings in schools and communities.

#FreeBambi

In April 2020, Cebu filmmaker and artist Maria Victoria “Bambi” Beltran drew attention on social media for a satirical Facebook post she shared on her personal account, which read: “9000+ new cases (All from Zapatera) of Covid-19 in Cebu City in one day. We are now the epicenter in the Whole Solar System.”

Cebu City mayor, Hon. Edgar Labella, shared this post, adding an explicit threat. Not too long past midnight of April 19, Beltran was arrested without a warrant and her inquest took place the following day. She faced charges of violating the Cybercrime Law, the Bayanihan Heal as One Law, and the mandatory reporting of notifiable diseases under the Law on Reporting Communicable Diseases. Her post referred to the recommendation of the Department of Health to do so as they considered the whole *sitio* contaminated.²

Both Beltran and Mayor Labella are linked to the city’s vibrant film history. Bambi is an independent filmmaker and actress who appeared in such films as Jerrold Tarog and Ruel Antipuesto’s *Confessional* (2007) and Lav Diaz’s *Mula sa Kung Ano ang Noon* (2014). She also collaborated with Remton Zuasola for *Ang Damgo ni Eleuteria* (2010). Kukuk’s Nest, a bar and cafe well-known to the local film community, is run by her. Mayor Labella appointed Beltran to represent the independent film sector in the Cebuano Cinema Development Council in October 2019. On the other hand, Mayor Labella is the son of Eugene Labella, a prolific director during the Golden Age of Cebuano Cinema, and Esterlina Colina, one of the most sought-after Cebuana actresses at the time.

Satire, such as the Facebook post by Beltran, is a literary device that banks on irony, humor, ridicule, or exaggeration. Beltran’s arrest on the basis of her satiric comment is one of the many cases of intimidation against vocal critics of the government in the context of the pandemic. The film community came to Beltran’s defense and statements of support were released by the artists groups DAKILA and the Concerned Artists of the Philippines (CAP). Shortly after, Beltran was named as a laureate of the 2020 Deutsche Welle Freedom of Speech Award in Germany, an award dedicated to all courageous journalists or artists worldwide who are suffering repression because of their reporting on the pandemic.

#BlackScreenBroadcast

On May 6, 2020, darkness spread further as the National Telecommunications Commission served a cease and desist order to ABS-CBN, the biggest broadcasting network in the country, to prohibit it from continuing operations because of its failure to secure the renewal of its franchise. While House Bills were filed by Congress representatives as early as 2014 to renew the media giant’s franchise, no move was taken to pass the bills ABS-CBN needed for franchise

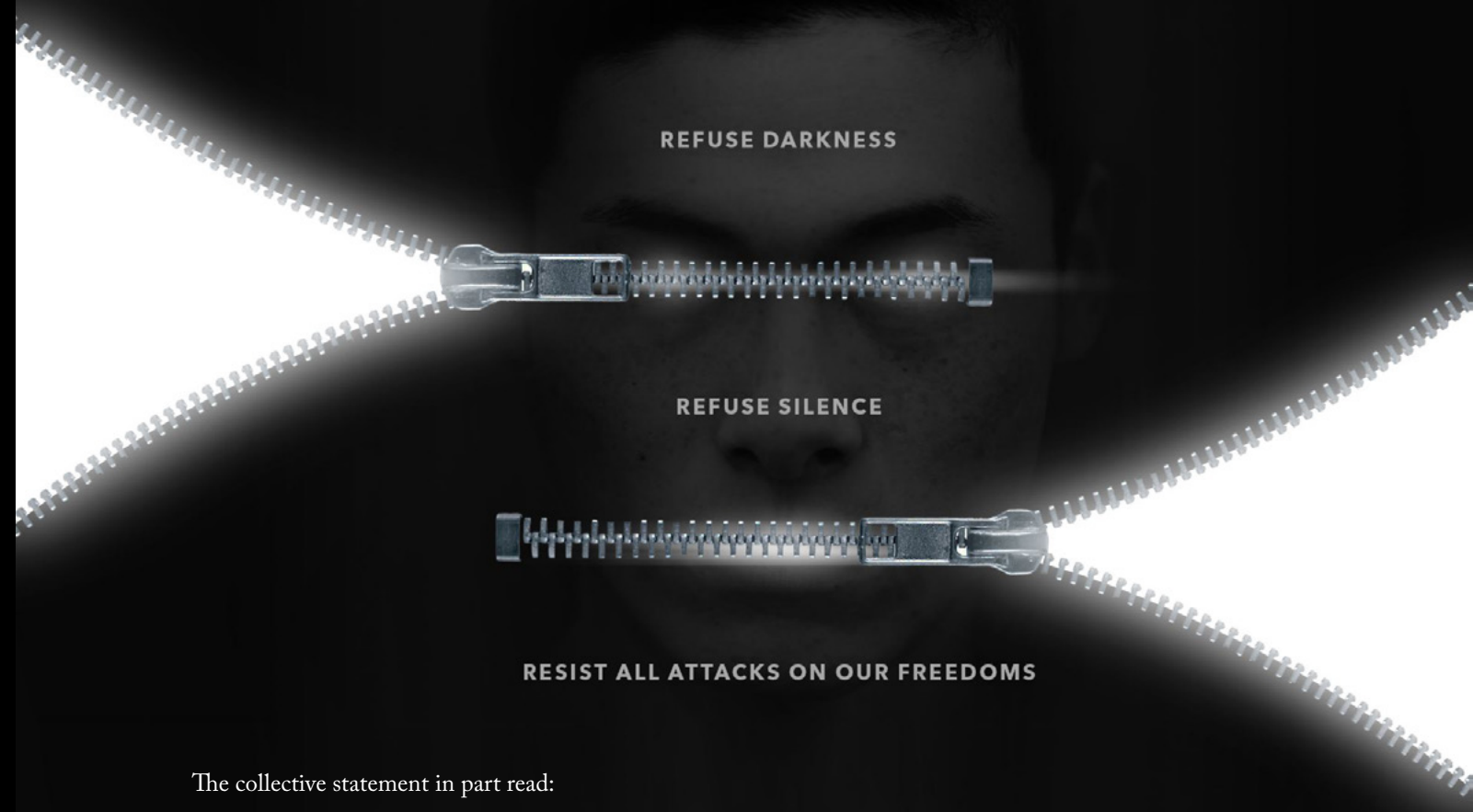
renewal by the time that the franchise expired on May 4. The president threatened ABS-CBN’s owner, Gabby Lopez that he will see to it that ABS-CBN will be out of business by 2020.³ True to his word, the Congress voted on ABS-CBN’s franchise renewal last July 2020, with 70-11 votes in favor of its denial.

The shutdown of ABS-CBN affected more than 15,000 direct employees of the network and thousands of others whose livelihoods and businesses are dependent of the media corporation’s operations. Losing rights to continue broadcasting left ABS-CBN with no choice but to lay off a large number of its workers. The loss of ABS-CBN’s regular programming also meant that millions of Filipinos lost access to vital news and information, especially during this period of a raging pandemic. Protest actions brought the affected workers and avid viewers of the media channel together, to grieve together and to encourage each other to start speaking out against the disservice the government did toward its people. On the day the ABS-CBN’s franchise renewal was denied, people took to the streets in front of the House of Representatives and outside ABS-CBN’s compound along Mother Ignacia. Actors such as Angel Locsin, Coco Martin, Kathryn Bernardo, and Kim Chiu added their influential voices to the growing protests online and in the streets. Despite the bashing from loyal supporters of the administration, their voices together with those affected by the shutdown and their allies persisted, refusing to be drowned by the blatant lies and manipulative actions of the regime.

The attacks continued with what was seen as the test case of press freedom in the country through what was deemed as politically motivated charges of cyber libel, tax violations, and the Securities and Exchange Commission revocation order against the news organization, Rappler. In June 2020, Rappler’s Maria Ressa received the guilty verdict in the cyber libel case filed against her and another colleague. A few days before the verdict, the documentary *A Thousand Cuts* (2020) by Ramona Diaz premiered in the Philippines, complemented with a forum that fueled the discourse on press freedom in the country.

Amidst the strict lockdown and threats against dissenters, protests were held continuously in the digital space. On May 8, 2020, over 30 arts and film organizations simultaneously broadcasted a black screen, live-streamed a symbolic protest over several social media platforms on the abrupt and ill-timed shutting down of media giant ABS-CBN and the call to defend press freedom. An online petition and community statement circulated gathering over a thousand signatures of artists coming from different fields, joined in solidarity by youth groups, human rights defenders, and media workers.

Opposite page:
Art card on the statement regarding the attacks
on the freedoms of expression and the press.
All images courtesy of ActiveVista



The collective statement in part read:

We live in dark times. This global pandemic casts a long shadow of fear and uncertainty that our generation has never faced before.

As we strive to survive together, we individuals and groups from the arts, media, and creative community, pledge to brave the darkness by being beacons of truth and amplifiers of hope.

We stand, in solidarity, to defend press freedom.

The shutting down of the country’s largest media network, the attacks on the independent press, the orchestrated spread of disinformation, and the killings of journalists all lay down a worrying pattern of repression and conditions for more hardship. In effect, we are deprived of accessible, credible, and accurate information and our right to speak truth to power, both crucial to saving lives.

We speak, in solidarity, to uphold freedom of expression.

The suppression of free speech, the threat of censorship, and the crackdown on those who voice out criticism and dissent hinder us from contributing to the bayanihan spirit in rebuilding our nation amid the crisis. The right to free expression should never be sacrificed in the guise of public order and safety.

We move, in solidarity, to reclaim our humanity.

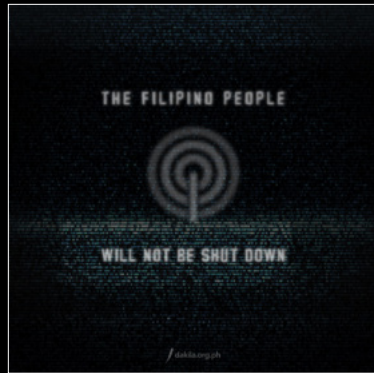
The disregard for everyone displaced by the shutdown, the neglect of the needs of the marginalized and the poor, the widening of social fragmentation, and the normalization of discrimination and violence erode the core of our humanity. No citizen should surrender rights, freedoms, and dignity to survive this catastrophe.

We shall not allow truth to die in this pandemic. We will hold the line for press freedom. We will continue to broadcast stories of the human condition. We will push back against barriers to our rights and freedoms with the strength of our unity.

As a community of artists, journalists, and creators, we will not sign off and leave the imagining of our collective survival to those in power. We will shape the new normal towards the vision of the better world we all deserve.

For every Kapatid, Kapuso, and Kapamilya. For our kababayan. For our kapwa Filipino.

We brave this darkness to channel light.⁴



ABS-CBN Shutdown art card released on the day the network was denied franchise.



Film Workers Unite & IGA. Screengrab from an online forum.



Art card for artists' petition to junk the Anti-Terrorism Bill.

#JunkTerrorLaw

The Duterte administration only tightened its grip as the public health crisis worsened. Authoritarian measures were enforced, and the narrative of the Filipinos as *pasaway* was perpetrated to condition the mind of the public into accepting repressive policies. The kind of conditioning seen in relation to the regime's war on drugs, the war in Marawi, and the war against activists and human rights defenders, further escalated with the war against the “veerus,” as if the virus could be beaten by the guns of the police and military in checkpoints. Unleashing its most vicious attack amid the pandemic chaos, the government railroaded the Anti-Terror Bill and had it signed into law on July 3, 2020, despite numerous calls against it for its unconstitutionality. The bill that is supposed to counter terrorism has become the very terror that threatens citizens because of its vague provisions that trample on guaranteed constitutional rights.

In response to the state of terror, a joint statement of artists, creatives, and cultural workers on the passing of HB6875 or the Anti-Terrorism Bill was released.⁵ Initiated by DAKILA and Free the Artist Movement, the statement garnered around 2,000 signatures, and in part read:

“As artists, we commit to lending our individual platforms to ensuring that our countrymen's civil liberties aren't encroached upon by the ATB. As citizens, we commit to vigilance and the duty of dissent.... We are this nation's storytellers. We are watching, and we will act.”

To spark further discourse on the issue, filmmaker Alyx Ayn Arumpac in partnership with Daang Dokyu, DAKILA, and Active Vista premiered the much-awaited documentary *Aswang* (2019) to Filipino audiences nationwide. *Aswang* puts a spotlight on the administration's war on drugs since 2016, following stories of people whose lives have been changed by the regime's terror campaign. The organizations felt the need to release the film to bring back to light conversations on police brutality, abuse of power, and the culture of impunity that existed even in the absence of the Anti-Terror Law. The film allowed audiences to ask what terror means.

Aswang was seen by more than 400,000 viewers all over the country, and a clamor from the people to show it again remains strong. Screenings of *Aswang* fueled the conversations on the drug war vis-à-vis the extrajudicial killings and the horrors that the passage of the Anti-Terror Law can bring. The screenings culminated with a series of online discussions that featured human rights experts, psychologists, and sociologists considering how the terrors committed by the regime continue to haunt us and inflict deep wounds on our collective psyche as a nation. The phenomenal response to the screening of *Aswang* reaffirmed the importance of cinema as a tool for us to collectively make sense of where we have been, where we are, and where we are headed as a nation.

Battling the Monster

The pandemic laid bare the inconsistencies, incompetence, and vested interests of a looming authoritarian regime and highlighted the road it is willing to take to reach its full power. It presented the cracks in our democracy, decay in the system, and the corruption of our culture. Most alarmingly, it revealed our own monsters—issues that we failed to address and confront in the past. The film industry has long been haunted with various monstrous issues in the past that has yet to be resolved—the deplorable state of film industry workers, the inability of the government to protect the local film industry, the lack of a unified framework in the development of Philippine Cinema, and many more. The celebration of the centennial of Philippine cinema should have been the opportunity to address these crucial issues. Instead, the celebration was marked with crises and conflicts that are manifestations of deeply entrenched problems. The eventual discontinuation of the ABS-CBN Film Restoration Program due to the network's shutdown will make matters worse. Not only will the only fully functional archive of our glorious cinematic history be endangered, the impact of this loss shall hinder us from understanding our own history.

The crucial role of developing Philippine cinema lies in the hands of the FDCP. However, even the agency tasked to lead the way toward the growth of the industry seemed to have lost its way. The FDCP imposed Advisory 06 (Clarificatory Guidelines on the FDCP-DOH-DOLE Joint Administrative Order [JAO] No. 2020-001 on the Health and Safety Protocols on the Conduct of Film and AV Production Shoots), issued on June 27, 2020, despite the existing self-regulating protocols proposed by the industry through the Inter-Guild Alliance (IGA). This move prompted the film community to question FDCP's mandate over the film industry. Only the Department of Health (DOH) and the Department of Labor (DOLE) have jurisdiction to impose such protocols; by entering a joint administrative order with these two departments, the FDCP found a foothold to exercise its self-proclaimed authority over the industry.

The overwhelming contention among members of the film community against the JAO imposed by FDCP paved the way for the formation of the Facebook group called Film Workers Unite. The group released a statement emphasizing FDCP's unnecessary expansion of powers through a set of arbitrary guidelines that extends the scope of the agency's authority to cover even television, advertising, and live events.⁶ The group not only called out FDCP on its overreach but also pointed out FDCP's intent to control rather than be open for consultation. It argued that FDCP's JAO exhibited a lack of understanding of the nuances of industry practices that could harm rather than help the industry.

The statement pointed out that the vagueness of some of JAO's provisions opens itself to misinterpretation and abuse of power. For instance, the JAO required organizations to disclose information on budget, distribution platforms,

and formats, aspects of production and exhibition that have nothing to do with health and safety. The statement, signed by leading personalities in the film community as well as representatives of various sectors of the film industry, rightly underscored how the JAO could be dangerous in light of the current political climate and how it could stifle freedom of expression. Some industry practitioners expressed their worry that that JAO could surveil artists and obstruct content-production that negated the narratives propagated by the government.

To exacerbate the situation further, the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) released Department Order 81 asserting its authority over the entertainment and cultural sector in the supervision of digital content. The political dynamics surrounding FDCP, DICT, and the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA) that manages the annual Metro Manila Film Festival only reveal how important it is for members of the film community to stand their ground and protect their freedom to tell their stories as the country transitions to a new normal.

Artists are the nation's storytellers. They are the truth-tellers. Theirs is the power of narratives—the ability to rewrite the rules of society. By invoking the power of stories—imagined or real—we can create a cultural blueprint to help us make sense of the chaos and navigate turbulent times. Stories illuminate the past, the present, and the future. They are the glue that connects our struggles and holds us together as communities. They constitute our collective memory and stir movements that shape our history.

As the world changes, the Philippine film community bears witness to the unfolding story of our nation, not as mere spectators in the sidelines but as storytellers of truth, of resistance, and of hope, courageously marching at the forefronts, shaping new narratives for a country the Filipino people deserves.

**WALANG PIPIKIT
WALANG BIBITAW
HINDI PA TAPOS ANG LABAN.**

Alexandra Maria Poblete, Alyssa Suico, and Leni Velasco are part of the Active Vista Center, an institution established by the artist-activist collective DAKILA, which organizes an annual human rights film festival in the Philippines. Active Vista brings attention to stories of human struggles through films which engage the public in discourses on social issues in order to develop a critical citizenry that supports initiatives for the promotion of human rights and democracy.

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FILMMAKERS AND DISSENT

IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

Chrissy Cruz Ustaris

ANGLE

Repression in the Midst of a Crisis

The country has been suffering from a human rights crisis that became even more pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic. As Filipinos grappled with ways to survive a most uncertain time when both livelihood and health were in jeopardy, the national government instead prioritized the shutdown of major media outfit ABS-CBN and the approval of the Anti-Terrorism Law—the former, the country’s biggest media conglomerate with news bureaus all over the world; the latter, a law that contains vague and sweeping provisions that expand the definition of terrorism with the intended effect of going after dissenters and critics of the administration. The legislation’s railroading exposed the regime’s fear of being held accountable for neglecting its citizens during the pandemic.

Aggravating the unemployment crisis by rendering 11,000 employees and talents jobless, the closure of ABS-CBN by this administration was also a direct assault on press freedom. It killed a platform that was supposed to serve the people;

journalism that is free to demand accountability was stifled. And the closure produced a chilling effect on media that was critical of the Duterte administration.

In the midst of a crisis, a spate of killings was also taking place, targeting peace advocates and human rights activists. Arrests of urban poor people asking for government aid and protesters expressing dissent against the Anti-Terrorism Law were carried out swifter than extending assistance to the needy and doing mass testing.

Months passed without concrete plans from the government to mitigate people’s hardships and to curb the spread of the virus. Consequently, there has been an undercurrent of growing discontent among Filipinos as state violence and the suppression of freedom of speech, press freedom, and the right to peaceful assembly were being normalized. Even as fear was being engendered through the regime’s militaristic approaches, people still continued to speak out.

Artists Speak Out

At the time of lockdown and oppression, artists took a stand.

The Concerned Artists of the Philippines (CAP) is an organization of writers, artists, and cultural workers with a commitment to the principles of freedom, justice, and democracy. It was founded in 1983 with the objective of bringing together Filipino artists to fight against the Marcos dictatorship and its repressive laws that had curtailed the right to freedom of expression. Lino Brocka, National Artist for Film, was the founding chairperson of CAP.

Nearly 30 years later, CAP continues Brocka’s legacy. It condemned all forms of human rights violations that afflicted the Filipino people during the COVID-19 crisis, as the passing of the Anti-Terrorism Law threatened to repeat the dark days of Martial Law. CAP continued to use art to uphold the rights of the masses and called on artists to speak against government repression in defense of the nation’s democracy.

Filmmakers and film critics, through the invitation of CAP, shared what remembering Lino Brocka on his 29th death anniversary last May 21 meant at a time when Filipinos were again facing threats to freedom of the press and freedom of expression, and other human rights violations amid the pandemic. Filmmaker Sari Dalena shared that her letter “To the Young Filmmaker Who Never Knew Brocka” that circulated in 2016 was conceived as a “thank you” to the great director.¹ For Dalena, Brocka paved the way for many others by using his works, words, and actions to usher change in culture and society.

Director Carlitos Siguion-Reyna shared that:

Lino Brocka’s films remain as relevant as ever: the psychological empowerment of the marginalized, the call for social justice and equality, and the human empathy for those characters deprived of the same in his characters all ring true here and now [...]. Thank you, Lino Brocka, for inspiring us through your community service, citizenship, your body of work in film, television, and theater, and for reminding us of the challenges, responsibilities, and honor embodied by a true National Artist.²

The director added a reminder that it was Brocka’s contribution to the crafting of the Constitution that helped enshrine the freedom of expression clause in Article III, Sec. 4 of the Bill of Rights.

Director and actor Joel Lamangan pointed to how Brocka’s words continued to resonate and inspire in a time of dissent. Words from Brocka’s speeches and from their conversations, Lamangan said, had guided him as cultural worker. He shared:

Bago tayo naging Artista, tayo ay mamamayan muna. Obligasyon natin bilang mandudula ang ipagtanggol ang mga karapatang ibinibigay sa bawat mamamayan sa Saligang Batas. Responsibilidad natin bilang Artista ang ilahad ang katotohanan. Kaninong katotohanan? Ang Katotohanang sumasagisag sa interes ng pinakamaraming mamamayan.

Kailangang masalamin ng ating mga dula ang katotohanang nais nating lumaya laban sa kahirapan, sa panggagahasa sa ating kalayaan sa pagpapahayag, ang lumaya laban sa pambubusabos ng dayuhang capital, ang lumaban sa pang-aapi ng mga politikong nagpapayaman sa yaman ng bayan.³

Opposite page: Artists gather at a protest rally led by CAP ca. late 1980s. (L-R) Bodjie Pascua, Carlitos Siguion-Reyna, Bienvenido Lumbera, Bibeth Orteza, Armida Siguion-Reyna, Behn Cervantes, Ishmael Bernal, Lino Brocka, and Renato Constantino, Jr. From the Cesar Hernando collection, courtesy of Tom Estrera III.

In other words, artists as citizens are entrusted with the duty to defend the truth and the people’s interests, demonstrated both through their actions and creative practice. Lamangan was also vocal in defending ABS-CBN against its closure as he asserted in a forum that denying the network their franchise was as good as curtailing everyone’s right to freedom of expression.⁴

Film critic Rolando Tolentino spoke of the necessity of political filmmaking as a means to respond to the times. He believed there is a need for more artists and filmmakers like Brocka who dared express their resistance against repression and exploitation through their words and their works.

In Altermidya Network’s Alab Analysis online broadcast, “Artists on Anti-Terror Law,” actor, writer, and filmmaker Bibeth Orteza also said that due to the law’s vague and broad provisions, even filmmakers can be suspected of being terrorists if their films were construed as being critical of the government. Siguion-Reyna, also featured in the broadcast, explained that since films reflect the human condition, which include the political situation, a film such as Brocka’s *Maynila sa Mga Kuko ng Liwanag* (1975), if made at present, could be viewed as inciting to commit terrorism under the Anti-Terrorism Law.

Filmmakers and the Lumad Bakwit School

Filmmakers’ actions were not limited to expressing dissent against a repressive regime. With the administration’s ineptitude and inadequate response to the desperate needs of the citizens during the pandemic, people have been callously left to fend for themselves. To the call for help of these disempowered communities, artists also responded.

One of the communities that needed financial aid during the pandemic was the Lumad Bakwit School (LBS) inside the University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman campus. The LBS was originally established in 2014, prompted by a massive evacuation of 1,400 Lumad from Talaingod, Kapalong, and Bukidnon (Pantaron Range) due to intense military harassment and occupation of their schools. Lumad schools were tagged by the Armed Forces as “rebels” under its counterinsurgency campaigns. The Save Our Schools (SOS) Network documented 368 attacks on schools by the end of the Benigno Aquino III administration.⁵ From July 2016 to July 2020, the incidents of attack numbered to more than 1,000 under the Duterte regime.⁶

In 2017, Lumad children became part of the campaign in Metro Manila to protest human rights violations and the people’s situation in Mindanao. The imposition of martial law by Duterte in Mindanao in May of that year and his brazen open threat to “bomb Lumad schools” brought an unprecedented increase in incidents of attack on the Lumad. More than 50 Lumad schools were forcibly closed from July 2017 to October 2017. These events rendered the children displaced. The LBS, which became not only their school but also their home, was set up in Metro Manila in 2017.

The LBS has been accommodated by various schools and churches. It is a mobile school for indigenous children, which serves as a venue for students, teachers, and community leaders to campaign against state-sponsored attacks on IP schools. The LBS became not only a space for Lumad children to continue their education but also provided a platform for Mindanaoans to broaden other people’s awareness of their plight in the country’s capital.

From early 2019 up to the ordering of the lockdown, the school was hosted in different buildings inside the UP Diliman campus. At the start of the pandemic, the school appealed for donations. Food and other resources became a challenge because the movement of students and teachers within the campus was restricted to avoid contracting the coronavirus disease. Around 100 students and teachers were sustained by donations in cash and in kind by well-meaning individuals and organizations.

CAP has long supported the struggle of the Lumad in its campaign against human rights violations in Mindanao. Its members held workshops for Lumad students on activities such as songwriting, video making, news writing, and photography. A number of its members volunteered as teachers in the LBS, and some had immersions in the community. In 2017, an exhibit entitled “Dissident Vicinities,” curated by CAP Secretary General Lisa Ito-Tapang, included artwork by Lumad students.

At the onset of the lockdown, CAP called for donations for the LBS. Volunteers from the organization were able to raise a fairly good amount within days. Food packs and sacks of rice were also sourced. Donations came mostly from members’ personal contacts who responded to the call. However, although things looked promising, some volunteers realized that the endeavor was not sustainable in the long term. The school’s needs were continuous, and there was much uncertainty about when the general situation would go back to normal. There had to be a way to reach out to more people.

Around the same time, the Lockdown Cinema Club, whose beneficiaries were film workers, proved successful in its call for donations in exchange for access to films. The Club offered an impressive lineup of independent films that was exhilarating for both film enthusiasts and anybody looking for good entertainment to pass the time during the lockdown. As one of the two CAP volunteers who launched the Artists for the LBS, I was hopeful I could ask some friends from the film industry to share their works for a cause. I reached out to Zig Dulay, who was one of the first to heed the call for donations for the Lumad youth. He shared his films *Bambanti* (2015) and “Missing” (2013).

We desired to make this fundraiser as big as Lockdown Cinema Club’s. It didn’t take long before it became clear that this wasn’t going to happen. Some of the filmmakers I approached were very willing to share their films, but they no longer had the proprietary rights to their work. Their producers were either not too enthused about using their film for free or were placing restrictions on the screening. Moreover, there was

so much formality in making the request that it was unnecessarily consuming the time and mental well-being of our two-person team (the author and visual artist, Gabriel Angelo Garcia) whose goal it was to provide for needs that were very urgent. This taught us an important lesson: that this project will never be aligned to any individual or organization with a capitalist motive.

Films abound. It was a matter of finding filmmakers who were willing to share their films for the fundraiser without any qualms or demands. As a film teacher in a university in Manila, I was surrounded by student filmmakers. My thesis advisee, Glenn Averia, was a 2019 Cinemalaya Short Film finalist and NETPAC awardee for his thesis film, “Disconnection Notice.” One message was all it took for him to agree for his film to be included in the fundraising initiative. He invited seven other filmmakers from the competition who had become his good friends. They shared the films “Tembong” (2018) by Shaira Advincula; “Sa Among Agwat” (2018) by Don Senoc; “Sa Gabing Tanging Liwanag Ay Paniniwala” (2019) by Francis Guillermo; “Hele ng Maharlika” (2019) by Norvin de Los Santos; “Heist School” (2018) by Julius Renomeron Jr.; “Wag Mo Kong Kausapin” (2018) by Josef Gacutan; and “Kinalimutan Natin ang mga Bata” (2017) by Gilb Baldoza. Other student films, produced as course requirements and later entered in film competitions, helped in raising money for the Lumad. Young filmmakers were very willing to lend their films to help out. By the end of March 2020, we launched our first batch of films through the Artists for Lumad Bakwit School fundraiser through free access films.

The team directly dealt with filmmakers. Our lineup was even better than what we had imagined at the start. We had a great mix of films. In addition to Dulay’s films, we featured Thop Nazareno’s *Edward* (2019), Martika Escobar’s “Pusong Bato” (2014), Sari Estrada’s “Asan Si Lolo Me” (2013); David Corpuz’s “Dencio at Meng”; and Joris Fernandez’s “Delia at Weng” (both from *Anatomya ng Pag-ibig*, 2015).

The fundraiser also featured documentary films on peasant and labor issues, namely: “Pagkatapos ng Tigkiwiri” (2018) directed by Danielle Madrid and produced by Unyon ng Manggagawa sa Agrikultura (UMA); “Butil” (2016) by Roanne Mirabueno; “A Sinking Ship” (2019) by Sam Vizcarra; and “Pisapungan” (2019) by Khalil Versoza. Documentaries on the themes of activism and social justice were also programmed: *Portraits of Mosquito Press* (2015) by JL Burgos; *Nanay Mameng* (2012) by Adjani Arumpac and Kodao Productions; “Kalumaran” (2015) by Jan Carlo Natividad; *Yanan* (Director’s Cut, 2018) by Mae Caralde; *Daughters of Cordillera* (2015) by Ilang-Ilang Quijano; and *Walang Rape sa Bontok* (2014) by Lester Valle.

In choosing the films to invite, we were careful with selecting the stories they presented. We were helping a community that had continually experienced oppression. Most films we featured were those that spoke for the voiceless and sought social transformation. We consciously veered away from films that glorified any oppressive force or vilified marginalized sectors.

Contacts got exhausted as the months passed, but

somehow, Artists for Lumad Bakwit School was able to come up with four batches of films from March to June. CAP constantly promoted the films through its social media account. It was important to sustain the effort since the pandemic continued to drag along with no solid plans from the Duterte administration.

None of the 47 filmmakers who participated in our fundraiser gave us a hard time in allowing us to use their works to help the LBS. They understood the urgency of the situation and were happy and honored to help the Lumad. Most thanked our team for the opportunity to make their films useful in a way they had never thought possible.

Resistance and Empathy

Many people see artists as producers of works that just entertain and beautify. It surprises such people when artists become political and speak out against a system that oppresses.

In the time of COVID-19, as filmmakers spoke out to protest a repressive law, they were not only concerned about how this was going to affect filmmaking but also about how it effectively tramples on people’s rights, most especially the freedom of expression that is most essential to protecting all other freedoms. Filmmakers, it was clear, were also ready to band together to help out marginalized groups like displaced film workers or the Lumad.

Filmmakers are storytellers. Choosing whose story to tell is choosing whose voice needs to be heard. In lending their films for a cause, calling for social justice did not remain inside their films but has become a concrete action of human empathy.

- ¹ *Manila Today* Staff, “To the Young Filmmaker Who Never Knew Lino Brocka,” *Manila Today*, May 22, 2016, https://manilatoday.net/to-the-young-filmmaker-who-never-knew-lino-brocka/?fbclid=IwAR3KZmy2gdsVlq76G2BE9MyfN-pVn5Ah0YrfCxDJnqfCtLk_vutEVfjXnITw.
- ² Concerned Artists of the Philippines, “Remembering Lino on his 29th death anniversary of National Artist for Film and CAP Founding Chairperson Lino Brocka,” Facebook, May 27, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/artistangbayan/posts/3384978111513874>.
- ³ Concerned Artists of the Philippines, “Bago tayo naging Artista, tayo ay mama-mayan muna,” Facebook, May 28, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/artistangbayan/posts/3387190941292591>.
- ⁴ “Joel Lamangan on ABS-CBN shutdown threat: Who will tell the story of the Filipino?” *Rappler*, February 24, 2020, <https://rappler.com/entertainment/joel-lamangan-abs-cbn-shutdown-threat-who-will-tell-filipino-story>.
- ⁵ Save Our Schools Network, *Submission to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) for Human Rights Council (HRC) Report 41/2 by the Save Our Schools Network in the Philippines* (Philippines, Save Our Schools Network, January 30, 2020), 2.
- ⁶ Save Our Schools Network, *Summary of Documented Cases of Attacks on Schools from July 2016 to July 18, 2020* (Philippines, Save Our Schools Network, 2020), 1.

Chrissy Cruz Ustaris is a documentary filmmaker and a lecturer at the Far Eastern University and Mapúa University. She received her BS in Business Administration and MA in Media Studies (Film) from the University of the Philippines and is currently pursuing her PhD in Philippine Studies at the UP Asian Center. She is a member of the Concerned Artists of the Philippines (CAP).



PROTEST

IN THE TIME OF

CORONAVIRUS

Protest and noise barrage continue every night in front of ABS-CBN along Sgt. Esguerra Street two weeks after the franchise denial. Photos by Neil Daza.



The camera is a powerful tool and can create a cathartic experience. To see the world from that rectangular box is its strength and weakness. In taking these photos, it automatically puts me through a wide range of emotions – nervousness, sadness, disgust, anger. I think this is a given when you take pictures of the human condition, especially in a situation which you yourself is a stranger to, and there's little that you can do at that point. That is why there was this overriding feeling of wanting to document these events for the present and future generation to see. These pictures will definitely not change the world. They are not even showing you the whole story as emotions are lost amidst the covered faces, but I hope these images would awaken the empathy and compassion in all of us.

-Neil Daza



Artists wear Defend Press Freedom masks during SONAgkaisa rally in UP on July 27.



March 19. A deserted EDSA-Cubao MRT station on a weekday on the fourth day of the lockdown.



A rally by ABS-CBN employees and supporters on July 18.



ABS-CBN employees after the congress denied the network its franchise on July 10.



Anti-Terror Bill protest in UP on June 4.

Neil Daza is an award-winning cinematographer who has shot some of the most memorable films of our time: *Dekada '70* (2002), *Feng Shui* (2004), *Badil* (2013), *Bwaya* (2014), *Signal Rock* (2018), *Oda sa Wala* (2018). Before lensing motion pictures, he was a photojournalist who documented major political events post-EDSA, an experience that contributed to his candid filmmaking aesthetics.