

Cinema Archipelago: A Geography of Philippine Film and the
Postnational Imaginary

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Dissertation

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Abstract

Joseph Palis: Cinema Archipelago: A Geography of Philippine Film and the
Postnational Imaginary
(under the direction of Dr. Scott Kirsch)

The project aims to understand and raise awareness about the power of film to shape geographies and the power of geography to shape films. The purpose of my research is to investigate the constitution of ‘national cinema’ in the Philippines. The concept of imagined communities by Benedict Anderson will provide a theoretical basis for understanding the relations between film and the concept of the ‘national’. The cinematic representation of local cultures, spaces and places and the tenuous concept of national cinema will be investigated and unpacked. The research seeks to investigate how notions of ‘national cinema’ are constructed through textual readings of selected Philippine films, employing discourse analysis as a method to apprehend meanings embedded in the images and in their reception. Of particular importance is how various constructions of the nation as seen in selected Filipino films enact, re-enact and contest the official narrative of the country. Additionally, the research asks how useful is the ‘national cinema’ as a conceptual approach to describe not only the various voices within a nation but also outside its geographical borders? Given the recognition of the materiality that Filipinos ascribe to the nation, is a postnational or non-resident cinema possible in the country? The research concerns are thus: (1) The interrogation and

investigation of 'national cinema', its constructions, reifications and contestations using insights from interviews and focus group discussions as well as a textual reading of selected Philippine films; (2) How the Third Cinema movement aided the articulation of alternative views of the nation (guerilla film aesthetics, digital filmmaking, queerness; (3) How diaspora mediates the depiction of the archipelago as nation and homeland; and (4) Whether a postnational cinema is possible in the national imaginary.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: GEOGRAPHY AND CINEMA

I. Introduction

When Thomas Alva Edison shot his Biograph actualities depicting the Filipino insurrection against the Americans in 1899, he used African American soldiers to portray Filipino soldiers. For convenience, Edison set his actualities in areas that best approximate the tropical foliage of the Philippines for verisimilitude. In the early years of Edison's cinema, the lushly vegetated area of West Orange County in New Jersey served as a faux Philippines. Cinema as an art form was a novelty, which helps explain why Edison's choice of locations was not scrutinized for veracity (Figure 1). What was important was that the action that unfolds before the spectator's eyes signals the American conquest of the Philippine territories. This early form of cinematic spectatorship provided a basis to support emerging imperialist ideologies (Deocampo 1999; del Mundo 1998). Staging the action of a film's narrative in other places during the early years of cinema was not new, and Edison was not the only one who resorted to reenactments or the filming of activities in staged locations.¹

Contemporary film projects have since changed this trend, using the Philippine settings to depict other countries. From *Apocalypse Now* (1979) to *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1982) to *Brokedown Palace* (1999), the Philippines substituted for Vietnam, Indonesia and Thailand, respectively. The Philippines assumed a peculiar space, being both

¹ George Melies' 'artificially arranged scenes' became famous for the reenactments of events and were viewed as authentic footages. See Mary Ann Doane's "The Emergence of Cinematic Time", Harvard, 2002.

place and non-place in cinematic history. This interstitial space occupied by the Philippines represents what Jean Mottet argues (following Jay Appleton) connected the “satisfaction of basic needs by the environment with the pleasure associated with aesthetic contemplation.” (Mottet 2006, 83).



Figure 1: Thomas A. Edison, *Capture of Trenches at Candaba*, 1899.

Like filmmakers, geographers also actively engaged in the use of films to illuminate uniformity, homogeneity, diversity and difference. Because of the potential of films to record and document the existence of people and places, early academic endeavors used captured filmic images to explain different kinds of geophysical and anthropogenic phenomena. *The Geographical Magazine*, under the supervision and encouragement of the British Film Institute director Roger Manvell in the 1950s, published writings that link particular landscapes to specific cultural traits and characteristics. These early forms of academic discourse brought to life the debate whether the ‘reel’ reflects the ‘real’ in any significant way. Whether the images captured by the camera are signifiers of actuality or not, the interrogation of ‘real’ has been the site of countless debates, particularly when these have taken a ‘national’ slant, as will be seen below.

The scholarship that emerged in the late-1980s and continues up to the present has problematized cinematic representations to a degree that imbricates cultural biases and ideological politics every time a landscape of a given country is framed and portrayed. The studies of Stuart Aitken and Leo Zonn (1994) on Australian national images in such films as *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975) and *Storm Boy* (1976) establish an explicit underlining of gender-based biases that were encouraged through the support of national film institutions.² Wolfgang Natter (1994) and Christina Kennedy (1994) each studied vastly different spatial and emotional landscapes, and both assert that national tensions manifest in various scales despite the idealized filmic representations of a nation as represented by landscape. Natter's assessment of *Berlin, A Symphony of the City* (1927) and Kennedy's study of *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) both argue that cinematic articulation mediates and aids in the (re)narration of the 'national' by using the city (Berlin) and the level of the individual (T.E. Lawrence) as illustrative examples to simultaneously look at the 'national' (Natter 1994, Kennedy 1994). Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen (2006) insist that 'the national' is not containable within fixed geo-political boundaries but should "constitute a horizon that is constantly kept open to critical engagement" (2006, 11). Film assists in the global circulation of re-figured national narratives and offers a "speculative ground for the transnational imaginary and its contention with national and local communities" (Dissanayake & Wilson 1996, 11).

The unfolding of film geographies carries a wider range of meanings and emotions as cinema attempts to show the ways in which certain national themes and modes of expression evoke and portray aspects of national identity. Cinema pertains to a national configuration because films are "clusters of historically specific cultural forms the semantic

² According to Aitken and Zonn, these institutions are the Australian Film Commission and the South Australian Film Corporation.

modulations of which are orchestrated and contended over by each of the forces at play in a given geographical area” (Vitali & Willemsen 2006, 7). The literature in film geographies has produced theoretical debates which have national and nationalist registers. A case in point is Tim Bunnell’s (2004) critical study of *Entrapment* (1999), in which the image of modern-day Malaysia clashes with the spliced image in a scene showing the majestic presence of Petronas Tower against a riverside slum area. The film legitimized the Malaysian government to issue a directive for its cities and citizens to clean up their act “to practice ‘fully developed’ ways of seeing, being and being seen” (2004, 297). The global circulation of the Hollywood-funded *Entrapment* assures worldwide distribution, which solidifies and legitimizes Malaysia’s desire to project itself as a tiger economy in the Asia Pacific region.

II. Problem

My interest in the relationship between cinema and the nation stems from the unique geographical location of the Philippines in the Asia-Pacific region. The country’s colonial histories, its diversity of island cultures and languages, and regional fragmentation have been fodder for filmmakers that articulate conflicting notions of Filipinoness. As a diasporic Filipino citizen, my project aims to unpack the ambiguities of a Filipino national identity and the idea of national belonging as manifested in cinematic output, when films become situated outside of the archipelagic borders of the country. Ideas of nationhood and nationalities are also important considerations when studying film production and film textuality, especially when the influence of diaspora and globalization are taken into consideration.

This project explores and investigates the utility of Benedict Anderson's notion of imagined communities (1983) as well as the contestations and critiques of this theoretical model of nationhood. Is the idea of a national cinema possible in an archipelagic country? If so, does it carry a specific cultural referent that answers the question, What is a Filipino? How do the global influence of Hollywood and the radical politics of Third Cinema mediate the cinematic articulation? Is a postnational cinema possible? If so, can the national live in a postnational culture?

In this discussion, I define nation as an entity produced from material and discursive transformations that, in turn, is enacting discursive formations. This definition draws not only from the literature of the modernist historiographies of Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm (1990) and Ernest Gellner (1983), but is also inspired by the social constructivism of Craig Calhoun (1997) and Rogers Brubaker (2004). In my project, nation is interrogated not only by momentous historical events for nation-building but also by its fragments and discrepancies. These slippages allow for a recuperation of buried and submerged voices, in the margins and fringes within and beyond the archipelagic spaces of the Philippines. In this regard, I define postnationality as a process that exists in an interstitial space or inbetween-ness that does not privilege ontological origins and formal closures of nations and national identities. Postnationality is between local and global spaces and accommodates the idea of unhomedness, of being native and foreign at the same time.

III. *Discourses of Nation: Theories and Definitions*

Current attempts to articulate the national or nationalist dimensions of cinematic cultures have relied on the theoretical texts of Anderson's conception of the nation as an

imagined community. As opposed to the primordialist historiographies which assumed that nations existed since early human history, Anderson's modernist assertion, along with the similar conceptions of Hobsbawm and Gellner, posits that a nation is first imagined before it is bounded in a geographical space. National history has been narrated in postcolonial states through census, museums, and maps which, according to Anderson, assisted in the formation of a nationalist consciousness (or national identity as it is now commonly referred to). What differentiates Anderson from the works of Gellner and Hobsbawm is Anderson's preference for the media of communication, or 'print language' as he calls it. The 'nationalist novel' and the newspaper are the vehicles that shape national consciousness. Anderson's reliance on print media and its subsequent wider vernacularization leads Philip Schlesinger to declare: "Mechanically reproduced print-languages unified fields of linguistic exchange, fixed 'national' languages, and created new idioms of power" (Schlesinger 2000, 23). Michael Billig took up and re-imagined Anderson's conception by introducing the idea of nationalism's 'banality', where national practice is embedded in the practices, rituals and performativities of the everyday (Billig 1995).

Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983/1991) has provided theoretical inspiration for several scholars writing on national cinema. What has been widely adapted in cinema studies is film's appropriation of print media, in order to imagine a nation. The vernacularization of films was aimed at wider dissemination to its peoples. Many film scholars writing on national cinemas warn that film vernacularization does not produce a national mirror for its people. Philip Rosen (2006) says that the presence of diverse film texts threatens to destabilize the notion of a homogenized nation. Filipino film scholar Roland Tolentino (2000) builds on that premise when he posits that: "The nation is imagined not as a

monolithine entity but as a multiple embodiment of individual and people's nationalism(s). The nation is constituted in relation to other political, economic, and cultural categories of class, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, among others" (2000, 90). Appropriating Theodor Adorno's famous question: "What is German?," Tolentino's definition of a nation also begs the question: "What is Filipino?"

While there is widespread agreement with Anderson's theory of the nation as an imagined community of people, there is also the issue of hegemony within the frames that produced such a community. In response to the multiplicity of Indian cultures within India, subaltern studies historian Partha Chatterjee challenges Anderson's concept with: "Whose imagined community?" Chatterjee says that Anderson "treats the phenomenon as part of the universal history of the modern world obscuring other nationalisms and ways of constructing community" (Chatterjee 1993, 5). What about resistance to signs and significations that create divergent dynamics to nation-building? This resistance can be antithetical to the official narrative that the current government wants to build. Chatterjee refers to these resisters not only as those with ideologically different conceptions of a nation but also those who find affinity with the more localized variations and differentiation of communities within the hegemonic nation.

Anderson's notion is useful when people in diasporic communities who maintain a long-term sense of ethnic consciousness and distinctiveness come into the discussion. Hamid Naficy says that "diasporic consciousness is horizontal and multi-sited, involving not only the homeland but also the compatriot communities elsewhere" (2001, 14). This makes for an interesting film culture that develops and germinates in areas other than their own so-called homeland. Naficy's book *Accented Cinema* asserts that the diasporic filmmakers' works are

expressed “less in the narrative of retrospection, loss and absence or in strictly partisan political terms” (2001, 14-15).

Anderson’s concept provides an interesting parallel to the revolutionary politics of Third Cinema. This resistant film movement, which blossomed in colonized countries in Asia, Latin America, Africa and the Caribbean as a response against cultural imperialism and dispossession, provides a reworking of the national narratives through cinema. Similar to Chatterjee’s critique of imagined communities, Third Cinema’s brand of sociocritical discourse interrogates the dominant ideologies within a homogenous imagined nations or communities. Filipino film scholar Joel David (1998) asserts that the notion of chaos and the carnivalesque, cannibalism and the twin aesthetics of hunger and garbage are some of Third Cinema’s visible manifestations in Philippine cinema. The legacies of guerilla aesthetics and queer filmmaking in predominantly Catholic spaces continue to draw inspiration from Third Cinema and provide a cinematic counternarrative to the nation.

While the Philippine archipelago is located between the Asian mainland and the Pacific group of islands, it is tempting to expect a sense of national singularity, even isolation from the rest of Asia. However, the practices of the Filipino film industry, embedded as it is in the transnational relationships of economics, politics and culture of its Asian neighboring countries and the United States, have proven to be far from separate and isolated in the many decades since cinema’s inception in the archipelago. In a parallel example involving Nordic cinema, Mette Hjort’s study has outlined the uneasy tension between the concept of national cinema and the “transnational realities of cinematic production that have characterized filmmaking for many decades” (2005, 160). At a time when globalization and its implications for the nation-state are drawing attention to cultural hybridity and various

transnational connections, cinematic transnationalism varies from country to country. A case study shows the specific negotiations of a particular country's filmic cultures in response to globalization (Hjort 2005). Focusing on the Philippines, the current study will investigate specific processes based on the encounters of the country's film culture with transnationalism such as co-productions with foreign film outfits, and denationalization which Hjort calls "one of the results of transnationalism, understood both as a response to and the means of globalization" (2005, 161). As shown in Chapter 4, which includes the experiences of Philippine-based film practitioners with foreign co-productions, the assertions of Toby Miller et al. in *Global Hollywood* rightfully points out that co-production treaties between countries "institutionalize normative and static conceptions of national culture in the very process of international collaboration" (Miller et al. 2001, 89). While Nordic cinema's experience with co-productions contradicts the authors of *Global Hollywood*, this commitment to theorizing in concrete case studies provides the rationale for focusing on the Philippines and the various negotiations of its filmic cultures.

My research aims to map out a history of cinema in the Philippines and to examine the diaspora and the regional specificity that Third Cinema has engendered in the country. Discussions on the tension between the diaspora and homeland that led to the creation of newer cinemasces are also tackled using two recent films (*Cavite* and *Rigodon*), which are discussed in Chapter 5 (Figure 2). Insights gleaned from interviews with film practitioners will be utilized as a starting point to provide a dialogue between various ideas regarding the Philippine nation vis-à-vis the selected filmographies. This conversation develops a cinematic map of the Philippines that illustrates the slippery and elusive definitions of the nation.



Figure 2. Neill de la Llana & Ian Gamazon, *Cavite*, 2005.

Of increasing relevance to Philippine cinema is Naficy's notion of accented filmmakers, which refers to exilic and diasporic directors who have relocated to cosmopolitan centers outside the Philippines where "they exist in a state of tension and dissension with both their original and their current homes" (Naficy 2001, 10). Millions of Filipinos left the country to be gainfully employed in contract labor abroad. The exodus of Filipino migrants seeking employment and residence in other countries produced several films that tackle this specific experience. Several filmmakers created filmic outputs that portray alienation, dislocation and the unhomed identities of their compatriots in other parts of the world. Films like *Rigodon* by Sari Dalena and Keith Sicat probed the active unbelonging of the three Filipinos in post-9/11 New York (Figure 3), while Filipino-

American filmmakers Neill de la Llana and Ian Gamazon produced *Cavite* to situate and emplace the painful homecoming of a delocalized hero to an alienated homeland.



Figure 3. Sari Dalena & Keith Sicat, *Rigodon*, 2005.

The Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) has also been dramatized in films as early as the early 1980s. *Merika* (1984) became the most famous and critically lauded film that discussed issues like disconnection in a foreign place and the illegal working status of Filipina nurses in New York City. Films like *Milan* (2004), *Anak* (Child, 2000) and *Bagong Bayani* (New Hero, 1995) were produced in recent years to portray the various dilemmas and crises that vex these migrant workers abroad. The OFW phenomenon started during the Marcos regime, but was only recognized during the Aquino administration following President Marcos' fall in 1986. Filipino labor migration is "one of the most significant developments in the Philippines in the last thirty years" (Hau, 2004: 227) and the overseas Filipino migrant workers have been hailed as the 'new heroes' of the country. Labor

migration has become the solution for a number of people trapped in the quagmire of centuries of underdevelopment. The OFW entered into the lexicon of the iconic when it became a normal feature of the socioeconomic landscape (Tolentino, 2001; Tyner, 2002; Hau, 2004; Rodriguez, 2005). No less than four Philippine presidents – past and present – heaped praise on these workers’ role in boosting the flagging economy: Corazon Aquino (“the country’s new heroes”), Fidel Ramos (“the Philippine contribution to other countries’ development”), Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (“OFI: Overseas Filipino Investors”) and Joseph Estrada. In 2000, the latter famously asked for the support of the OFWs to close ranks and “help prop up the heavily battered economy and to help in praying for his critics and political opponents.”³ These unanimous laudatory praises coming from Philippine leaders spring from the country’s realization that the remittances from the OFWs play an important role in resuscitating the economy and paying the national debt the country incurred from financial lending institutions (Rodriguez, 2005; Hau, 2004). Filipino scholar Filomeno Aguilar likens the migrant to a “pilgrim-sojourner” who engages in a “ritualistic quest for self-perfection through migration” (Aguilar 2001, 417). The OFW, like the pilgrim, leaves the homeland and goes through the process of “sacrifice, ascetic self-denial, and the abandonment of worldly comfort and pleasures . . . to seek personal fulfillment beyond the limitations of his own society” (Aguilar 2001, 444).

Whether the films that were produced about the crossing of borders qualify as diasporic films, Naficy claims that diasporized filmmakers who create these images either as a loving homage to a lost homeland or as a critique of the present national set-up of their country of origin, show more multiplicity and plurality and the performativity of identities. Dalena, Sicat, de la Llana and Gamazon are filmmakers who anchor their films on memory,

³ *Manila Bulletin*, 10 December 2000, cited in Caroline Hau, 2004, 231.

the idea of a lost homeland and its unsuccessful recuperation. The films on OFWs (which were often filmed in the actual place of work in a foreign country) do not problematize these issues, but rather show the various negotiations of Filipino workers whose own rootedness are enplaced in their country of origin. Still, the larger question asks what happens to the positionality of address when these films are routinely produced, circulated and consumed across national boundaries?

Because of the social fragmentation brought about by the archipelagic shape of the Philippines and the Filipinos' various encounters and experiences with colonization, I will employ Anderson's concept of imagined communities to provide a theoretical basis for understanding the relations between film and the concept of the 'national'. The cinematic representation of local cultures, spaces and places and the tenuous concept of national cinema will be explored and unpacked. I will investigate how notions of 'national cinema' are constructed, using textual readings of selected Philippine films and employing discourse analysis as a method to apprehend the meanings embedded in the images. Of particular importance is how various constructions of the nation, as seen in selected Filipino films, enact, re-enact and contest the official narrative of the country. How useful is the 'national cinema' as a conceptual approach to describe not only the various voices within a nation, but also outside its geographical borders? Given the recognition of the materiality that Filipinos ascribe to the nation, is a postnational or non-resident cinema possible in the country?

The role of Third Cinema in the country's filmic culture has led me to interrogate its complicitness in the articulation of alternative views of the nation (especially in the deployment and re-assertion of guerilla film aesthetics, digital filmmaking and queerness). Historically, Third Cinema spread and developed in regions where a significant number of its

people – marginalized and relegated to the peripheries – began to assert themselves within the First World space that produced them. The pioneering activities of Argentinean filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino in 1968 were aimed at constructing and solidifying a social and artistic movement with a subversive slant. Since then, Third Cinema has evolved not only from the perspective but more importantly in the presumption that all alternative models be measured against Third Cinema as an ideal type. As Antonio Sison succinctly puts it: “[Third Cinema] is dialectically angled towards giving voice and visibility to socially-resonant films that foreground the Third World experience and perspective” (Sison 2005).

The fecundity of neologistic aesthetics, both literary and cinematic, gave birth to varying ways of describing the sensibility of Third Cinema. Among them were: the aesthetics of hunger (Glauber Rocha, Brazil), cigarette-butt cinema (Ousmane Sembene, Senegal), *Cine Imperfecto* (Julio Garcia Espinosa, Cuba), the aesthetics of garbage (Rogerio Sganzerla, Brazil), termite terrorism (Guillermo del Toro, Mexico), *rasquachismo* (Tomas-Ibarra Frausto, Mexico), and neo-hoodoo aesthetics (Ishmael Reed, Tennessee, USA). And one may also bring Filipino filmmaker Kidlat Tahimik’s *Bathala na* filmmaking into the mix. These aesthetics share the trait of turning strategic weakness into tactical strength (Stam, 2003). For my project, I employ Joel David’s use of the Bakhtinian notion of the carnivalesque, cannibalism, and the aesthetics of hunger and garbage that characterized the resistant cinemas of colonized countries as my conceptual approach, to offer glimpses of the way that Third Cinema was appropriated in the Philippines.

How do filmmaking practices outside of the archipelagic spaces of the Philippines operate by way of the depiction of the homeland, and the plurality as well as the

performativity of identities? Does the change in the geopolitical spaces where these films are produced also intervene in the narrative of the nation? The 7,107 islands in the country and its 50 dialects inspection, and whether there exist various other constructions of the nation within the archipelagic space. Is ‘national cinema’ an appropriate conceptual tool to describe these differences?

IV. *Objectives of the Study*

Following on the research concerns that are highlighted above, the main objectives of the study include:

1. What are the various constructions of nation as gleaned from field interviews and textual readings of selected films, and how do these act, re-enact and contest the narratives of the nation?
2. What is the influence of Third Cinema in the cinematic articulations?
3. What cinematic spaces are created by diaspora?

Interviews were conducted in Metro Manila and New York. Filmmakers, film scholars and other film practitioners were enlisted in the project with a view to soliciting various insights and responses. The interviews aim to highlight the various versions of nationhood and nationalism that come from different ideologies and geopolitical spaces. The influence of Third Cinema also will be discussed, especially in its role in the creation of spaces that produce alternative views of the nation through transgressive film genres and practices (queer films, guerilla filmmaking aesthetics, digitalization of the film medium). A reexamination of Third Cinema’s evolving definitions that resist categorization will be analyzed in the Philippine context.

The quest for self-government during the American occupation of the country (1898-1946) has produced an ideological ideal that simultaneously celebrates nativism and

cosmopolitanism. The *Bagong Lipunan* (New Society) under the Marcos Regime used the rhetoric of national reconstruction and global competitiveness as a national imperative. This also led to the City of Man that Imelda Marcos conceptualized and developed to embody a clean, virtuous and beautiful city, as a bid to reclaim the Philippines as a site for modernity. According to its critics, the concretization of the City of Man was encouraged at the cost of flagrant human rights abuses committed against political dissidents. The national call for unity as enforced by the Marcoses became a state meta-narrative that criminalized the members of opposition groups. Various films show that Filipinos construct and are themselves constructed within the space of this official/state (meta)narrative. As tenants, ‘national minorities’, and *hampas lupa*⁴, the Filipinos’ surrender to the state’s ideological structures is clearly manifest in the euphemisms that the state used to describe them, and which they in turn use to describe themselves. As seen in films like *Sakada* (1976) and *Biyaya ng Lupa* (Blessings of the Land, 1959) this interpellation reproduces the narratives of the nation even if these marginalized groups understand their exclusion. This very exclusion also signals their inclusion and subsequent reconstruction (and fetishization) as the ‘poor’ whose condition becomes a national task.

Cinematic output flourished in the era of the Marcoses, even when the films were criticizing the government – from the audacious and socially critical urban films of Lino Brocka to the agrarian unrest in Philippine ruralities that informed the cinema of Behn Cervantes. These contestations of the prevailing and iron-clad narratives that the Marcoses actively pursued also resulted in the mobilization of a politically committed citizenry that took the cudgels Lino Brocka’s *Bayan Ko: Kapit sa Patalim* (My Country: Clutching the Edge of the Knife, 1985) first raised. In *bayan Ko: Kapit sa Patalim* (Figure 4), Brocka’s

⁴ Tagalog term for “wretched of the earth” or literally “strike ground”.

intention is to bring out into the open what Wimal Dissanayake calls “the false unity of the nation-state that is enforced through diverse strategies of exclusion and repression” (1994, ix). In the film, the homogenization of the nation-state and its legitimizing meta-narratives begin to be ruptured when the dispossessed character breaks loose from the shackles of capitalist oppression and decided to take matters into his own hands.

On the labor front, a different gender shift was seen in films that depict the country’s OFW. Most of the labor migrants who became the subject of films were women. While the common trope of labor migration has always identified overseas contract work as male, the iconic use of women as the new face of oppressed OFW has been fodder for filmmakers who dramatized the sad plight of abused nurses, domestic helpers, nannies and cultural entertainers from Japan to Milan. This shift pointed to the fact that, as of 2001, “70% of these



Figure 4. Lino Brocka, *Bayan Ko: Kapit sa Patalim*, 1985.

women serve as domestic workers for families in 162 countries” (Aguilar 2002, 4). In recent popular Filipino imaginaries, the profile of the domestic helper has functioned as the representative figure of overseas Filipino contract workers. Films like *The Flor Contemplacion Story* (1995) and *Milan* (2004) show these battered female faces putting a brave front in the face of adversity, and even death. Beyond the representations of migrant workers as victims, Katherine Gibson et al reported in one study that Filipina domestic helpers in Hong Kong invested actively in collectively owned cooperatives in the Philippines. These entrepreneurial ventures resulted not only in a shift from a slave class (domestic worker) to a communal class position, but also became the basis for the workers’ transformed agency that enabled them to develop resources to fight for their rights in Hong Kong (Gibson et al 2001). In Vancouver, working among the Filipina domestic helpers, Geraldine Pratt observes that Filipina nannies establish their rights to their employers as employees “rather than family member or supplicant-preimmigrants” (1999, 233). This transaction also reconfigures their relationship with their employer in terms of labor relations. The recent wave of films that were produced in the Philippines that tackle the issue of diaspora and labor migration tends to provide many voices and experiences of survival in First World spaces. Films like *Milan*, *Homecoming* (2003) and *Kailangan Kita* (I Need You, 2002) have all universalized the experience of a Filipino migrant returnee. However, Anne McClintock’s reminder in *Imperial Leather* warns us that:

One can safely say...that there is no narrative of the nation. Different groups (genders, classes, ethnicities, generations and so on) do not experience the myriad national formations in the same way. (McClintock 1995, 360)

The constitution of the various embodiments of ‘nations’ in cinema goes beyond the reading of how filmic codes interface with national symbols, to the capability to construct deeper ‘structures of feeling’. Imagining the nation through individual and people’s nationalism(s) as embodied in films is equally important.

V. Methods/Research Design

I employ a variety of methods to apprehend the various dimensions of my research, including interviews, focus group discussions and discourse analysis.

Interviews

As a diasporic Filipino based in North Carolina, I use the English and Filipino languages to approach my key informants for the various interviews. Fluent in three Filipino regional languages (Tagalog, Hiligaynon and Kinaray-a), I conducted and videotaped focus-group discussions and semi-structured interviews among key respondents in Metro-Manila and New York City. My personal and professional connections to people and institutions in the Philippines made access to interviews comparatively easy. Despite these connections, I still encountered some issues working with the more high-profile informants. My own personal connections with people who facilitated the interviews helped explain my credentials to these informants. The use of Taglish⁵ made the interviews easier, but some informants made an effort to speak English because the interview was being videotaped. Although I informed interviewees about the Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedures in data gathering involving human subjects prior to interviews, a significant majority did not ask questions about the IRB procedure.

⁵ Taglish is a hybrid dialect among Tagalog language speakers who use English words and phrases in a sentence.

Individual interviews range from 25 minutes to 90 minutes.⁶ A mixture of English, Tagalog, Hiligaynon and Taglish was used to conduct the interviews in both the Philippines and New York City. The interviews focus on three major categories that aim to encourage the respondents to provide their own insights and ideas on the given topics. These discussions illuminate the research questions by interrogating: (1) what makes national cinema ‘national’ in their own terms and language; (2) how identity markers like history, folklore, ethnicity, language, class and gender that are cinematically represented operate within the transnational-diasporic-national nexus; and (3) how these markers of identity shift, depending on the geographical context of exhibition venues. A total of 41 film practitioners – filmmakers, writers, cinematographers, film scholars, actors, archivists, and producers – were interviewed from July, 2006, to August, 2007. A complete list of the names and details of the interviews is included in the Appendix.

Discourse Analysis I & II

To address my question – which is to investigate how notions of “national cinema” are constructed using a textual reading of selected Philippine films and employing discourse analysis as a method to apprehend meanings embedded in the images, I will employ the methodology of interpreting visual imageries based on the work of Gillian Rose (following Foucault), specifically what she refers to as Discourse Analysis I (Text, Intertextuality, Context) and Discourse Analysis II (Institutions and Ways of Seeing) from her book *Visual Methodologies* (2001). What I will use for my study utilizes a Foucauldian framework that justifies the interpretation of the Filipino filmic images as it concerns cultural meaning and power relations, as well as the roles of institutions in the creation of these films. Discourse Analysis I is concerned with “the notion of discourse as articulated through various kinds of

⁶ Focus group discussions were also undertaken in three instances involving filmmakers, producers and writers.

visual images and verbal texts” (Rose 2001, 140). Employing Discourse Analysis I to my project, I will investigate films ranging from *Tatlong Taong Walang Diyos* (Three Godless Years, 1976) which critically examines the dominant anti-Japanese sentiments during the brief occupation of the Japanese in post-World War II Philippines, to *Bayan Ko: Kapit Sa Patalim* which offers a scathing critique of the Marcos regime in the years before the 1986 EDSA Revolution. This methodology allows me to explore how film as a visual form can produce different representations of place, space and landscape, and how they all relate to the national project of creating identities. Discourse Analysis II will be employed as a specific methodology to address the question that pertains to the role of institutions (state government, film companies, movie studios) in Filipino identity markers and why these are cinematically portrayed. This heuristic methodology will analyze the social contexts of selected Filipino films and how cinematic representations acquire meaning based on the social, cultural and geographic contexts. Discourse Analysis II is more concerned with issues of power, regimes of truth, institutions and technologies (Rose 2001).

Crucial questions employed in both discourse analyses include (1) the purpose of the cinematic image including the interrogation as to who produced the image of a particular film, his/her social identities (age, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class), who commissions the image that was produced as well as the time of its creation and its first exhibition; (2) the image aesthetics that will lead me to identify its symbolic elements, its relation to specific cultural genres and its critical reception; and (3) the intended audience and the filmmaker’s relationship with this audience. The research does not intend to produce a textual analysis of these films only but as a strategy to map the connections and interrelations between actors, institutions and the chosen image of representability.

VI. *The Structure of the Dissertation*

Chapter 1 has provided an introduction that details the purpose of the research, the statement of the problem and the objectives of the study.

Chapter 2 highlights the literature relevant to this study. The literature review will investigate the evolution of Film Geography or Cinematic Geography in the Academy, the influences it drew from other disciplines, and the scholarship that has been produced since its inception. It will likewise devote space to the issue of the reel-real binaries and the works of specific scholars. As an extension of Cinematic Geography, this chapter will also trace the evolution of the concepts of national cinema and the accented cinema that Hamid Naficy theorized. Hollywood, *auteur*-driven filmmaking and Third Cinema, among other interventions, will be discussed in relation to their significance to cinema in the Philippines. The focus in this chapter is Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities and how it reifies the sense of belongingness among nation-states in general, and the Philippines in particular. It will also highlight the debates and counter-arguments around this notion and explore how it can be limiting for particular nations like the Philippines, whose social fragmentations offer different and differing versions of official historical narratives as seen in the films they produce. A brief discussion of the methodologies used in the research concludes the chapter.

A short history of Philippine cinema will be mapped out in Chapter 3. The issue of periodization for the cinemas produced in and about the Philippines will be critiqued, and then I offer a re-reading. Chapter 3 also identifies specific Filipino films for textual analysis. Drawing on the works of Gillian Rose and Giuliana Bruno in the analysis of films'

intertextualities, this chapter will involve a critical evaluation of films that were produced in various periods and the various *auteur* who created key works representative of the era being investigated.

- a) Thomas Edison's short films (Actualities) and early representations of Filipinos, including the St. Louis World Fair of 1904 event and American empire-building
- b) Agustin Sotto and the periodization of Filipino films
- c) Kidlat Tahimik, Nick Deocampo, guerilla filmmaking and the rise of alternative cinema
- d) Lino Brocka and the socially-conscious films resistant to the Marcos regime
- e) Khavn de la Cruz and digital filmmaking
- f) Sari Dalena, Keith Sicat and diasporic/exilic filmmaking
- g) Jeffrey Jeturian and pito-pito films
- h) Cris Pablo and queer filmmaking
- i) Films produced and completed outside of Metro-Manila.

These films will be critically examined through the mythologies, folklore and ideas of nation that are embedded in the cinematic images. Discourse analysis will be used to analyze the content of these filmic texts as well as the social contexts in which they shape and acquire meaning.

Chapter 4 first provides a brief overview of the Philippines and the country's social fragmentation, experiences with colonialism, and the films that were produced to illustrate the normative ideologies that were pursued by specific administrations in the country, i.e. official/state cinema. This chapter also discusses the interviews conducted among film

practitioners in Metro Manila and New York and how views of the nation and its narratives mediate the filmic representation of places, spaces and identities. These discussions unpack the homogenizing singularity of the concept of national cinema, and are followed by my reworking of this notion.

Chapter 5 is devoted to themes of diaspora and Filipino diasporic experiences. In it I will discuss the OFW phenomenon and the contract labor migration that flourished during the time of President Aquino. The films of Sari Dalena, Keith Sicat, Neill de la Llana and Ian Gamazon will be the focus of these discussions, in order to illuminate unhomed or non-resident cinema. Insights from particular interviews will be utilized to enrich the discussion on the specific implications of creating films intended for an international and diasporic Filipino audience in international film festivals.

Finally, Chapter 6 contains my concluding remarks on specific contexts and geographies that contribute to the identified films' distinct Filipino slant. The textual analyses endeavor to re-animate the discussions of what 'national' means in specific historical periods in the Philippines. This will be complemented by the narratives from interviews and focus group discussions. The conclusion will revisit Benedict Anderson's imagined communities, critically examine its relevance, and suggest innovative ways of opening up newer avenues to interrogate its significance in relation to notions of national cinema in the Philippines.

The significance of my research does not end at the borders of the Philippines. The project aims to understand and raise awareness about the power of film to shape geographies. With the increasing national and legend-building power of media in the Philippines and throughout the world, a thorough understanding of such processes is critical to understanding

the contextual development and subsequent formation of a chosen image and its representability. The research hopes to imagine a cinema that contextualizes globalization, transnationalism, and the trans-Pacific national identity of the archipelago.

This research will contribute to a growing literature in cinematic geography that problematizes the notion of various national cinemas. Using Philippine cinema as a case study in the construction of national imaginaries, the study should encourage and stimulate discussion and formulate new(er) questions on the cultural geopolitics of the national as gleaned through cinematic lenses. The conversations that will be initiated through this study of Philippine cinematic imaginary will contribute to an understanding of various processes of articulation in relation to the local positioning of transnational identities.

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CHAPTER 2

GEOGRAPHIES, NATION, CINEMA

I. Introduction

This chapter outlines the growth of film geographies in the Academy and the critical approaches employed to engage not only the filmic images but also what happens beyond the frame. The early scholarship that emerged in the 1950's described the filmic images as real representations of people and places that highlight the inherent difference between nations and cultures. This fixation with 'reality' led to the further exploration of the 'reel-real' binaries of filmic representations that remained a site of debate among geographers interested in films from the 1980s to the present. Since the 1980s, various other methodological approaches and analytical tools were brought to the debate to understand how films transcend their initial conception as a mirror of reality. Geographers looked at films using the lenses of poststructuralism, feminism and psychoanalysis, to name only a few, to establish the connection between space, place and image in relation to cinema. Other scholars have investigated how the film as a finished product can be entangled in the process of its creation. The political economies involved in the film's distribution, circulation and consumption from various scalar dimensions provided opportunities to understand how and what networks are involved in the production of the moving image before and beyond its pro-filmic creation (Aitken 1994, Morley & Robins 1995, Aitken & Zonn 1994, Lukinbeal 2004).

This chapter shows how the study of national cinemas continues to intersect with film

geographies, especially when framed from the various permutations of the ‘nation’. It revisits the age-old question that interrogates how films address and construct ‘national subjects’ (Vitali & Willemsen 2006). I draw from specific works of Benedict Anderson, Partha Chatterjee and Sumita Chakravarty when it comes to the reification and contestation about the singularity of the concept of nation. The theories that link cinema and nation originated by Andrew Higson, Stephen Crofts and Christopher Faulkner will be put in conversation with the newer explorations by Valentina Vitali, Paul Willemsen and Phil Rosen. The literature of national cinema will map out a corpus of study that incorporates the various influences that stem not only from poststructuralism and feminism, but also those emerging from studies in diasporas and Third Cinema.

The intention of this chapter is to provide a context for the study of national cinema in relation to current debates about nation and ‘the national’. In the next two chapters, I evaluate the utility of these conceptualizations vis-à-vis the field interviews conducted in the Philippines and the United States, and the textual readings and analyses of specific Filipino films. The theories of national cinema contained in this chapter are employed in conjunction with the textual readings of selected Filipino films (Chapter 3) to contextualize the insights gleaned from the field interviews of Filipino film practitioners (Chapter 4). A brief description of the methodologies used in this research completes this chapter.

II. *The Evolution of Film Geographies in the Academy*

In the introduction to *Imagining Geographies of Film*, Stuart Aitken and Deborah Dixon announce that “the study of film within the discipline of geography has come of age” (2006, 326). Noting the many names of the subfield since its early emergence in the academy

– cinematic geography, film-and-geography, among others – Aitken and Dixon rationalize that this specialized field – “film geographies” – accommodates the newer theoretical debates that invigorated the discussions on the intersection of cinema, geography and the politics of representation. In spite of the relative youth of film geography, this does not suggest that film did not enter the analytical lexicon of geographers in the course of their profession. However, the active engagement with the apparatus of film coupled with the production of meaning and character of representation, both gave birth to newer spatial ontologies of film and filmic ontologies of space (Aitken & Dixon 2006).

The earliest academic output on film geographies can probably be traced to the 1950s. *The Geographical Magazine*, through the articles of Roger Manvell, encouraged the thinking that links cultural signifiers to inherently national registers (Manvell 1953, 1956a, 1956b). Hailing the documentaries “put to the service of geography” of Robert Flaherty and John Grierson, Manvell ascribes a correlative link between landscape and national character (Manvell 1956b). The impetus to write these essays highlighting the ‘national’ characteristics embedded in films clearly satisfies the agenda to provide a generalized typology, where specific geographic features and configurations correspond to specific cultural practices. The cinematic apparatus that captured these ‘reality’ shots becomes an authenticating machine that brands these images as national and rooted in the real. In the case of Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* (1922), Stuart Aitken notes that the emphasis on the subjects’ “simplicity and lack of sophistication” reveal more the filmmakers’ biases than the “represented subject matter” (Aitken 1994, 7-8). (Figure 5)

Since then, a number of film geographers have critically explored the intersection between the spaces of particular movies and the spaces of subject formation (Jancovich



Figure 5. Robert Flaherty, *Nanook of the North*, 1922.

2003). Watching a film is a complex experience, in which the space where the film is being seen – the cineplex for example – intersects with both the geographies represented in the film and the sense of space, place, nature and others, that the audience already has experienced. Equally important, although receiving scant attention among scholars working with this approach, are the ways in which specific audiences negotiate or refuse the positions offered to them by particular films.

Several studies by film scholars probe the issue of national imaginaries through myths. Thomas Elsaesser's influential work on German cinema mined the tensions within the Germanic cinematic texts as attempts to come to terms with the nation's past. Elsaesser

describes landscapes of the vernacular type to assert to inject a sense of German-ness into the whole cinematic dissection. This clearly articulates the notion that landscapes and the attendant bond that ties people to their land are congruent with the topophilic ideas first presented by Yi Fu-Tuan. Although Tuan mentioned that the idea of place can vary in scalar dimensions (e.g. from an armchair to the Earth), Elsaesser's focus on the everyday landscapes to emphasize that daily practice within a geographical scale (in this case, the German nation) serves as a reminder of a meta-German national identity (Tuan 1974, Elsaesser 1980). One interesting parallel is Edgar Reitz's 25-hour film called *Heimat*⁷, which was released on television in 1980 as a response to the American mini-series called *Holocaust* (1979). Most German scholars who voiced critiques of *Holocaust*'s certain erasures of German history were themselves confronted with critiques such as *Heimat*'s very little screen time devoted to the period of the Holocaust. Which film is a truer and more accurate account of Germany's history? This debate opens up issues of collective memory that privileges certain historical accounts over others. Speaking of Reitz's film, Elsaesser said: "It is true that in keeping with many films of the New German Cinema, *Heimat* is 'rich on incident, episode, atmosphere: for a German audience there must be literally hundreds of details and scores of incidents that feel absolutely right, that spark off personal memories and allow the audience to recognize themselves'." (1985, 113). Elsaesser did not, however, specify who this German audience was.

Textual readings of films have been fruitfully mined by film geographers, but there had been a shift in the emphasis of the study by the 1990s, as the role of institutions was deemed equally important in understanding the cultural politics operating within and beyond the screen images. More scholars began to investigate the functioning of cinema as a cultural

⁷ Roughly translated as 'homeland'.

practice, and how the industry significantly bears the imprints of the state's intervention. Zonn and Aitken's research on the depiction of Australia suggests that filmic images of landscapes are manipulated by the filmmakers and by the country itself (1994). The image presented is one imbued with ideology that promotes and perpetuates a symbolic landscape of the region. Zonn and Aitken investigated the perpetuation of the national symbolic landscape of Australia in *Storm Boy* (1976), where they theorized that the film portrays Australia as a symbolic rural landscape dominated by men (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Henri Safran, *Storm Boy*, 1976

Women are nearly always represented as Other and as sexual objects. The “Other”, in the film, embodied what the male protagonist rebelled against: norms, culture, and societal structures. Although Australian films in the 1990s such as *The Adventures of Priscilla: Queen of the Desert* and *Muriel's Wedding* (both released in 1994) became internationally

famous for depicting the lives of outsiders and fringe-culture dwellers, the unmistakable gait and man-in-the-wilderness figure of Michael in *Crocodile Dundee* (1986) commercially outperformed any other films produced in Australia, both domestically and internationally.

Christopher Lukinbeal has written about location-filming that focuses on the institutions that broker the final image that gets to be included in the finished film. He says: “while on-location filming helps authenticate the narrative, the filmmaker does not authentically re-present place, but rather presents a story” (Lukinbeal 1995, 72). To maintain authenticity, the place cannot be misrepresented beyond recognition. Still however, a place can be represented in any fashion the filmmaker sees fit, to accommodate the narrative. Tim Bunnell, in his research on Jon Amiel’s *Entrapment* (1999) reported that the Prime Minister of Malaysia approved the representation of Petronas Tower as symbolic of that nation’s aspirations for industrialization. Bunnell comments that the careful emplacement of the tall tower symbolizing Malaysia’s desire to be one of Asia’s tiger economies also erased other angles and perspectives of Petronas as rising from a riverine bio-region. Riverine communities as synonymous with underdevelopment do not fit well with a country’s image of rapid industrialization.

It is worth noting that Gillian Rose’s book *Visual Methodologies* offers methodologies that situate the visual in the social and cultural context and discusses the ‘regimes of truth’ that are portrayed in the cinematic fields of vision (Rose 2001). This work is particularly relevant and important to my present study because the highly visual aspect of film lends itself to an examination using Rose’s (following Foucault) employment of discourse analysis (i.e. Discourse Analysis I and II). Rose’s methodological tool can be further used in the study of national cinemas not only on the textual level (employing

Discourse Analysis I), but also at the level of the institutions (Discourse Analysis II) that play a crucial role both in the visual representabilities and also in the kinds of imaginings that privilege certain narratives over others. For example, Martin Roberts' analysis of three Indonesian films⁸ for screening in the IMAX theatre situated in the heritage park in Jakarta offers proof of Indonesia's effort to create a so-called New Order regime through the laborious transactions involved in the making and screening of these films. Roberts calls this "globalization of North American popular culture" and the "Javanization of global cultural norms" (2000). For example, in these American-produced films about Indonesia, the conventions of the 'destination' film genre are made to accommodate a range of references to practices associated with the tradition of shadow-puppet theatre. This indigenizing tendency within a more general process of globalization has the effect of providing Western audiences with touristic images of Indonesia, and Indonesian audiences with the elements constitutive of a national identity. Like Bunnell's study with Malaysia, Roberts points out that the 'Indonesian Indah' films provide the means, not only of interpreting local traditions as national traditions, but also of staging the Indonesian nation as a modernizing nation.

Aside from positioning certain films as fetishistic subjects, filmmakers frequently change the physical environment to fit an "aesthetic ideal" (Nicholson 1991, Lukinbeal 1995). Previously examined was the role that the filmmakers play in misrepresenting place. Filmmakers can also affect the environment filmed. For example, the physical environment may be changed to suit the filmmaker's perceptions. Such was the case with Ridley Scott's *Thelma and Louise* (1991) where it was reported that the film's last scene, filmed near Moab, Utah, required that the filmmakers destroy natural vegetation so that the landscape would look "more like the movie audience's mental image of the Southwest" (Lukinbeal, 1995, 74;

⁸ All of which were produced by MacGillivray Freeman Films, at the behest of Madame Tien Suharto.

Figure 7). The same is true with Danny Boyle's *The Beach* (2000), which was shot in Thailand. The film crew remodeled and flattened the beach using a tractor, thereby making the beach geologically unstable. The actual beach is not totally surrounded and enclosed by mountains, hiding it from the sea. In fact, there is a large gap between two gigantic boulders. The film's editors superimposed a fake mountain in post-production.

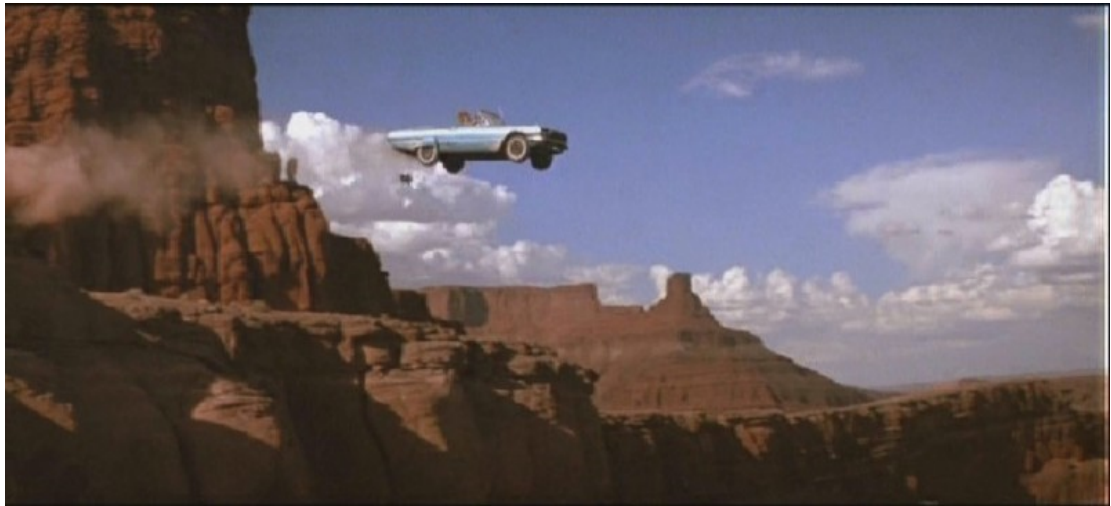


Figure 7. Ridley Scott, *Thelma & Louise*, 1991.

The mimetic ability of film to capture both form and movement (such as a geomorphological process) make this a favorite medium to “experience” places first hand. Aitken and Zonn were among the pioneers that critiqued the propensity to ascribe automatic authenticity to a filmed image. Aitken and Zonn theorized that films function like maps of meaning where the debates on the politics of representation on contemporary life can be negotiated and transacted. They argue that space and place are “inextricably integrated with social-cultural and political dynamics, and thus are indispensable to cinematic communication” (Aitken and Zonn 1994, 5). This anti-essentialist perspective advances the

belief that truth is a social construct, as opposed to a transcendental fact. Film no longer represents or mimics reality because the assumption that there is a single coherent reality waiting to be filmed no longer carries weight. Film geographers who have elaborated insights through critical spatial theories maintain that studies are not only about filmic representations of space, but are also about the material conditions of lived experience and everyday social practices. This explains why the specific visions of films serve as case studies to talk about issues that sustain or contest notions of difference, from race and gender to class and sexuality. Examples include Matthew Gandy's dissection of the heretical bodies of people with disease in Todd Haynes' *Safe* (1995), and Wolfgang Natter's rearticulation of whiteness as part of a democratic cultural politics in films such as *Matewan* (1987), *Avalon* (1990) and *Bulworth* (1998).

Recent works in film geographies strive to look at film production and film networks (Lukinbeal 2005, Dixon and Zonn 2004). Lukinbeal has investigated the cinematic cities in North America that theoretically map the intersection of real and representational, but also afford us a look at the industrial changes in the film industry. He cites the demise of the studio system and the rise in location shooting outside of Los Angeles as primary reasons why location shoots outside of the area where a film is supposed to take place were variously carried out in Toronto or Vancouver. Lukinbeal's research on runaway productions sustains the argument that the tensions between space and place extend to cinema, where image is an industry. Dixon and Zonn (2004) write about the emergent dialogue regarding film and technology as part of a broad, relational network comprised of diverse objects and forms of knowledge. The nature of this complex and multi-scale network is examined by providing an assessment of the interrelations that bind film financiers, producers, distributors, personnel,

viewers, and public institutions into a series of smaller and still-complex networks. All of these are deeply embedded within a varied array of economic, political and cultural settings. Dixon and Zonn use the early years of film, the Hollywood System, and the “global” cinema (both as collective and as specific national cinemas) as examples, to highlight how multi-scale networks operate in various settings.

III. The ‘Imagined’ National: Benedict Anderson’s Notion of Imagined Community, its Critical Reception and its Re-Imagination

Geographical knowledges are very often conveyed visually, and geographers in other social science disciplines, are beginning to pay attention to the specifically visual dynamics of this process. The recent surge in the study of national cinemas, coupled with the framing of various image cultures in terms of the numerous permutations of ‘nation’ (e.g. nationalism, multinationalism, national identity, internationalism and transnationalism) clearly suggests an intersection with the objects of analysis that geographers favor. Current attempts to articulate the national or nationalist dimensions of cinematic cultures also draw from the body of work from non-geographers like Benedict Anderson and Giuliana Bruno, who deploy geographically-informed methodologies to apprehend issues like the recuperation of the early Italian films of Elvira Notari as correlative to cinematic nation-building (Bruno, 1993).

The cinematic representation of national identities allows the various visions of the nation – its mythologies, memories, symbols and traditions – to be viewed through a critical lens to re-affirm or challenge the ‘official’ narratives. The act of showcasing these filmic images signifies and conveys meaningful understanding to the audience. This is even more

significant when one filmmaker realizes cinema's intentions in the depiction of certain national themes, and modes of expression that are evocative of a national identity.

This happens when a nation assumes that the portrayed cinematic signifiers are those that its citizens can identify with, or relate to. Some of the filmic output coming from other countries occasionally exaggerates the portrayals and uses national identity as a token carrying card to describe its distinctiveness and difference from others. Andrew Higson warns that "a national cinema ... asserts its difference from other national cinemas . . . [and] proclaims its sense of otherness" (Higson 2000, 67). The 'national identity' marker is used as a type of branding whenever a discussion of distinct national cinemas arises.

The study of national cinemas indicates the need to frame various image cultures in terms of new nationalisms. Benedict Anderson's notion of imagined community defines a nation as an 'imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign' (1983, 6). A nation is first imagined, and then bounded in a geographical space. He examines the creation and global spread of the 'imagined communities' of nationality and explores the processes that created these communities. Anderson has likewise examined how the national history has been told and recounted in postcolonial states through census, museum, and map – what he calls the "three institutions of power" (Anderson 1983, 164-165). He credits the cultural elite, language, "print capitalism" and educational systems as the driving force that created a network of familiarity that then facilitated a sense of community among people who may never meet in face-to-face village interaction. He imagines two people, situated in two different regions, as reading the same newspaper and being nationally constituted by their common link to their nation, without actual real-time face-to-face interaction. Although Anderson never addressed or referred to film and the moving image in

his theorization, *Imagined Communities* has provided theoretical inspiration for film scholars to look at the concept's applicability to national identity issues in cinema. The print media that Anderson discussed was appropriated in cinema studies as a theoretical point, to imagine a nation. The border-crossing of cinemas has allowed a nationally-produced film to be watched by fellow compatriots based abroad, thereby broadening the base of the community beyond the country where the film hails from.

Anderson's 'imagined community' as a concept states that a nation is socially constructed and ultimately imagined by the people who perceive themselves to be part of that group. Anderson falls in the 'historicist' or 'modernist' school of nationalism along with Ernest Gellner and Eric Hobsbawm, in that he posits that nations and nationalism are products of modernity and have been created as cultural means to political and economic ends. Before nationalism, there existed the 'great religiously imagined communities' such as Christendom, based on shared languages such as Latin. With the rise of exploration, Europeans came to realize the insularity of their conceptions of existence. Furthermore, the shared language of Latin was beginning to decline, and was replaced by the vernacular. Anderson's modernist notion of imagined communities stands in opposition to the belief of the 'primordialist' school of nationalism, the belief that nations, if not nationalism, have existed since early human history. Imagined communities can be seen as a form of social constructivism parallel to Edward Said's concept of imagined geographies.⁹

⁹ According to Said: "Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography" (1993, 7). The geographical orientation and distribution of people who are rooted in particular nation-states and imagined geographies, perpetuate the notion not only of how the world is perceived according to Western discourse, but how people's identities are viewed and tied to their specific geographical origins.

While there is general agreement with Anderson's theory of the nation as an imagined community of people, there is also the issue of hegemony within the frames that produced such a community. For instance, is there resistance to the signs and significations that present a divergent dynamics to, for example, Filipino nation-building? This resistance can be antithetical to the official nation that the current administration wants to build and project to the international community. I am referring not only to those with ideologically different conceptions of a Filipino nation, but also the non-Tagalog speakers in the Philippines who find affinity to the more localized variations of the hegemonic nation. In response to the multiplicity of Indian cultures within India, Indian subaltern historian Partha Chatterjee asked in 1993, "Whose imagined community?" Chatterjee challenges these Andersonian assertions by emphasizing that the nation's "fragments" are just as important, especially in highlighting differences within a nation. While unity through an imagined community is certainly important, with the introduction of "fragments" as a conceptual tool to understand nationalism, a sense of 'nation' is also achieved. Chatterjee says that Anderson "treats the phenomenon as part of the universal history of the modern world obscuring other nationalisms and ways of constructing community" (1993, 5). Similarly, Anderson's references to Asian experiences and literatures are reduced to a backdrop, because these are still integrated into the European history of the national imaginary, reducing the Asian "moments" to nodes by which to reiterate the constructedness of the nation. Anderson's notion of imagination as a "steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity" opens up a universalized scenario that incorporates all other imaginations within its trajectory. As Chatterjee notes, "if nationalisms in the rest of the world have chosen their imagined

community from certain ‘modular forms’ were already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine?” (1993, 5).

Andrew Higson likewise questions the fixed boundaries that govern the concept of ‘imagined community’. He asserts that Anderson’s concept neglects the “contingency or instability of the national” (2000, 66). Geographical boundaries are leaky rather than immutable or fixed, as evidenced by various and considerable movements that occur in nation-states that are authoritarian. The movements caused by diaspora and the possible homogeneity that is found between the homeland and the new home-spaces of the diasporic communities demonstrate this ‘contingency’ to the nation-ness with the fully formed identity that Anderson is proposing.

IV. Cosmetic Nationalism: Investigating the ‘Nation’ in National Cinema

The late 1980s saw the emergence of a wide range of critical studies on national cinemas, and investigative work interrogating the concept of national cinema itself. Questions that were raised probed the crucial role played by the nation-states in the production and reception of cinematic works, as well as the extent to which these cinematic works contribute to the kinds of imaginings that sustain nation-states.

Several film scholars since the 1980s have problematized the conceptualization of national cinemas using various lenses. Stephen Crofts contends that national cinemas are best analyzed in terms of “production, audience, discourse, textuality, national-cultural specificity, cultural specificity of genres and nation-state cinema movements, the role of the state and the global range of nation state cinemas” (1998, 387-389). According to Crofts, these categories draw attention to the nation-specific styles and conventions that are favored

and preferred to encourage the formation of cinematic genres, such as musical, Western, horror, romance and others. A few national cinema theorists like Higson, Faulkner, Vincendeau and Dyer have reconceptualized a national cinema that goes beyond the styles and conventions and the ways in which specific national contexts create specific genres. Higson (1989) writes that the “histories of national cinema can only be understood as histories of crisis and conflict, of resistance and negotiation”. Following Higson, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the conception of national cinema as a seamless totality that somehow accurately expresses, describes and itemizes the salient concerns and features of a given national culture. That this line of argument involves certain political commitments is underscored by Christopher Faulkner, who claims that making an attempt “to construct the history of a nation or national cinema as coherent, unified, homogeneous, is to lend support to its erasure of difference and to the maintenance of a centrist and neo-conservative cultural politics” (Faulkner 1994). Understood this way, national cinema necessarily becomes a site of conflict. It appears that films do not simply express national culture in its stable features but are themselves the focus of debates about a nation’s history, memory, tradition and heritage.

In her study of the lost and forgotten films of Italy’s first woman director Elvira Notari, Giuliana Bruno (1993) proposes an approach to national identity through difference, cognizant of the different cinematic productions in her country that are based on local, regional, and popular practices. This theorization finds an important example in the Philippines because of the propensity of the identified and ‘official’ national cinema to repress or silence the filmic cultures of other regions within the nation. The continued suppression of film cultures outside of Manila made it challenging and difficult to create

alternative Filipino pictures.¹⁰ Artistically-oriented films (which are usually produced for international markets rather than for the domestic audience) are given more coverage and importance than popular and populist films. Ginette Vincendeau and Richard Dyer (1992) both claim that there is a tendency to overlook a nation's popular cinematic cultures and to favor artistic films geared to an international audience, films which were created with an eye toward garnering a film festival prize. Popular films are denigrated and dismissed as 'pandering to popular tastes' and unworthy of academic study or artistic recuperation. Higson's and Faulkner's similar ideas on national cinemas as fruitfully understood in terms of conflict can certainly engage in conversation with the humanistic geographers who emerged in the 1980s and were encouraged by socialist-humanist geographies. The broadening of Marxist geography has led to the view that people make history (and geography) but not just as they please, and not under conditions of their own choosing (Duncan & Ley 1982). Ginette Vincendeau and Richard Dyer's investigations reveal that some films are elided and strategically repressed by their own national institutions simply because the narratives these films depict are not the favored ones. A case in point were Filipino filmmaker Lino Brocka's socio-realist films, which began to question the film projects instituted by the Marcoses during the late dictator's regime. Instead of supporting or shoring up Imelda Marcos' City of Man, Brocka actively resisted what he terms 'internal colonialism' by the Marcoses as he engaged in film projects aimed at generating popular-democratic resistance. As a counter-narrative to Imelda Marcos' City of Man (which promotes a "beautiful city" ideal), Brocka portrayed Manila's unacknowledged urban underbelly in such films as *Maynila, Sa Mga Kuko ng Liwanag* (Manila in the Claws of

¹⁰ Often mockingly called 'Imperial Manila' by people hailing from other Philippine cities.

Neon, 1976), *Jaguar* (1980)¹¹ and *Bayan Ko: Kapit sa Patalim* (Figure 8). He continued to create similar films to provide counter-national narratives even after the Marcoses fled the country in 1986 after the people's revolt. Films like *Orapronobis* (1989) and *Gumapang Ka Sa Lusak* (A Dirty Affair, 1990) questioned the politically centrist government of President Corazon Aquino which followed Marcos. Films provide structure and agency for citizens to reclaim and recover a narrative that is suppressed by institutions like the government.

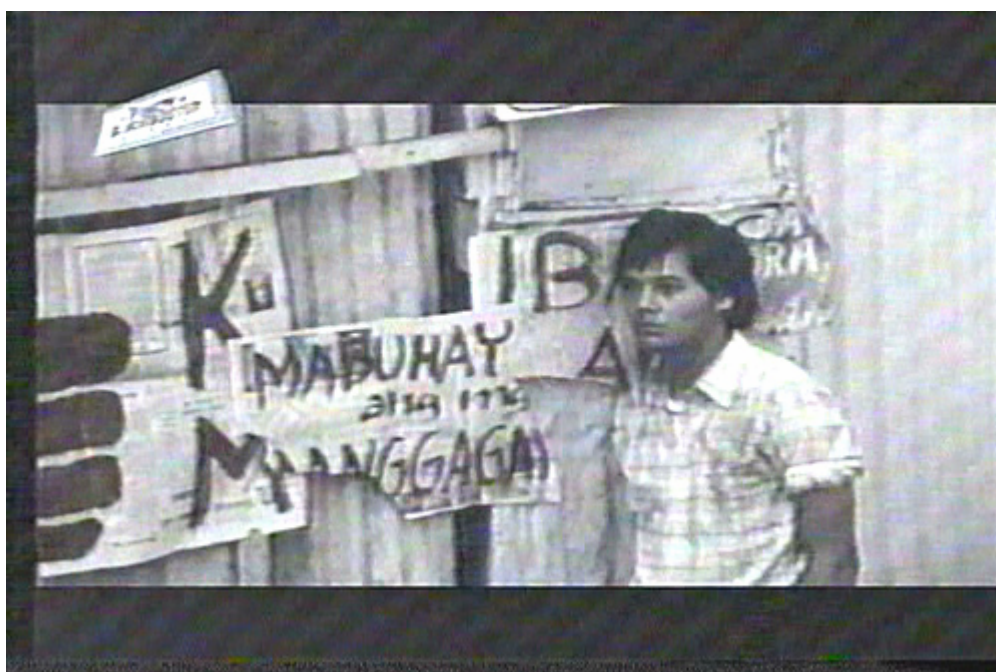


Figure 8. Lino Brocka, *Maynila, Sa Mga Kuko ng Liwanag*, 1976

If the popular versus artistic films in the homeland engage in a tug of war for the people's attention and claim for national narrative, diasporic film cultures borne out of Filipino communities abroad also vie for the title of national cinema. If we are to employ Anderson's concept of imagined communities to explain national cinemas, national identity

¹¹ Jaguar is a colloquial term for a security guard. The term 'jaguar' is a play on words on the local name of a security guard, i.e. *guardia*.

is therefore not hinged on the geopolitical space of the nation. Diasporic communities were uprooted from the homeland but still “[s]hare a common sense of belonging, despite – or even because of – their transnational dispersal. On the one hand, community, on the other, diaspora” (Higson 1989, 64). Hamid Naficy calls filmmakers who construct versions of nationhood and nationalism from another geopolitical space the “accented filmmakers”. These accented filmmakers include exilic and diasporic directors who continually represent a lost homeland in their films, as a way of recapturing an absent national sensibility and redrawing a national history.

Sumita Chakravarty’s study of Indian popular cinema encourages a rethinking and updating of imagined community (Chakravarty 2000). She argues that the cinemas of the world are not only differentiated on the basis of national origin, but the film medium may be said to approximate most closely what Eric Hobsbawm identified as the tension contained within nationalism itself, namely, the cultural singularity evoked by the concept (the ‘nation’ as a collectivity linked by ties of common history, place of origin and language) and the reality of nation/nation-states in the contemporary world as inevitably diverse and plural (Chakravarty 2000, Hobsbawm 1990). The question then arises, In what precise ways is popular cinema an expression of a nation-group? On the one hand, commercial cinema’s mass appeal provides precisely a sense of “the view from below” (Hobsbawm 1990), a glimpse of the fears, hopes and aspirations of ordinary people that is behind many of our everyday assumptions of the natural fit between cinema and nation. On the other hand, it would seem that what makes many mainstream cinemas ‘national’ is their broad identification with official versions of national priorities, and maintaining nation-state unity is one major priority (Chakravarty 2000). Despite the widespread recourse to ‘imagined

community' in the literature on national cinemas, Chakravarty claims that it is arguable whether the medium of film and the institution of narrative cinema in its mainstream form may actually be resistant to nationalist imaginings, given that 'the nation' is always mediated by its fragments, that is, by individuals whose particularities of dress, speech and lifestyle locate them within specific regional, social and cultural configurations.

In the Philippines with its 89 million people spread across the archipelago's more than 7,100 islands, when cinematic folk heroes like Nardong Putik¹² appear, they are supposed to embody the majority community (Gealogo 2000). By using Chakravarty's argument, his cinematic presence makes visible all others who were not represented in the national mainstream cinema. Philippine history reveals that Jose Rizal's banned novels in the 1890s – *Noli Me Tangere* (1887) and *El Filibusterismo* (1891) – satirized Spanish clerics and the opportunism, greed and misrule of the country. An impoverished artisan, Andres Bonifacio is inspired by Rizal's national sentiments and forms a secret revolutionary society with a Tagalog name – Katipunan – to appeal to the masses he wants to mobilize. In August of 1896, Bonifacio launched an ill-timed insurrection in Manila, and the movement rapidly spread to the surrounding provinces. The success of the insurrection and the eventual establishment of the Republic of the Philippines led to popular film dramatizations and subsequent adaptations of the struggle that still packs filmgoers into movie houses around the country. Recent films like Tikoy Aguiluz's *Rizal sa Dapitan* (Rizal in Dapitan, 1997) and Marilou Diaz Abaya's *Jose Rizal* (1998) were blockbusters that encouraged other Filipino filmmakers to portray other personalities and events that showcased the struggle against

¹² Nardong Putik, literally means Muddy Nardo, is a character based on the famous bandit from Cavite who became a hero among the peasantry after World War II. Ramon Revilla who portrayed Nardong Putik in the film *Nardong Putik: Kilabot ng Cavite (Terror of Cavite, 1972)* used the slogan of his famous cinematic alter-ego to win the senatorial race.

foreign domination. Notable recent films in this genre include Raymond Red's *Sakay* (1993) and *Bayani* (Hero, 1992), which depict the early struggles of Filipino patriots.

The literature on national cinema that Higson, Crofts and Faulkner helped theorize, has aided and mapped out the ways in which the sphere of the national intersects with the filmic images the country produces. However, the question of 'the national' remains leaky and blurry in light of the re-definition of nations and nation-states. Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemsen (2006) raise the issue of how films "address and construct 'national subjects'" when the concept of nation is unstable and not fully delineated (Vitali & Willemsen 2006, 7). They argue that films which are understood as products of industrial production should not 'reflect' as much as 'stage' the historical conditions that constitute 'the national' and 'mediate' the "socio-economic dynamics that shape cinematic production" (2006, 8). Phil Rosen, on the other hand, addresses the question of "national specificity" in films; a 'nationality' should be an "inter-textual symptom" that allows for a diversity of voices that are part and parcel of the continuing construction of national subjectivities. The fluidity of trajectories that accommodate differing accents and identities within the Philippines represents a way of looking at the films that are produced as hybrid and plural, and yet still Filipino in their cinematic gesture. The cinema that emerges is 'national' as it is simultaneously local and transnational.

Finally, on the issue of reading a film as transnational, Janet Harbord proposes a new paradigm for the study of national cinema that uses Marc Augé's idea of a non-place (Harbord 2007, Augé 1992/1995). Harbord (following Augé) claims that supermodernity causes an excess of temporal and spatial referents in our contemporary world. She claims that non-places disrupt the binarism that accompanies a film's categorization as either foreign or

local.¹³ She says: “Filmic space defies an originary cultural space ... because the ‘here’ of the film is mediated by the ‘elsewhere’ through a range of cultural references” (2007, 11). Non-places in films distract the viewers, to ascribe a distinctive character to a ‘foreign’ film that, in turn, produces a heightened awareness that there is a distinctive national cinema in every country.

V. *Third Cinema: Guerilla Filmmaking or Lenses for Third Worldism?*

Third Cinema offers a fertile ground for the investigation of resistant cinemas that occur in colonized countries, and these countries’ desire for national liberation. Inspired by Cinema Novo in Brazil and the Cuban Revolution, Third Cinema germinated in Latin America in the 1960s. Cinema, among its practitioners and faithful followers, is seen as a radical site for political practice, which can reveal embedded class and political antagonisms. The film should be used as a revolutionary tool to advance the cause of Third World nations for world-wide liberation. The manifestos that were produced during the early conceptions of Third Cinema advocated for an alternative, independent, anti-imperialist Cinema that is free from commercialism and *auteur*-driven self-expression.

The writings of Argentine filmmakers Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas entitled *Towards a Third Cinema* (1971) and that of Ethiopian filmmaker and scholar Teshome Gabriel’s *Towards a Critical Theory of Third World Films* (1994) interestingly parallel the radical geography that grew in the 1970s and coalesced around the belief in the power of Marxian analysis. While radical geography favored the theoretical structure of Marxism in a move to create a radical science “which seeks not only to explain what is happening but also to prescribe revolutionary change” (Thrift & Peet, 1977), Third Cinema practitioners

¹³ Harbord claims that non-places in films are universalized and functional spaces like ATM machines, international hotels and airports, while places are those that are historic signifiers of local identities.

privilege Frantz Fanon and the third phase he advocated in regaining a national culture in post-colonial nations (i.e. the combative phase). Both movements complement each other in their refusal to submit to the domination of positivism and cultural imperialism. But where the cultural turn in geography is promoting new paths to understanding and shares the radical tradition of questioning how society is structured and organized, trends in activist filmmaking have de-centered the idea of a hegemonic 'oppressed collective'. It has since looked at the other margins and encouraged other ways of filmmaking (digital, new media) and other voices (diasporic, queer, etc.) to come to the forefront.

Where Solanas and Getino establish that Third Cinema is 'guerilla cinema' whose purpose is to agitate, instigate, defy and combat, Gabriel, on the other hand, seeks to establish a "methodological device for a critical inquiry into Third World films" (1989/1994, 340). Gabriel is not advocating revolution, unlike the two Argentine filmmakers, instead he insists on the triad of text, reception and production to apply to Third Cinema to illuminate the differences among people living in the Third World. What is significant about his discussion is the manner in which he introduces and argues for the influence of social factors in the critical approach to films from both the First and Third Worlds. Gabriel equates Third Cinema with genuine Third World cinema expressive of Third World needs. Whether or not China, India or South Korea can meaningfully be regarded as Third World areas, Gabriel argues that it is equally difficult to find a unifying aesthetic for non-Euro-American cinemas.

Julianne Burton's 1985 essay in the British film journal *Screen* is considered the first notable critique of Gabriel's writings that outlined Third Cinema. Burton interrogates the "unprecedented elaboration of film theory and critical methodology in the developed sector" (1985, 2) that investigates the cinematic statements of Third World countries which are

forging a sense of national identity and cultural autonomy. She also ascribes the refusal of Third Cinema practitioners to subject their films to criticism as a “defensive attitude” and correlates that to the “development of critical underdevelopment in many Third World sectors” (1985, 4). She claims that, despite Gabriel’s comprehensive analysis of “Third World Cinema as a tricontinental phenomenon” (1985, 6), it distorts and perpetuates a “mythical vision of an internally consistent cultural practice” (1985, 6) by insisting that neither filmmakers nor theorists in the Third World enjoy the luxury of reflection and theoretical elaboration. Burton also questions the homogenization of Third World texts and finds it problematic the “desire to return to a state of pre-colonial innocence and integrity, to strip off alien layers until the pure essence of national culture reveals itself” (1985, 10).

The argument that drew the strongest criticism from other scholars is Burton’s claim that “what ‘First World’ critical theory brings to Third World film practices is, above all, the revelation of mediation as essential to any act of communication” (1985, 19) that puts primacy on the role of the film critic (meta-mediation). Gabriel, aided by some scholars and specialists, severely chastised Burton for her troubling insistence that it is not only for Western audiences that these roles were to be played but for the people of the Third World as well. Gabriel refutes the implication that mainstream critical theory should either assimilate or be accounted for by others, since its superiority or importance is in direct proportion to the position of power from which it emanates. Despite Burton’s withdrawal from the field of contest, Burton’s critique opens up new ways of looking at Third Cinema, and its future utility in cinema studies as a discursive tool for analysis.

VI. *Philippine Third Cinema?*

Third Cinema's emphasis on the rootedness of the film in national cultures unsurprisingly has struck a chord in the postcolonial state of the Philippines. Most of the films that were completed locally did not initially produce the same size audience that attends Hollywood films that are screened in the country. Using Third Cinema's discourse to the cinematic articulation, Brazil's Cinema Novo¹⁴ reveals interesting resonances with the Philippines. Brazilian filmmaker and Cinema Novo founder Glauber Rocha has said: "The fact that Cinema Novo is well received abroad in no way justifies the difficulty it has getting accepted in Brazil", although he problematically maintained that "the fundamental problem . . . lies with the public" (Rocha 1979a, 25).

Filipino filmmakers continue to borrow from Third Cinema's alternative aesthetic traditions. Gerald MacDonald's study of Kidlat Tahimik's *Mababangong Bangungot* (Perfumed Nightmare, 1976) positions the film and Tahimik's filmmaking praxis as indicative of a Philippine Third Cinema (Figure 9). Citing the thematics of *Perfumed*



Figure 9. Kidlat Tahimik, *Perfumed Nightmare*, 1976

¹⁴ Cinema Novo came into prominence in the late 1960s among Latin American countries which were against neocolonialism and cultural imperialism.

Nightmare's rejection of Western development and progress, MacDonald sketches a condition of possibility where the Philippines re-appropriate Western technologies in the form of rockets and giant skyscrapers into jeepneys and bamboos. What is elided in the analysis of *Perfumed Nightmare* is the guerilla filmmaking aspect which incorporates grassroots-level production in its praxis.

As outlined by Joel David (1998), three Third Cinema traditions may be held for closer inspection in the Philippine context: the carnivalesque, cannibalism and Rocha's aesthetic of hunger. Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque as well as the modernist cannibalistic or anthropophagic art that "have in common the notion of turning tactical weakness into strategic strength" are especially resonant with current Filipino filmmaking practices (1984, 34).

The carnivalesque, particularly in its emphasis on bodily functions, can be seen as challenging the overriding Vatican-determined Catholic morality in the Philippines. The carnivalesque as exemplified in current Filipino queer films celebrates the creation of new voices from conventional and traditional rules and restrictions. Nick Deocampo's short film *Oliver* (1983), which concerns a gay transvestite who earns a living by performing as a human-spider in gay clubs, along with Lino Brocka's *Macho Dancer* (1983) paved the way for younger contemporary filmmakers like Crisaldo Pablo, Brillante Mendoza and Will Fredo to stake their claims in creating queerscapes in cinema that disrupt the strict codes of heteronormativity in a predominantly Catholic country. The titular character in *Oliver* uses his orifice to create large and artificial spider-webs in his performances. The film speaks to the carnival's celebration of the grotesque that "abolishes hierarchies, levels social classes,

and creates another life” (Stam 1989, 86). Pablo’s series of queer films situated in Metropolitan Manila were all filmed using digital cameras and utilized Kidlat Tahimik’s aesthetics of assembling found footage to create an alternative narrative of contemporary Filipinos in an urban metropolis. Alternative sexuality and the practice of transvestitism as a release from the burden of socially imposed sex roles are hallmarks of the carnivalesque (Bakhtin 1984). Pablo’s films *Duda* (Doubt, 2003), *Bilog* (Circle, 2005), and *Bathhouse* (2005) have all been released in the United States through Water Bearer Films (Figure 10).

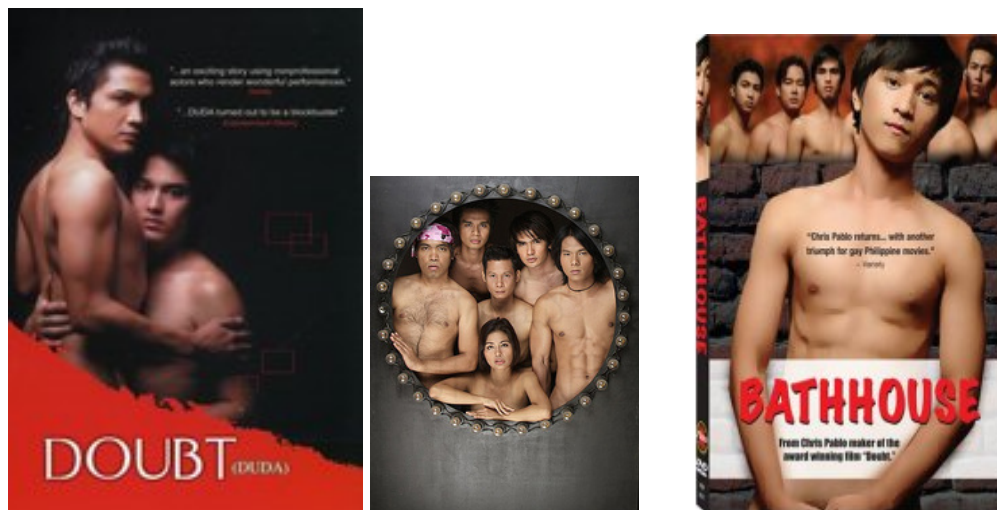


Figure 10. Crisaldo Pablo, *Duda*, (2003) *Bilog* (2005) and *Bathhouse* (2005)

On the other hand, cannibalism as a conceptual approach forces the reconsideration of what has been termed “originality as vengeance” wherein, according to Robert Stam and Ismail Norberto Xavier (1990), cultural resistance to the effects of Western colonialism was “(mis)construed in terms of the purist pursuit of themes, treatments, and stylistics in art and literature that were unimplicated by any form of precedent, especially from the West” (1990, 281). The notion of eliminating the foreign and recuperating the national is particularly

tricky, but Kidlat Tahimik's unfinished film project of 28 years about the slave of Magellan, will have him utilize film sequences from Hollywood films to power his film and create a new narrative from something foreign.¹⁵

Rocha's aesthetics of hunger explains its conception: "They don't know where this hunger comes from. We know – we who make these sad and ugly films, these desperate films where reason doesn't always possess the loudest voice, that hunger will not be cured by the planning of the cabinet [i.e. government] and that the strips of technicolor will not hide but amplify its tumors. That said, only a culture of hunger, looking at its own structure, can rise above itself, qualitatively speaking: it's the noblest manifestation of cultural hunger and violence." These words that came from his seminal "Aesthetics of Hunger" manifesto find an affinity with struggling Filipino filmmakers, who derisively dismiss the output created by mainstream producers and directors who they feel kowtow to the powers-that-be and the *status quo*. The rise of a digital filmmaking that utilizes cheaper film stocks, coupled with a renewed ferocity among current filmmakers to tackle themes considered bizarre and grotesque by Philippine society, elucidates the growing ranks of filmmakers who typify an aesthetic of hunger that Rocha didactically talked about in the 1960s.

No doubt such Third Cinema-inspired projects in the Philippines will engender their own resistance, possibly even from the sectors that staked claims to radicalism during their time, just as the "cinema of garbage" practitioners were dismissed by the Cinema Novo filmmakers after the former viewed the latter as a new establishment force (Xavier 1982, 35-

¹⁵ In an interview with Kidlat Tahimik in 2006, he remarked that his filmmaking philosophy of found objects still guide him since *Perfumed Nightmare* in 1976: "As for found objects, I find new sequences to create every time and [the narrative] keeps getting bigger and bigger. I call myself a desperate filmmaker so I will use a stone here, a wooden twig there, and show these objects as props. As for my ocean scenes, I might get the most recognizable film scenes from Hollywood. I'll take from *Amistad* and *Pirates of the Caribbean* and I'll store them for use later. These are just fillers anyway. I am more interested in the characterization of the slave and his relationship to the master. And I am interested in raising the questions as to who was the master and who was the slave."

36). What remains to be seen is how current Filipino cinema, which has proved to be vital in discourses on the different regimes, will still be able to find a role in the future of Philippine culture.

VII. *Conclusion*

The concept of the nation, whether perceived as having a physical materiality or imagined without face-to-face interactions, always has a geographic dimension. Film geography as a field of specialization not only adopted the theories of spatiality but has also incorporated a range of scholarships, from social theory to humanistic arts, to provide theoretical inspiration in its quest to understand the cultural and social politics of cinema in its textual and contextual forms. With various studies documenting the collapse of nation-states and their apparent recuperation and transformation into other entities, film geography has investigated the links, connections, ruptures and disjunctions of these complex networks. The study of national cinema has enriched the canonical literatures of film geography by its engagement in the filmic texts and cinematic mode of production of geographical territories as well as interstitial spaces. The cinematic configurations of official/statist national narratives, as well as the counter-narratives that exist side-by-side, question differing notions of nations whether these are imagined or contested. The contestations against a national meta-narrative also paved the way for the examination of Third Cinema and its influence in developing countries as well as in developed economies. The articulation of the radical as a means to destabilize the hegemonic effects of dominant ideologies both enriches and broadens film geography's scope. Textual readings of filmic images in relation to national myths engendered various methodological tools to give voice to multi-scalar interpretations.

The role of institutions in mediating the final images in cinematic outputs as well as the global paths of mobility of a film's distribution and circulation have geographic resonance, not only in a cartographic sense but also in the mapping of emotional geographies.

Using the Philippines as a case study to investigate the constitution of a national cinema has particular geographic significance. The archipelago's unique geographical and geopolitical locations in the Asia-Pacific region produced various identities within its territorial enclosures as well as outside its boundaries. The mobilities and diasporic movements that occurred in recent years also contribute to an interesting cinematic culture that simultaneously looks back at the homeland and the new spaces of home. It is also interesting to study the archipelago's various encounters with colonialism and repressive governments and how these experiences manifest themselves in the overall cinematic milieu. The research is premised on the idea that Filipino cinemas mirror the multiplicity of voices within the country's frames and beyond its territorial boundaries.

In the next chapter, I investigate a wealth of materials to initiate conversations dealing with various stories that view the nation through cinema. For example, while there is agreement on the hegemony of Metro Manila as the site of a vibrant filmmaking practice in the country, not much has been written about the film cultures lying outside of Luzon's famous metropolis. The two major island groupings of the Philippines, namely Visayas and Mindanao, are regions with an unmapped cinematic terrain because very few films are shot in these areas owing to insurgency, harsh environments, linguistic differences with Tagalog, and the refusal of Tagalog-speaking producers and their film outfits to venture outside of Metro Manila for film locations. Feature-length narrative films have been shot in those regions in the past, however, regional cultures and dialects were largely unrepresented on

screen. A discussion on the non-Tagalog cinema outside of Metro Manila that will feature the films of J.P. Carpio and Elvert Bañares from the Visayas, and film groups in Mindanao will follow in Chapter 4.

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CHAPTER 3

THE PHILIPPINES IN CELLULOID SPACE, 1898-1986

I. Introduction

The geography of the Philippines is expansive. With 7,107 islands spread out within the archipelago's 116 sq. miles territorial domain, it is the twelfth most populous country in the world, with 89 million people as of 2006. Typically regionalized among nations in Southeast Asia, the archipelagic nature of the Philippines allows it to be lumped into other categories such as 'the Far East', 'Pacific Rim' and 'Asia-Pacific'. Nevertheless, the category of 'Filipino' has been used especially when cultural products like films are discussed and given a national signifier.

There are several issues that arise when Philippine – or Filipino – cinema is articulated. In order to understand the dimensions of Philippine national cinema, one has to relate it to and anchor it in the wider cultural discourse shaping the lives of the people. Questions of history, cultural formation, tradition, social change, and the ideologies of nationhood figure prominently in this endeavor. The ways in which cinema inserts itself into the existing and interlocking cultural practices and the ways in which it produces the idea of nationhood become extremely important in this regard.

The various stories that view the nation provide the raw material for the textual analyses of selected Filipino films. These films reflect the country's encounter with various colonialisms that created different political and administrative designations and

nomenclatures (e.g. from commonwealth to republic). This chapter evaluates the dominant themes in films that emerged during particular periods of the country, and the counter-stories that were ignored or not given importance by film scholars. National mythologies, folklore and ideas of nationhood that are embedded in the cinematic images of the films will be dissected and re-evaluated. Discourse analysis will be employed to analyze the content of these filmic texts, as well as the social contexts in which they take shape and acquire meaning.

In this chapter and the succeeding two chapters, I will make the case that the Philippine archipelagic configuration, regional factionalism and experiences with colonialism, coupled with overseas contract labor migration in recent years and the growing number of diasporic communities abroad, all abetted the plurality of identities of its peoples. I contend that despite the social and cultural fragmentation among Filipinos brought about by the arbitrary geographical regionalization instituted by the late President Marcos,¹⁶ the common trope of Filipino films attempts to transcend the different geographic and ethnic origins of its peoples by invoking ‘Filipino’ as the unitary concept of ethnic solidarity. From *Ganito Kami Noon Paano Kayo Ngayon* (This Was How We Were, What Happens To You Now) in 1976 to *The Flor Contemplacion Story* in 1995, popular films assume that the ‘Filipino’ signifier trumps all ethnic and cultural differences by creating a space where a common cultural heritage binds Filipinos across various islands. In the case of *The Flor Contemplacion Story*, which was based on a true story of a Filipino domestic helper who was hanged in Singapore, the country’s wounded national pride was transformed into random acts

¹⁶ Regions first came into existence in September 24, 1972, when the provinces of the Philippines were organized into 11 regions by Presidential Decree No. 1 as part of the Integrated Reorganization Plan of President Marcos.

of rage against the incident.¹⁷ Observers believe that the public hanging united the whole country in its hatred for Singapore, as prayer vigils for Flor Contemplacion were reported in Visayas and Mindanao. Three different films¹⁸ about the life of the slain domestic helper were made that same year to satisfy the people's desire to keep Contemplacion's memory alive.

This chapter begins by exploring the films that were produced during the early years of cinema when Thomas Edison's short films and actualities portrayed Filipinos in battlegrounds. This analysis extends to the American Period (1898-1946) when the Philippines became a U.S. territory, a commonwealth and finally, a republic. Themes that privilege the usage and importance of the English language in films capture the gradual erasure of the Spanish legacy in the country, notably in the *lingua franca* of Tagalog which incorporates Spanish terms and colloquial expressions. Outside the predominantly Tagalog-speaking island of Luzon where the movie studios later coalesced, filmic cultures in Mindanao and Visayas did not develop at the same rate.

A brief discussion of the Japanese period (1942-1945) will highlight the importance of propaganda films that re-asserted the United States' dominance during the country's quest for independence.

Reeling from the Pacific War at that time, the film industry recovered in 1946 with the release of 30 films (Lumbera 1981). Four big movie studios came into existence – Sampaguita, LVN, Premiere and Lebran. Sampaguita was associated with melodrama, LVN with comedy, and Premiere with action films. The emergence of these three movie studios

¹⁷ The flag of Singapore was burned in the Singaporean embassy in Metro Manila, while several utility transport buses placed “Bawal sumakay ang Singaporeans” (Singaporeans are not allowed to board this vehicle) signs in their vehicles.

¹⁸ Aside from *The Flor Contemplacion Story*, the other films are *Bagong Bayani* (New Hero) and *Victim No. 1*.

also engendered a genre that focuses on war/guerilla. By 1945, heroic films that portrayed bravery among Filipino resistance fighters blossomed and found an appreciative audience among movie-goers. These films include *Dugo ng Bayan* (The Country's Blood, 1946), *Walang Kamatayan* (Deathless, 1946) and *Guerilyera* (1946), among others. These war/guerilla films not only celebrate underground resistance movements against the Japanese, but also emphasized the cultural friendship and diplomatic ties between the United States and the Philippines. John Wayne and Robert Taylor participated in two Bataan films, namely *Bataan* (1943) and its unplanned 'sequel' *Back to Bataan* (1945). However, it was *Back to Bataan* that rearticulated Filipino history as it conveyed the triumphant return of American troops to help the war efforts of the native Filipinos, and also celebrate the efforts of the Filipino guerilla fighters.

Filipino literary scholar Petronilo Bn. Daroy has observed that the war left lasting scars among Filipinos that no cinema of heroism can heal or erase. This film genre would continue to be produced in the 1950s. The advent of the decade of the 1960s and up to the 1970s and 1980s produced another genre that glorified exploitation, and one that centered around the superstar syndrome. The latter is dependent on a well-known performer to draw box-office receipts to the film's producers. Sex and violence (called *bomba*) relied on foreign films for inspiration to adapt foreign techniques to local sensibilities. Despite the clampdown on these films in 1972 when Martial Law was imposed, their production continued, albeit in diminishing numbers.

The 21-year reign of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos forms the basis of the discussion of militant films that developed during this period as a reaction against human rights abuses and the propaganda films that he would later commission, the imposition of Martial Law, the

creation of *Bagong Lipunan*, and the assassination of exiled political opposition leader Benigno Aquino in 1983, all of which contributed to the EDSA Revolution of 1986. Sparked by the social unrest happening worldwide, President Marcos' dictatorial reign produced prolific film outputs from several radical filmmakers who criticized his administration and the monstrosity of human rights abuses committed during the period. Films dramatized the irony of Marcos' unification projects like the regionalization of the country and the institutionalization of *Bagong Lipunan* in 1972. Activist filmmakers like Lino Brocka targeted former First Lady Imelda Marcos' plan to transform the city of Manila into a 'City of Man',¹⁹ where poverty and squalor are cordoned off away from the view of foreign visitors. Brocka's films like *Insiang* (1976), *Maynila, Sa Mga Kuko ng Liwanag* (Manila in the Claws of Neon, 1975), along with Ishmael Bernal's *Manila By Night*²⁰ (1980) and films from Mike de Leon, Celso Ad. Castillo and other filmmakers from 1970 to 1986, were later regarded as the second Golden Age of Philippine Cinema.²¹

Despite the restoration of democracy in the country after the Marcoses fled for Hawaii in 1986, various human rights abuses continue in the countryside under the Aquino administration. Brocka's *Orapronobis* (1987) showed atrocities committed during Cory Aquino's term as president that rival the savagery of the abuses of the former dispensation. It

¹⁹ The City of Man that Imelda Marcos instituted during her husband's administration portrays the city of Manila as the symbol of the 'true, good, and beautiful'.

²⁰ The title of Ishmael Bernal's *Manila By Night* was later changed to *City After Dark* when President Marcos opposed the negative connotations of the first title.

²¹ The first Golden Age of Philippine Cinema was presumed to have blossomed around the time Manuel Conde's *Genghis Khan* (1950) won the screenplay award at the Venice International Film Festival in 1953 and was given unanimous praise by American film critic, writer and poet James Agee.

was in Cory Aquino's time that the Overseas Contract Worker (OCW)²² became prominent. Hailing them as *mga bagong bayani* (new heroes) because of the remittances these workers send to their families, Aquino acknowledges that these remittances boosted the country's economy. Several films tackled the issue of diaspora and the resulting transnational identities, not only during Aquino's administration but even after that. Popular films like *Anak* (Child, 2000), *The Flor Contemplacion Story* and *Bagong Bayani* (New Hero, 1995) discuss the plight of the children of migrant Filipino workers and the impact of single-parenthood on the national psyche. A separate discussion of diaspora and diasporic films like *Cavite* (2005) and *Rigodon* (2005) will form the basis for Chapter 5.

Other significant film genres, movements and developments in the country which will be mentioned in this chapter, will re-appear in greater detail in the next chapter. These include the stylistically audacious films of Kidlat Tahimik, which will be woven into the discussion of guerilla filmmaking and the rise of alternative cinema. Likewise, Khavn dela Cruz's digital filmmaking, which pays homage to Tahimik as well as the alternative cinema of Nick Deocampo, will animate the discussion of cinema at the fringes and its gradual acceptance in the mainstream. The proliferation of *pito-pito*²³ films and the creativity they have engendered in new filmmakers in making cinematic statements, spawned critically-acclaimed films that received their aesthetic affirmations via awards and citations at film festivals abroad. Jeffrey Jeturian will be the focus of the *pito-pito* filmmaking ethic. Likewise, the queer films first pioneered by Nick Deocampo in the early 1980s and later

²² Later it was recast as OFW (Overseas Filipino Worker) to carry a 'national' signifier and also describe the undocumented Filipino workers abroad.

²³ Literal translation: seven-seven. This style of filmmaking and film production can be attributed to the filmmaking ethic encouraged and financed by Filipino-Chinese producer Lily Monteverde (affectionately called Mother Lily). The film is produced with a low budget and is supposed to be finished in 14 days, hence the *pito-pito* moniker.

practiced with zeal and prolific output by Crisaldo Pablo, will be discussed in terms of Third Cinema aesthetics. Deocampo and Pablo seek to challenge the predominant Catholicism by fostering a cinematic queerscape.

The table below provides a timeline of various periods and the inclusive years for each period, as well as the key films/directors and the general tropes associated with each.

Years	Period	Key Directors	Key Films	tropes
1898-1945	American Empire Building	T.A. Edison J. Nepomuceno	1899 actualities <i>Jose Rizal</i> films <i>Dalagang Bukid</i> Zarzuela films <i>Bataan</i> films	Anti-Spanish Empire-building US-Philippines Friendship
1942-1945	Japanese Occupation	G. de Leon (M. O'Hara)	<i>Tatlong Maria</i> <i>(Tatlong Taong Walang Diyos)</i>	Propaganda films
1946-1959	First Golden Age of Phil. Cinema	M. Conde E. Romero	<i>Genghis Khan</i> <i>Biyaya ng Lupa</i>	International exposure Big Four studios
1960-1965	Decline of Phil. Cinema	M. Torres	<i>Roberta</i> <i>Dayukdok</i>	<i>Bomba</i> Exploitation films Counter-culture Collapse of studios
1965-1986	Marcos Regime (Second Golden Age of Philippine Cinema)	L. Brocka I. Bernal E. Romero C. Castillo K. Tahimik	<i>Insyang</i> <i>Kapit sa Patalim</i> <i>Ganito Kami Noon, Paano Kayo Ngayon?</i> <i>Perfumed Nightmare</i>	Anti-Marcos protests Re-writing the national narratives
1986-present	Post-Marcos Age of Diaspora	J. Jeturian K. de la Cruz G. Portes	<i>Pila Balde</i> <i>Bahag Kings</i> <i>Cavite / Rigodon</i> <i>Flor Contemplacion Story</i>	Diasporic films Queer films <i>Pito-pito</i> Digital Revolution Independent films

Table 1. Historicization of Filipino Films

II. *Periodization and Historicization*

This chapter maps out a short history of Filipino cinema. Despite the claims of Filipino film historian Agustin Sotto that 1897 is the year when Lumiere films premiered in the country²⁴, it was in 1898 when the earliest representations of Filipinos were created in a series of short films by Thomas Alva Edison²⁵ (del Mundo 1995, Deocampo 1999). This is not to suggest that 1898 is the “point-zero” in Filipino filmography, but to acknowledge the existence of these film evidences that were created during that year. The issue and controversy surrounding the periodization of cinemas produced in and about the Philippines will be examined in their historical contexts. The alternative cinematic timeline (Table 1) challenges an earlier timeline published by Agustin Sotto and Bienvenido Lumbera – both former members of the *Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino* (Filipino Film Critics Circle). While acknowledging that specific historical periods should not be elided, the proposed alternative map for Filipino cinemas also discusses the interstitial spaces occupied by particular films that provide counter-narratives to the generalizations that characterize a period.

Filipino historian Renato Constantino has referred to Philippine cinema as “reflective of a Westernized society because [Filipino films’] themes are too often copied from foreign successes and because a majority of scriptwriters and directors view Philippine life through the lenses of their Western upbringing” (1985, 31). Filipino film scholar Joel David claims that it is hardly surprising to find that no history “in the traditional comprehensive, definitive

²⁴ Sotto challenges the earlier claims of Vicente Salumbides that *Dalagang Bukid* in 1919 marked the “zero-point” for Filipino cinemas.

²⁵ Ironically, the Filipinos who were depicted in Edison’s early films were portrayed by African-American soldiers from the New Jersey National Guard.

and authoritative senses” of Philippine cinema exists, although available historicizations have proliferated during the decades of the 1970s and 1980s, or roughly since the start of what has been called the Second Golden Age of Philippine Cinema during the period of the Marcos dictatorship (David 1998, 114). Robert Sklar and Charles Musser observed: “Film historians have tended to emphasize institutions and processes, while radical social historians, not necessarily neglecting either of those subjects, have nevertheless placed their emphasis on the lived experiences of people” (Sklar & Musser 1990, 28). The periodization developed in early Filipino film scholarship highlighted the filmic achievements in each era and culminates in the creation of the Golden Ages as the apogee. I intend to make visible the interstitial timelines where films that were produced are not the ones that were heralded for their greatness, but rather as a recuperation of forgotten moments in Filipino filmic histories.

The most significant historicization projects were those undertaken by Bienvenido Lumbera and Agustin Sotto, former members of the *Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino* (Filipino Film Critics Circle). Both have written more detailed histories in simultaneously published monographs, both also titled *Pelikula*. Sotto covered the period 1897 – 1960 and Lumbera reviewed 1961 – 1992. Common to these attempts are the tendencies to pinpoint an originary moment, and that of supplying a periodization that facilitates the discussion of historical issues according to temporal segments that provide openings and closures. David counsels that this type of periodization neglects the small-scale publications such as personal memoirs or film narratives found in film brochures and film festival catalogues that sometimes provide more detailed information and insights than the more generalized and sweeping statements that Lumbera, and especially Sotto have made.

Much of the literature on the national cinema of the Philippines has been written by foreign authors who relied on the materials developed by Lumbera and Sotto. In effect, they reproduced the prevalent foreign perspective that valorized a Filipino filmmaking community centered on the works of Lino Brocka (who found success abroad, especially at the Cannes Film Festival). In contrast, Elliott Stein's report on the Philippine cinema module of the (now-defunct) Manila International Film Festival surprised Filipino film observers when it came out, because its reading strategies were similar to what may be regarded as representative of the then-prevalent local sentiment (David 1998). Joel David asserts that, in as much as Lumbera and Sotto produced the early scholarly works on Philippine cinema, their observations and insights should not be taken as the last word in Filipino cinema. Various changes occurred within the film industry that made possible the emergence of new filmmakers who have created cinematic *oeuvre* different from that of Lino Brocka.

What I am proposing is the recuperation of interstitial film spaces that were missed by the conventional historical periodization of Filipino cinemas. While cognizant of the major periods that created filmic outputs that speak of their distinctive ideological slant, I propose a historical interpretation that not only uses the existence of filmic samples for analysis, but also includes the traces and the interstitial spaces occupied by lost and hitherto unavailable Filipino film projects.

Inspired by Giuliana Bruno's project for the recuperation of the lost films of Italian filmmaker Elvira Notari at the dawn of the 20th century, this alternative cinematic timeline proposes to include specific films or groups of films that did not come into existence for critical scrutiny until recently. These groups of films were not previously available to offer counter-readings against the dominant narratives that were ascribed to specific periods. The

films may provide a different imagining of the nation and of nation-building, and unsettle the commonly-held beliefs that are supposed to emanate from a specific historic period.

III. *American Empire Building and the Birth of 'National' Cinema, 1898-1946*

I investigate three short films at the Library of Congress American Memory Page to show how space is manifested and negotiated on the screen.²⁶ I examine Edison's *Filipinos Retreat From Trenches*, *Capture of Trenches at Candaba*, and *U.S. Troops and Red Cross in the Trenches Before Caloocan*, which were both released in 1899. These short films were shot during the tumultuous years of the Spanish-American War²⁷. The privileged positions of both Spanish and American forces as regards the annexation of a foreign land in world history books is indicative of the tendency to de-emphasize the contribution of the native population in the war.

This 'insurrection' which marked the resistance of the 'newly-freed' Filipino natives against their American 'liberators', has been preserved in Edison's Biograph films that, despite being staged and re-enacted, nevertheless enjoyed immense popularity among the American public when these films were shown in the United States. Nick Deocampo argues that these short films made in the Edison studio produced profits for Edison which emboldened him to create more war pictures. Edison's projecting machine, called a Kinetograph, became known later as the 'Wargraph' to drumbeat the intersectional importance of war, imperialism and the cinematic apparatus that records and documents

²⁶ The Paper Print Collection in the Memory Page of the Library of Congress website contains short films and actualities about the Philippines. Mostly dating from 1898 to 1899, these films that were shot by Thomas Edison are recreations of the Filipino-American War as well as actualities that were shot in the Philippines.

²⁷ Known as 'Filipino insurrection', the skirmishes between Filipinos and American soldiers resulted in more than 500,000 casualties according to Constantino (1975).

them. The camera was utilized “as an instrument of surveillance and display, and imaged the Filipinos as racially and technologically inferior” (Vergara 1995, 4).

The first Edison short film entitled *U.S. Troops and Red Cross in the Trenches Before Caloocan*, was completed in June 5, 1899. Apart from the recreations of the Filipino ‘insurrection’ against the American troops, other short films tackled the everyday life that served as touristic images for Americans. Filipino film historian and film archivist Clodualdo del Mundo says:

“they are images of everyday scenes, but for the foreigner they must have appeared to be strange faces, places and practices”
(del Mundo 1995, 31).

The purpose of the films reinforces the imperialistic design of the United States on the Philippines after the Spanish-American War.

While these ‘strange faces, places and practices’ depict Filipinos in the urban and rural Philippines during the period of the Filipino-American War (1898-1902), Edison took a further step in other films that he shot in New Jersey, which have African American soldiers and actors portraying Filipinos in various images of defeat and capitulation. These black-and-white short films were marketed in the United States as entertainment and they perpetuate the supremacy of the burgeoning power of the U.S. in relation to territories like Cuba and Guam. Independent filmmaker and documentarian Nick Deocampo, commenting on the early films commissioned by Edison, claims that “one could not miss [the] deliberate intention to construct subjects that would be supportive of war... the subliminal effects of these works have deeper consequences in the ideological formation of viewers, particularly in the way they view the world and their relation to it” (Deocampo 1999, 13). These filmic projects took the form of a spectacle at the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair, when Filipinos from various

ethno-linguistic groups were shipped to the United States to be displayed as objects of curiosity. This exhibition validated the imperial aspirations of the United States to its conquered territories.

History, as encoded in these films, shows how cinema has aided in the encryption of these contested historical narratives to be “subsumed into filmic fantasies” for entertainment and enjoyment by its intended spectators (Deocampo 1999, 10). Most of the cinematic portrayals of Filipinos, especially when the issue of constructing American colonial outposts is concerned, continue to reduce Filipinos to rebels and terrorists even in the era of post-Edison Hollywood; they range from Samuel Goldwyn’s *The Real Glory* (1939) to John Dahl’s *The Great Raid* (2005). The common and recurring visual trope of the Edison films shows Filipinos as enemies, who had to be driven out of the frame of the film screen to show and highlight their defeat and signal the triumph of the American troops. The left-to-right filmic obliteration of ‘Filipino enemies’ that tells the story of American Manifest Destiny, helps justify the emerging American imperialist ideology to the Philippine archipelago. The double absence occurs first by the denial of a territorial space for Filipinos on the film screen that invalidated their presence, and second, by the refusal to let Filipinos claim the onscreen loss and defeat as their own since the cinematic Filipinos were actually portrayed by African-American soldiers belonging to the New Jersey National Guard (del Mundo 1995; Deocampo 1999; Feng 2002).

Filipinos Retreat From Trenches shows Filipino soldiers firing from guns and eventually disappearing from the frame, signifying escape; the subject (Filipino soldiers retreating from the advancing American soldiers) experiences and lives in the space in which it is entangled, that is, the subject is produced along and in relation to its lived space (Figure

11). The spatially situated image of the men escaping creates an ordering that makes them out as the ‘other’ that had to be driven out of the frame, hence, out of sight. Their absence from the frame that clearly indicated their defeat is further complicated by the fact that this ‘moment of history’ was taken from the pages of a forgotten war that remains unacknowledged and thus not given historical legitimacy. This double absence indicates the erasure of the lived space of Filipinos, given that African-Americans substituted for Filipinos in this war sequence. Deocampo notes that this recurring visual trope sets up “film space as metaphor for a contested territorial space” (1999, 14).



Figure 11. Thomas A. Edison, *Filipinos Retreat from Trenches*, 1899.

Manthia Diawara argued that “space is related to power and powerlessness, in so far as those who occupy the center of the screen are usually more powerful than those in the background or completely absent from the screen” (Diawara 1993, 16). Frank Millet, on the other hand, observed in 1899 that Filipinos “remained outside the Kodak zone” (1899, 1-2) and indeed, the disappearance and erasure of Filipinos from the screen could be read as a sign of their absence from the society constructed by the white filmmakers. In *Capture of Trenches in Candaba*, the initial defense of the Filipinos (referred to as “rebels” in the film’s description) is overwhelmed by the “fierce charge of [our] soldiers” that led to their surrender. This capitulation is portrayed in the film by the hasty flight of Filipino soldiers

away from the screen. Despite the heroic death of the officer in command, in the end only the American soldiers remain in the screen frame to signal victory with an American flag, unequivocally indicating their power and might. The instrument of surveillance and display provides and assumes an unmistakable position of an othering technological apparatus, as the American soldiers take command of the screen space. The placement of the camera takes the point of view of the advancing soldiers while Filipinos were emplaced in the vulnerable center and annihilated by the unblinking cinematic gaze. This gaze likewise invites and encourages the American public, who were the intended spectators, to assume this gaze and cheer at the conquest of the territory and thus it fans the “imperialistic emotions of the hour” (Barnouw 1993, 30). The camera’s invincibility from gunfire and battleground warfare in these films leaves it apparently unharmed by the carnage. According to Deocampo: “[t]he powerful gaze cast by the camera proved persuasive in convincing millions of American moviegoers to see the war as supporters of war saw it” (1999, 15).

In her discussion of cinematic time and the instability of the image in the early cinema of Edison, the Lumiere Brothers, Georges Melies and others, Mary Ann Doane laid the conditions by which “punishment around the concept of a criminality [is] understood in relation to otherness . . . where the cinematographic evidence enables the subordination of the contingent to the rule of law [and] ultimately imbued with a power over life and death” (2002, 152). The disappearance of Filipinos in the frame of *Capture of Trenches in Candaba* taints the absence as criminal, which the technological prowess of the apparatus documents and authenticates. As Doane further notes, “None of this . . . guarantees that the image is actually documentary, but certain stylistic traits had already been attached to the on-the-scene actuality, giving it a rudimentary form of recognizability”

(2002, 152). Despite the initial physical presence of the “Filipinos” on the screen who had to be driven out of the frame in the course of the film, ultimately it is their absence that legitimizes the criminalization.

This straightforward manipulation of spatially situated images provides an important dimension of spatial hierarchy. Some scholars see a direct relation between the geography of the world and the geography of the imagination. Said defines the ‘imaginative geography’ as a typical example of Orientalism, or as he famously wrote “The orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” (1979, 43). Despite the American world fairs that started in 1898 and continued until 1916 which displayed Filipinos to promote the “superiority of the white people over non-white races” (Fermin 2004, xxii), the exposure of Filipinos who came from the Philippines has been “outside the Kodak zone” for some time (Millet 1899, 1-2). This helps explain the choice of African American soldiers/re-enactees to portray Filipinos in the Edison Biograph films.

As seen in *U.S. Troops and Red Cross in the Trenches before Caloocan*, when the American troops drove the Filipino ‘enemies’ out of the trenches once again, the strategy of psychological and physical distancing was used (Figure 12). This is apparent in the absence of the Filipino soldiers in the frame after they were chased out by the incoming American troops, but their return to the screen resulted in the forward rush of the advancing forces that led to “a trail of dead and wounded” (Mussey 1899, microform) resulting in the ideological codification of triumph and defeat. What are produced in the spaces of the film are codified texts that clearly articulate the discourse of the art of winning the war.²⁸

²⁸ C. del Mundo observes that all three Edison films end with an officer on horseback, which he sees as the “supreme image of conquest and subjugation” (1998, 35).



Figure 12. Thomas A. Edison, *U.S. Troops and Red Cross in the Trenches before Caloocan*, 1899.

Despite the formal end of the Filipino-American War²⁹, films continue to be produced in and about the Philippines. Most of the films that came out of this period borrow heavily from the Spanish theatrical art forms for inspiration. *Dalagang Bukid* (Country Maiden, 1919) which was based on Hermogenes Ilagan's *zarzuela* became officially known as the first film directed by a Filipino (Figure 13). Using the traditions of *zarzuela*, *bodabil* and live performance, *Dalagang Bukid* had actors declaim and sing their lines. Jose Nepomuceno who directed *Dalagang Bukid* would continue to have a prolific career in the 1920s, with feature-length films with Spanish titles³⁰ (Pilar 1977, 15). The adaptation of *zarzuelas* to cinema reached its height with *Walang Sugat* (No Wounds) which held the exhibition record of seven consecutive weeks (Martin 1975, 24).

Among the early films that were produced by American industrialists are *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo* based on the anti-Spanish novels of national hero and "First Filipino" Jose Rizal. *Noli Me Tangere* was shown at the historic Zorilla Theater and was "an instant success" (Carunungan 1978, 29). This success would lead to the production of another film called *Jose Rizal*, along with *Enchong Laway* and *Nena la Bozcadora*. American

²⁹ Other Filipino scholars contend that nationwide skirmishes continued until 1913.

³⁰ Nepomuceno's films include *Mariposa Negra*, *Hoy o Nunca*, *Besame*, *Estrellita del Cine* and *Un Capullo Marchito*, among others.



Figure 13. Jose Nepomuceno, *Dalagang Bukid*, 1919

monopoly played a huge role in the encouragement to produce films that signal their victory to the newly conquered archipelago from the clutches of Spain. The films bear Spanish titles to appeal to the cultural elite (*ilustrados*) who were proficient in Spanish, and titles in the local dialect of the island group one happens to be situated. These films include *La Conquista de Filipinas*, *La Fiesta de Obando* and *Los Milagros de la Virgen de Antipolo*. Some contemporary Filipino scholars and historians contend that the veneration for Jose Rizal and the subsequent movement to glorify him as a national hero bore the handiwork of the American Occupation in their drive for the gradual erasure of Spain in Filipino life. This helps explain the cinematic realization of *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*.

Jose Nepomuceno's *Dalagang Bukid* was hailed as the first Filipino film by virtue of the nationality and ethnicity of the filmmaker who made the film. Since *Dalagang Bukid* is a silent film, the issue of language as the unifying factor that determines a film as national in origin, did not figure prominently. The 'talkies' that arrived in the United States in 1927 trail-blazed by *The Jazz Singer* did not make its presence felt in the Philippines until 1929 when Nepomuceno experimented with a film *Syncopation*. The film announced an 'all-talking, all-singing, all-playing extravaganza' (Martin, 1975) even if a phonograph was cranked to produce the sound. *Lucky Boy* in 1930 received better reception because it features a soundtrack that captured the recorded songs and dialogues. The first 'talkie' in the country was *Ang Aswang* (The Ghoul) in 1932, which was produced by an American named George P. Musser. Nepomuceno followed this trend by creating his first 'talkie' in 1933 with *Punyal na Ginto* (The Golden Dagger) which utilized the equipment he purchased from American technicians in Hollywood (Carunungan, 1978). Nepomuceno's subsequent films started using Tagalog-language titles: *Makata at Paraluman* (Poet and Muse) and *Ang Kuba* (The Hunchback). This linguistic shift in film titling was the first discernable resistance and rupture that announce the Filipino filmmakers' desire to break from their early dependence on foreign ideas. The use of Tagalog film titles and the subsequent dialogue in the films marked the complicity of early Filipino filmmakers to make Tagalog the signifier of Filipino-ness. The hegemony of Manila in Luzon as the center of cinematic productions during this period already brands the films as Filipino. The rest of the islands suddenly found themselves learning Tagalog in order to understand the dialogues.

The common themes of films that were created and produced during the

American occupation are agrarian life and religion (mostly centered around Catholicism). This celebration of rurality and religion would later produce resistant films that question the ideal agrarianism brought about by the feudal system that still exists in the country. These resistant films would ironically gain validation abroad by winning awards and citations before the films are shown in the country. Films like *Biyaya ng Lupa* (Bounty from the Land) in 1959 are character-driven vehicles for actors but they also problematize the abundance and material gain that became the hallmarks of American occupation in relation to its territories.

It is also worth investigating the number of films that were produced between 1930 and 1942. This period is usually glossed over in Philippine history books because, as Bienvenido Lumbera says, “the years 1919 to 1944 become a veritable pre-history of Philippine cinema” (1981, 67). However, according to Clodualdo del Mundo, who sits as president of the Society of Filipino Archivists (SOFIA), several films were actually produced during this period even if the master copies have since been lost or are unrecoverable. Table 2 summarizes the film outputs per film director for a given period:

Inclusive Years	Number of films produced	Film Director
1930-1941	23	Carlos Vander Tolosa
1932-1942	26	Eduardo de Castro
1932-1941	21	Manuel Silos
1934-1941	20	Octavio Silos
1936-1940	16	Mar Esmeralda
1937-1941	23	Tor Villano
1937-1940	18	Carlos Padilla

Table 2. Filipino Films, 1930 to 1942.

These films apparently did not survive because, as del Mundo confirms, only four of these films are extant. Three films which were based on *zarzuelas* include Carlos Vander Tolosa's *Giliw Ko* (My Dear, 1938), Octavio Silos' *Tunay na Ina* (True Mother, 1939) and *Pakiusap* (Lover's Plea, 1940). The fourth film is a *moro-moro* called *Ibong Adarna* (Adarna Bird, 1941) by Vicente Salumbides. The common trope of the four films is the reunification of lovers amidst obstacles, be it an authoritarian father (*Giliw Ko*), a domineering aunt (*Tunay na Ina*), a meddlesome rich aunt (*Pakiusap*), or magical underworld characters (*Ibong Adarna*). These films follow the theatrical conventions of their origins (i.e. song and dance) that are popular forms of entertainment during the years before World War II.

In summary, while the earliest films of Edison depicting Filipinos were exercises to show the hegemonic dominance of the Americans as an imperial power, the emergence of films in succeeding years allow for the imaginings of a Filipino national cinema. The cinema as a technological apparatus that was used to create ethnographic depictions of the conquered territory during Edison's time, became the same tool that was used by Filipino filmmakers to interrogate their own identity amidst the various forms of colonialism they had, and have yet to encounter. The recording ability of the films for mimetic functions can also be manipulated to create narratives, even propagandistic ones.

IV. *The Japanese Occupation, 1942-45*

History textbooks portray the interim years of 1935 to 1946 as the preparatory years for the Philippines to become a republic, interrupted by the invasion of the Japanese. This 'interruption' gave the United States an opportunity to once again save the country from

foreign invasion and emphasize its indispensability when it comes to ensuring national home security.

The hatred of the Japanese occupation later produced several documentaries and films that depicted the barbarism of this three-year subjugation. The issue of ‘comfort women’ and ‘war atrocities’ effectively demonized the Japanese to Filipinos. This period was characterized by propaganda films that Filipino filmmakers were supposedly commissioned to film. When the Second World War broke out, all the film companies ceased operation. In the Japanese-occupied years of 1942 to 1945, a total of seven films were reported³¹ yet according to film historian Celso Al. Carunungan in his 1978 article entitled “Early Years of Philippine Movies”, only one film – *Tatlong Maria* (Three Marys) – was produced during this period. Carunungan wrote: “*Tatlong Maria* was an idyllic story in which the ‘return to the farm’ idea was exploited with lyricism and fine detail. It was not a propaganda picture, although it was produced by the Japanese in the Philippines and distributed by Eiga Haikyusa” (Carunungan 1978, 37). It is interesting to note that Carunungan only cites one film from among the seven films that were listed. This can be attributed to the commonly held view during that period that *Tatlong Maria* and its theme of celebrating a more rural and agrarian life is more appropriately labeled as a Filipino film, while others that were produced were probably tainted with a pro-Japanese and propagandistic stigma, and therefore not accorded a ‘Filipino’ signifier. Another view implicates Carunungan as complicit in being a cultural arbiter who decides what makes a film Filipino and worthy of mention.

The films that came out after 1945 that celebrated native resistance against the Japanese occupation were heralded with victorious titles like *Tagumpay* (Victory), or have

³¹ These films include *Caviteño* (Fellow from Cavite), *Niña Bonita* (Beautiful Girl) and *Princesa Urduja* in 1942; *Tia Juana* (Aunt Juana) in 1943; *Liwayway ng Kalayaan* (Dawn of Freedom) and *Tatlong Maria* in 1944; and *Ginoong Patay Gutom* (Good for Nothing Man) in 1945.

titles that deride those suspected of collaborating with the Japanese, e.g. *Oo, Ako'y Espiya* (Yes, I'm a Spy). It was not until the decade of the 1970s that a few films reexamined the trope of the collective Japanese hatred. One film that easily stood out as a revisionist interpretation of this period was Mario O'Hara's *Tatlong Taong Walang Diyos* in 1976 (Figure 14).

This film described the cultural tension between the Philippines and Japan that showed empathy for the occupiers. Made three decades after the Japanese left, the



Figure 14. Mario O'Hara, *Tatlong Taong Walang Diyos*, 1976

Tatlong Taong Walang Diyos story revolves around a Filipino country maiden who was raped by a Japanese soldier. O'Hara showed how the audience can be transported into the movie by letting them side with Rosario's rightful indignation at Masugi's sexual abuse. This interpolation provides an avenue to rekindle the hatred of Filipinos towards the Japanese. The film's depiction of Masugi's personal conflict and dilemma coupled by his genuine love and affection for the woman he raped and impregnated was skillfully executed. By the time Rosario can carry out her ultimate plan to kill Masugi, she begins to doubt whether her

resolve is as firm as it was earlier. Her final act of forgiveness for her oppressor made the initial irrationality of spurning him a painful act. What she has done is what is truly unexpected in the film's initial demonization of the oppressors: Rosario married one of the Japanese officers just when they were on the brink of losing the war. Filipino film critic Noel Vera, writing about the film and its director in 1998, said that "O'Hara, having taken pains to show us the wrongness of Rosario's defiance, now demonstrates the wrongness of the rest of the world in judging Rosario for her decision. Rosario has done what she felt in her heart was true to her, what O'Hara makes us all feel was true and right and good for her" (Vera, 1998). Vera's film analysis treads the risky undercurrents that underline the Filipinos' ambivalence to their colonizers. By championing the film for its masterful perfection of the craft, Vera also parlayed the technical excellence of the film to a national narrative that acknowledges both the repulsion and fascination the Filipinos have for their occupiers.

While O'Hara's film was produced three decades after the Japanese left the country, *Liwayway ng Kalayaan* (Dawn of Freedom, 1944) which was co-directed by a Filipino and a Japanese filmmaker (Gerardo de Leon and Abe Yutaka) was labeled and derided as a propaganda film when it came out. *Liwayway ng Kalayaan* reconfigured the power relations between Filipinos and the Japanese by making the occupier and the occupied equals.

Joel David claims that *Liwayway ng Kalayaan*, which was not available in the Philippines until 1992, offered a radical reworking of the common trope that the (Japanese) occupier oppresses the occupied (Filipino). David says: " *Dawn of Freedom* (1944) can be seen as overturning both the quality and level of pre- and post-World War II Philippine-set

pro-American propaganda in terms of budgetary amplitude, technical excellence and the surprising reconfigurations of ideology” and gender.³²

The emergence of the movie studios began in 1945 when the country was still reeling from the effects of the war. While new companies had arisen from the aftermath of the war, three studios dominated film production: Sampaguita, LVN and Premiere. In the era of the Hukbalahap³³, the Board of Censors for Motion Pictures (BCMP) was empowered to examine silent and spoken films and to prohibit the exhibition of foreign films if these films are deemed immoral and injurious to the country. Despite the vigilance of this non-salaried group in performing their task, BCMP’s impact on local films was not documented. However, with Joel David’s recent discovery that films such as *Liwayway ng Kalayaan* were only recently donated by the Japanese to the film archives of the Philippines, one can imagine how outputs that are suspected of being propagandistic or Japanese-friendly films could have met similar fates. This is especially true for films such as *Tia Juana* (Aunt Juana), *Caviteño* (Fellow from Cavite), *Ginoong Patay Gutom* (Good-for-Nothing Man), *Princesa Urduja* (Princess Urduja) and *Niña Bonita* (Beautiful Girl), which were produced between 1942 and 1945.

V. *The First Golden Age of Philippine Cinema, 1946-1959*

The so-called First Golden Age of Philippine Cinema came about as a result of the emergence of the Big Four movie studios – the LVN, Sampaguita, Lebran and Premiere.

³² In the film, the Filipinos and their colonizers are equals and the Asian men are seen physicalizing their mutual solidarity, rather than American men saving the lives of Filipino males and winning the sexual attention of Filipina characters.

³³ Hukbong Bayan Laban sa mga Hapon (People’s Army Against the Japanese). Hukbalahap or “Huks” is a left-leaning armed movement of the Communist Party of the Philippines.

These movie studios would specialize in specific genres to appeal to a broad audience.³⁴ It was also observed that most of the pre-World War II film directors reached their maturity and became the main architects of films that came out of this period. Filmmakers like Gerardo de Leon, Lamberto Avellana, and Eddie Romero came of age, although no one achieved as much fame and acclaim as Manuel Conde with his film *Genghis Khan* (1952), which was screened at the Venice International Film Festival. No less than the American writer and film critic James Agee served as Conde's script collaborator for the film (Figure 15). Respectability for filmmakers during this period not only came from Conde's film, but also from the accolades Filipino films would reap from the international film festivals,



Figure 15. Manuel Conde, *Genghis Khan*, 1950/52.

³⁴ Sampaguita Pictures was identified with melodrama, LVN with comedy, and Premiere with action pictures. Lebran on the other hand was not really identified as creating and producing a niche genre although scientific photo-plays originated from this studio.

notably the Asian Film Festival.³⁵ Furthermore, the country's oldest surviving award-giving body was created during this period – the Film Academy of Movie Arts & Sciences (FAMAS). The Big Four would play a huge and instrumental role in the financing of 'prestige films' that would compete in international film festivals. Lumbera noted that, although not all the films that were targeted for international competition would win awards, a number of technically polished and more artistic films were produced during this period.

Filipino film writer Jessie Garcia notes that this period also turned out a "spate of historical films based on the famous sagas of local legendary heroes" (Garcia 1972, 48). The lives of national heroes and revolutionaries like Diego Silang, Dagohoy and Lapu-Lapu were committed to screen and acted by famous actors portraying "valiant fighters for freedom" (1972, 48). This decade produced a series of 'firsts' in cinematic history that show the achievement of the film practitioners during this period (Table 3).

Despite the critical successes of cinematic outputs produced during this period, there also were films that were propagandist in nature, e.g. Lamberto Avellana's *Huk sa Bagong Pamumuhay* (Huk in a New Life, 1953) and *Kandelerong Pilak* (Silver Candlesticks, 1954). These films were created under President Ramon Magsaysay's administration. Both films were intended to spotlight the efforts of the government to relocate reformed members of the dissident movement to Mindanao. Jessie Garcia notes that in the case of *Huk sa Bagong Pamumuhay*: "halfway through [the film] becomes a slick piece of propaganda for the government" (1972, 54). Describing *Kandelerong Pilak*, Garcia says: "The film concerns itself with guerilla activities for the greater part of its first half, only to degenerate toward the end into a mess of sentimental claptrap" (1972, 54).

³⁵ Among the Filipino films that won awards internationally were: *Biyaya ng Lupa*, *Isinakdal Ko Ang Aking Ama*, *Bayanihan*, *Anak Dalita* and *Badjao*.

Film	Studio	Distinction
<i>Pagoda</i>	Sampaguita	First Filipino film filmed abroad
<i>Hawayana</i>	LVN	First co-production venture between the Philippines and Indonesia
<i>Obra Maestra</i>	People's Picture	First Filipino movie filmed in five key Asian cities
<i>Ezxur</i>	Premiere	First Filipino sci-fi photoplay
<i>Tuko sa Madre de Kakaw</i>	LVN	First local film which deals with an atomic monster
<i>Tokyo, 1960</i>	Premiere	First Filipino monster film shot abroad
<i>Low-Waist Gang</i>	Premiere	First of a lucrative series which spawned a host of imitations, like <i>The H-Line Gang</i> .

Table 3. Noteworthy “Firsts” in Filipino Films Source: J. Garcia, 1972.

These films are usually not mentioned in the discussion of Filipino cinema, much less the so-called Golden Age of Philippine Cinema. This is attributed to the suspicion accorded to statist propaganda films, similar to the ones commissioned by President Marcos during his presidency. These films tread similar lines with the study of Tim Bunnell about the Malaysian government’s intervention to prop up its image as a tiger economy in the film *Entrapment*. The naturalization of the environment in its fictive diegesis transforms the film into a narrative the film creators want the audience to believe. Christopher Lukinbeal has pointed out that “film geography has primarily engaged issues that illustrate how cultural politics is naturalized in film” (2005, 13). The state-sanctioned reforms that the Magsaysay government wanted for the Huk reformers during this period found a wider and popular acceptance by using films to act as a naturalizing agent in the process of the dissidents’ national reintegration.

VI. *Bomba and the Counter-Cultural Films, 1960-1965*

The period following the collapse of the Big Four studios and the rise of independent production companies was also the period that most Filipino film history books cite as the decline and deterioration of Filipino cinema. Lumbera labels this period “rampant commercialism and artistic decline”(1981, 74).

The disappearance of the major studios that were responsible for the creation of award-winning films contributed to the title of this period. Perceived as an embarrassing period due to the preponderance of exploitation films, locally known as *bomba* films,³⁶ this period is also distinguished by its reliance on the star system that orchestrates the making of a superstar with legions of fans.

Lacking the big budgets of major studios, the independent companies would commission films on a per-product basis to recover production costs. This practice also allows filmmakers to jump on the popular filmic bandwagons by indigenizing the foreign idiom for Filipino consumption. The most popular ones are violent and soft-core sex films, spaghetti Westerns, the appropriation of the James Bond character in thrillers, Chinese/Japanese martial arts films and European sex melodramas (Lumbera 1981). This trend led to the veneration of superstars who become Filipino James Bonds, *bomba* queens and kung fu masters.

It is this decade that produced counter-cultural films that oppose the establishment and the administrations of Diosdado Macapagal (1961-1965) and Ferdinand Marcos. The *bomba* films were outlawed by the Board of Censors for Motion Pictures (BCMP) but they

³⁶ *Bomba* film is seen both as a genre where sexual exploitation of usually unknown actors/actresses are common themes, and also as a rebellious reaction to the repressive social conventions relating to sex.

continued to reassert itself. Owing to its underground popularity, the *Bagong Lipunan* of Marcos would recommend the shift in terminology to refer to *bomba* by dressing it and calling it ‘bold’.

Despite the ‘vacuousness’ of this period in terms of the quality of the films produced, it also produced numerous films leading to the establishment of the Manila Film Festival in 1964, which allowed Filipino films to compete among themselves. During this period in universities and colleges, social unrest was beginning to brew and “nationalism had become a force inspiring young people to seek integration with the masses” (Lumbera 1981, 76). The *bomba* films like *Ako’y Dayukdok* (Glutton, 1961) were seen as reflections of the students’ own rebellion against the Catholic Church-dominated society (Figure 16). Looking beyond the obvious reasons for the emergence of the *bomba* film, both as an exploitative product of a profit-driven industry and as a ‘stimulant’, it can be analyzed as actually being a ‘subversive genre’, playing up to the establishment while rebelling and undermining support for its institutions.

The ‘superstar’ syndrome not only applied to the *bomba* stars but also to talented performers who are paired with another to make a ‘love team’. Nora Aunor is considered the country’s only ‘superstar’. Rising from a rags-to-riches background in the Bicol region of Luzon, Aunor first gained attention by winning a popular singing contest. Possessing what many music insiders say was a ‘golden voice’, Aunor would join a popular young actor to complete the love team. It is, however, her talent that made her transition from music to cinema usher in a phenomenally successful career (Almario 1977). Nora Aunor would eclipse all other film stars’ career even if she did not conform to the conventions of beauty.

Dark-skinned, petite and coming from a working-class family, Aunor would command a following that is unprecedented in the Philippines.



Figure 16. Mar S. Torres, *Dayukdok*, 1961

Although Aunor would make her mark with cinematic performances that were hailed as classic, her beginnings originated in the decade when a decline and deterioration of cinema was considered its most defining feature. All of these happenings foreground the arrival of a young presidential candidate who was known for his vitality, strength, charisma and intelligence – the dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

VII. The Marcos Dictatorship and the beginnings of the Second Golden Age of Philippine Cinema, 1965-1986.

Ferdinand Marcos was elected President of the Philippines in 1965 by defeating the then incumbent president Diosdado Macapagal. His election to the highest office in the country signaled a renewed hope for a country that was lagging behind its Southeast Asian neighbors. His youth, vitality and strength were supposed to have invigorated the country during his first years as president – a visual trope he would later revisit through films and other mass media to prop up his image as an all-capable leader. With civil unrest within the Metro Manila area, he imposed his iron-fisted manner of governing a nation by imposing martial law in 1972, that effectively policed all kinds of activities of its citizens. Creating Bagong Lipunan (New Society) in 1972, he also divided the country into 12 regions and together with First Lady Imelda Marcos, re-engineered Manila as the City of Man, devoid of visible social ills, garbage and dirt.

Reacting against the human rights violations directed towards his political foes and suspected members of the New People's Army (NPA), a radical group of filmmakers decided to offer alternative visions of the country to its people. Filmmakers Lino Brocka, Behn Cervantes, Ishmael Bernal and Mike de Leon comprise the filmmakers who actively created an angry filmic palette to provide a counter-narrative to the fascist dictatorship that governed the country. Brocka, in particular, was very vocal against Marcos; he created gritty urban scenarios that valorize uprisings and mass actions as a form of defiance and resistance to dictatorship. Filipino film scholar Jose B. Capino finds in Brocka a "complicated mix of gritty social realism and political activism co-existing with heightened melodrama, which, in combination, read variably as metonym, allegory, and expose." (Capino 2007, 40).

Brocka's *Bayan Ko: Kapit sa Patalim* indicts the atrocity of social and political conditions under the Marcos dictatorship (Figure 17). The film's title makes clear its intention of interpellating



Figure 17. Lino Brocka, *Bayan Ko: Kapit sa Patalim*, 1985.

Filipinos into the struggle and make the protagonist's plight a microcosm of the malaise infecting the general population. Released in 1985 at the height of the demonstrations, the film also uses as its title the well-known folk song that has since evolved into an anthemic song of nationalist movements in the country. The song (which speaks about a caged bird that must be freed from its incarceration) has long been used as an apt metaphor of freedoms that have been silenced in the country under Marcos. Turing, the protagonist who decided to

rob his employers in an act of financial desperation, not only represents most minimum-wage earners in the country but embodies the workers who have been victimized by oppressive employers. His wife Luz has been characterized by film scholar Roland Tolentino as embodying the mother-nation space. Tolentino opines: “[The film] positions Luz as the caged freedom bird, withstanding pain and suffering so that social change may arise in the near future. The caged bird metaphor is the appropriate figure for the mother-nation. On the one hand, the mother-nation is to remain in agony over inflicted pain and suffering and the cage signifies this anguish; on the other hand, the mother-nation is to remain pure, the cage signifies her protection.” (Tolentino 2001, 34).

The end of the film shows a Pieta-like image of Luz cradling the lifeless body of Turing, thereby reinserting the trope of a nurturing mother-nation to its fallen sibling and rebuilding from that calamitous occurrence.

Brocka also made commercial melodramas so he could earn money to make the social-realist films he is known for nationally and abroad. Capino’s observation that Brocka seamlessly melds the efficacy of melodrama into his politically-charged film, has resulted in his recognition at the Cannes Film Festival. Other activist filmmakers during this period have created darker films that view the City of Man of the Marcoses with scorn and disdain.

Bernal’s *Manila By Night* dealt with the underbelly of the City of Man by using miniature portraits of ordinary lives as correlative to the larger society. Mike de Leon’s *Sister Stella L.* (1984) focused on a nun’s political awakening and the contradictions of her divine mission, while *Batch ’81* (1982) delved into a fraternity hazing that criticizes the Fascism of the regime of *Bagong Lipunan*. Copies of Behn Cervantes’ *Sakada* which were confiscated by

the military, exposed the abuses of the landowners who are in cahoots with the military in exacting high taxes from the poor land tenants.

Despite the Marcoses' draconian rule, they also instituted the Experimental Cinema of the Philippines (ECP) under Executive Order 770 in 1982, which was headed by their eldest daughter Imee Marcos-Manotoc. ECP ushered in an era of filmmaking that created Filipino masterpieces like *Oro Plata Mata* (1982) and *Himala* (Miracle, 1982), among others. President Marcos created the National Media Production Center to create 'state propaganda films' often depicting anti-Communism. Enlisting the respected Lamberto Avellana and actress Charito Solis, a film was commissioned to portray the triumph of *Bagong Lipunan* in unmasking the Left-leaning groups from misleading the citizens. More importantly, as will be discussed in the next chapter, the Marcos regime somehow created a space for dialogue where politically-active filmmakers sought to provide alternative narratives to his vision of *Bagong Lipunan*. Most of the responses from interviewed film practitioners also reveal that the repressiveness of the Marcos dictatorship produced a filmic *oeuvre* that is unmatched in any other period in the country's cinematic tradition. The democratic space that ushered in the Aquino administration after Marcos' fall in 1986 produced a complex context where films did not excite or engage quite as much as the ones produced in the former dispensation.

The Marcos dictatorship is considered in Philippine history to be the most repressive and dictatorial (although there were several claims that the present one under the Macapagal-Arroyo administration is the worst). His reconfiguration of Filipino identity to prop up his image and the regime has resulted in unprecedented human rights abuses against its citizens. His clever control and astute manipulation of the media to create national narratives have

resulted in the creation of social infrastructures that benefited numerous citizens, but also alienated an equally huge number of Filipinos. The cinematic output from the period that opposed his administration made possible the so-called Second Golden Age of Philippine Cinema. Credit should also be given to the creation of the ECP and the enthusiastic government support for other film agencies that made film culture more robust. The contradictory dialectic of this regime has created a film space for the cultural production of conflicting national narratives.

VIII. *Conclusion*

The history of the Filipino cinema provides an avenue to examine the country's role in the articulation of the issue of the national. As a colonized country, Filipino filmographies borrowed heavily from the formula of foreign cultures in spite of its incorporation of local cultural practices to the mix. What are elided in most discussions of Filipino cinemas are the forgotten and lost filmic samples that offer a richer terrain to map alternative stories and counter-narratives to the whole issue of what constitutes the 'national'. Furthermore, propaganda films from both the colonial and the colonized ends of the political spectrum offer interesting insights in terms of the gate-keeping intentions of states, governments and institutions in relation to state-formation.

The next chapter examines the creation of a meta-Filipino narrative with Tagalog as the signifying language for 89 million Filipinos. Based on interviews conducted this hegemonic cinema within the country will not only alienate the non-Tagalog-speaking citizens but also neglects the tension that allows for regional complexities to create their own versions of Filipinoscapes. The recognition of the multiplicity of identities in the archipelago

necessitates that filmic outputs produced in the Philippines (and beyond its borders) be rightfully called as Filipino cinemas to reflect the complexity and multiplicity.

Chapters 4 and 5 will focus on the post-Marcos years (1986-2008) that discuss the period of diaspora, independent filmmaking, regional cinema and other film movements that emerge during this period.

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*There is no such thing as a 'national cinema'
if the phrase is used to designate a single, unitary object.*

Albert Moran, 1996

CHAPTER 4

THE FILMS IN THE NATIONAL IMAGINARY OR, YOU'RE NOTHING BUT A SECOND-RATE, TRYING-HARD COPYCAT

I. *Introduction*

One of the most memorable and enduring scenes in Philippine cinema that is forever etched in the national psyche through its constant reenactment and parody happens in *Bituing Walang Ningning* (Fading Star, 1985). An aging singer lashes back at a neophyte who is earning raves for her performance by saying in Filipino that success will be elusive for those who are imitators, or in her immortal words, spoken in English: “You’re nothing but a second-rate, trying hard copycat!” Filipino film scholar Jose B. Capino says that such colorful dialogue is the norm in Philippine melodrama and insists that *Fading Star* is “quintessentially Filipino” in its form of address to its audience and, more significantly, in its self-reflexive assessment of Philippine cinema through the years (2006, 33).

This chapter investigates various perspectives that ask what makes the Philippines a nation, and what is the discourse of nationality that its cinema produces. I interviewed 41 Filipino film practitioners between July, 2006, and August, 2007, in both the Philippines and New York City. These film practitioners are film directors, cinematographers, producers,

writers, actors, film professors/historians, film critics and archivists. A majority of the interviews were conducted in Manila during the CineMalaya: Philippine Independent Film Festival³⁷ in 2006 and 2007. The rest of the interviews were conducted among active Filipino filmmakers who reside in New York City, and these took place in September of 2007.

The interviews revolved around questions about the past, current and future of Philippine cinema. Discussions focused on the respondents' concept of nation, using the Philippines as an example to foreground the interrogation of the possibility of a national cinema. The so-called Golden Age of Philippine Cinema (specifically focusing on the Second Golden Age which started during the Marcos regime) drew varied responses with regard to that period's significance in the country's cinematic traditions. Responses tended to identify key film *auteurs* who they felt best represent an era, as well as a filmic style or film movement. A discussion of significant film movements (*pito-pito*, digital filmmaking and queerness) and their leading practitioners contributes to the examination of the filmic traditions of the country and the deployment of these movements as the Philippines' version of Third Cinema. Owing to the various economic, ideological and cultural backgrounds and orientations of the respondents, the responses offered a rich terrain to imagine the discourses of the nation.

The slippery issue surrounding the various definitions of a Philippine national cinema in the country's archipelagic space necessitated a clarification of terms: (1) Cinema in the Philippines and (2) Philippine cinema. The former is a generic phrase that talks about the

³⁷ CineMalaya literally means Free Cinema although it has taken a nationalistic color by invoking 'freedom' as its underlying theme. The CineMalaya film festival which started in 2004 is a showcase of the best of Philippine independent films. Ten feature-length films and ten short films are selected from a pool of applications and given 500,000 Philippine pesos from the CineMalaya and an additional 100,000 pesos from the Film Academy of the Philippines. Many critics observe that this financing scheme defeats the purpose of the festival, and hence the 'independent' slant of the chosen film projects no longer carry the 'indie' signifier.

filmic outputs generated by the country, while the latter is a loose and less defined issue requiring discussions on what a nation typifies and constitutes arising from various geopolitical spaces and ideological perspectives. In spite of the differing responses from the interviewed respondents, there appears to be near consensus on the type of ‘national’ mythologies and folklores that portray a Filipino-ness. For example, while Jose Rizal’s status as the national hero has been contested in some quarters in the nationalistic discourse, it was acknowledged by all the respondents that Rizal constitutes Filipino-ness, no matter which aspect of his life was used to depict him in films. In Mike de Leon’s *Bayaning Third World* (Third World Hero, 2000), the critical (and some say heretical) perspective offered by the film about Rizal is predicated on its continuing relevance to Philippine history (Figure 18).



Figure 18. Mike de Leon, *Bayaning Third World*, 2000.

There is also an acknowledged acceptance of the cinematic portrayals of folkloric creatures as having Filipino registers, like the creatures of the underworld such as *aswang* (flesh-eating ghoul), *kapre* (cigar-smoking giant), *diwata* (fairy), *manananggal* (half-bodied ghoul) and *nuno sa punso* (dwarf-like goblin who lives in a termite mound), among others.

These creatures have been depicted in numerous films since the first Philippine ‘talkie’ called *Ang Aswang*. There are also other folkloric representations that were culled from the pages of Philippine literature that had cinematic incarnations, like the epic story of *Florante at Laura* and the two novels of Jose Rizal (*Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*) that were considered the apogee of being ‘Filipino’. What is interesting about these myths is their inscription in the national psyche as ‘Filipino’ despite having originated from various provinces and regions in the archipelago.

The influence of characters serialized from the local and hugely popular *komiks* became the basis for the creation of several films. Film professor Nicanor Tiongson claims that Filipino cinematic tradition has been derived from Philippine theater. These theatrical genres that found cinematic incarnations include *komedya*, *sinakulo*, *zarzuela drama* and *bodabil*, which bears a distinctly Spanish origin (1980, 84). Furthermore, Nick Deocampo’s book *Cine: Spanish Influences on Early Cinema in the Philippines* proclaimed that Philippine Cinema’s earliest beginnings not only had international origins but that these historical lineages raise questions about the evolving identities of its people (Deocampo 2003).

II. *The Republic of Filipinos: Nation and Cinema*

National cinema has been traditionally known as being tied to the nation and the cinematic outputs that it produced. However, with the various definitions accorded to *nation*, as well as various other erasures that hegemonic ethnic groups and ideologies impose upon smaller and fringe cultures within the country, the idea of nation and the idea of a national cinema should not concentrate on homogeneity as its defining feature, but as a site of conflict that recognizes the multiplicities and the plural group of identities.

In 1983, Filipino historian Rafael Maria Guerrero proclaimed “The country’s cinema reflect the peculiarities of its society ... and the moral worth of movies as a popular medium ultimately corresponds to a society’s collective mentality” (1983, 1). Guerrero, editing a book called *Readings in Philippine Cinema* which was commissioned and published by the state-sanctioned Experimental Cinema of the Philippines (ECP), was actually referring to Tagalog cinema when he talked about ‘society’ and ‘society’s collective mentality’. His essay paid little attention to the filmic cultures outside of Manila and other Tagalog-speaking regions of Luzon. Guerrero’s underscoring of the hegemony of Tagalog cinema as representing the archipelago’s filmic cultures, points to the problematic assumption that cinemas outside of Tagalog-speaking regions do not have relevance in the country’s filmic traditions. According to Teddy Co, an essay was written in 1937 called *Ang Pelikulang Tagalog*³⁸ was written to standardize and propagate Tagalog as the national language for Philippine cinema (Co interview, 2006).

Tiongson, who formerly served as chief of the Movies and Television Ratings Classificatory Board (MTRCB), says that the concept of the nation and its attendant national culture has to be ‘rooted in the experiences of the people’ (2007 interview). He notes that the nation is a political construct, therefore the enlargement of the concept of ‘national cinema’ as constituting certain people, has to be unpacked. The Philippines gained its independence from the United States by becoming a republic in 1946. Tiongson claims that the idea of a nation in the case of the Philippines is a product of colonization or one that carries ‘a national opprobrium’ (2007 interview).

It is worth noting that it was in 1898 when the Philippines gained its freedom after more than 300 years of Spanish colonization that the idea of the “First Filipino” was declared

³⁸ Tagalog Cinema

and instituted. This was a category created and consolidated by Spain for its own end. To the Spanish, 'Filipinos' are Christianized groups within the country that had been under Spanish rule and such citizens bear Spanish last names (Constantino 1978). The Moros in Muslim-dominated Mindanao and the Igorot highlanders in northern Luzon are not included in this typology and hence, are not 'Filipinos'. Historian Renato Constantino explains the origins of the term 'Filipino' in his book *Dissent and Counter-Consciousness*:

It is important to bear in mind that the term Filipino originally referred to the creoles - the Spaniards born in the Philippines - the Españoles-Filipinos or Filipinos, for short. The natives were called indios. Spanish mestizos who could pass off for white claimed to be creoles and therefore Filipinos. Towards the last quarter of the 19th century, Hispanized and urbanized indios along with Spanish mestizos and sangley mestizos began to call themselves Filipinos, especially after the abolition of the tribute lists in the 1880s and the economic growth of the period. (Constantino 1970, 136-137.)

If 1946 is the benchmark year when the country became an independent country and was proclaimed a republic, then the national cinema would officially use that year as its originary timeframe. Nick Deocampo contends that whether it is 1898 or 1946, it is worth considering that cinema as older than the Philippines' formation into a nation. The film output of Thomas Edison in 1899 up to the 1912 and the films about Jose Rizal created by American filmmakers all bear closer scrutiny, if we are to understand how the present films that carry a Filipino signifier have been influenced by the colonial powers that occupied the country. The bestowal of a national identity in films is problematic because the term 'Filipino' has to acknowledge the colonial underpinnings for which it was framed. Filipino cinema should not be limited to Tagalog-speaking films but to the plurality of voices that originate from other regions across the country.

Deocampo likes to call early Filipino films the products of ‘Hispanic natives’. He was contesting the assertion of Filipino film scholar and filmmaker Clodualdo del Mundo about the so-called native resistance in Filipino films. Who was that native and what forms of film resistance were these? Although *zarzuela* and *moro-moro* were the earliest resistance to Hollywood films that were screened and produced in the Philippines, one must realize that *zarzuela* and *moro-moro* are themselves colonial products from Spain. Deocampo derides the inadequacies of empirical information that led film historians to assume that early Filipino filmic resistance to Hollywood takes the form of indigenized *zarzuelas*, *moro-moro* and *sinakulo*. Resistance also can take the form of formal and thematic resistance. The former, he insists, inverts the form of the film medium, while the latter deals with the inversion of the ideological *status quo*. More importantly, native resistance in films had to be framed in the cultural milieu that understands who is ‘native’.

Controversially, film historian Teddy Co notes that for him, while a Filipino film means that it is done by a Filipino and about Filipino life, he is willing to expand the definition and claim that “a foreigner can also make a Filipino film as long as s/he immerses in the local culture” (Co interview, 2006). This immersion in local culture is also underscored by film scholar Patrick Flores, who dismisses the film programmers from film festivals abroad who “parachute in the country and take away the interesting, the curious and the strange” (Flores interview, 2006). The lack of film research about film contexts and very little acquaintance with the culture that Flores attributes to film programmers, assisted in the perpetuation of the image of the country’s cinema as curious and strange.

III. *The State of Philippine Cinema*

When asked about the current state of Philippine cinema, a majority of the respondents said that it is either “comatose”, “dying”, “dead”, or as filmmaker Gil Portes said, “between 110 years and death” (Portes interview, 2006). These pessimistic views of current Philippine cinema arise for two major reasons: (1) the decline in viewership due to competition from Hollywood films, film piracy, the heavy taxation imposed on films, and (2) the lack of ‘quality’ films that rival or approximate those produced during the two periods of the so-called Golden Age of Cinema (1950-59; 1976-86).

The decline in film viewership was blamed on the persistent economic recession that the country endured. While 150-200 films were produced annually in the 1970s, only 50 and 30 films were produced in 2005 and 2006, respectively (interviews with R. Tolentino, P. Flores & K. de la Cruz, 2006). University of the Philippines professor and current president of the Film Desk of the Young Critics Circle (YCC) Patrick Flores maintains that the decline also coincided with the fall of President Marcos in 1986. The creation of the post-Marcos democratic space did not encourage creativity in the field of film. This was aggravated by the deaths of Filipino *auteurs* Lino Brocka and Ishmael Bernal a few years after President Aquino took office. The demise of these two ‘architects of Philippine cinema’ created a gap between the Brocka/Bernal and post-Brocka/Bernal periods in which no filmmakers emerged to continue their legacy. According to film scholar Roland Tolentino, “Philippine cinema grappled for 20 years as to what images it will show to an international film market” (Tolentino interview, 2006).

Flores also attributes the decline to a dearth of film criticism and critical discourse in Philippine cinema, which contributed to the steady downward slide. He identifies the rise in

popularity of the award-giving bodies in the Philippines as the culprit. FAMAS (Filipino Academy of Movie Arts and Sciences) once was the only film institution that gave film citations for technical excellence and performances. Instituted in 1952, FAMAS is composed of newspaper editors, writers, reporters and movie columnists. As of the present, there are several award-giving bodies ranging from the Film Academy of the Philippines and the Gawad Urian (Critics Prize) to the Catholic Mass Media Award and Star Awards. Flores claims that awards are not necessary requirements for film criticism. Honed by this type of practice, the Filipino audience only pays attention to the films when they are awarded a prize, Flores added. He further laments the audience's clamor for awards, rather than film criticism, essays, symposia and a discursive level of film appreciation. The YCC that Flores currently heads has attempted to remedy that situation by instituting a practice that creates a space for film discourse to evaluate the merits of films in a given year. Despite this development, Flores claims that YCC is also compromised by giving awards to six categories because "[giving awards] is the only language that the industry understands" (Flores interview, 2006).

The Marcos dictatorship (1972-86) has been identified as a fertile period that sparked angry filmmakers to produce social-realist films that provided a counter-narrative to the government's vision of the country and its plan to transform Manila into the City of Man. This creative period saw a profusion of allegoric films such as *Insyang*, *Maynila*, *Sa Mga Kuko ng Liwanag* and *Bayan Ko; Kapit sa Patalim*, that provided a sharp-edge critique of what filmmaker Jeffrey Jeturian says "the lies of regime". Another filmmaker, Celso Ad. Castillo, goes further by asserting that the dreaded Martial Law "contributed a lot to the achievement of Philippine movies" (Castillo interview, 2006). He claims that this is also the period when he created one of his best films – *Burlesk Queen* (Burlesque Queen, 1977),

although he is quick to say that “movies done right remain a classic regardless of period because of a certain timelessness to it”. When Marcos left the scene, there was a loss of the creative spark among filmmakers. Flores says “suddenly there was no longer a common enemy and filmmakers could not find a post-Marcos idiom because the context became complex” (Flores interview, 2006). This complex challenge owing to the sudden disappearance of Marcos did not produce new filmic allegories for more than 20 years, until the newer filmmakers were heralded as heir-apparents to Brocka and Bernal.

The post-Marcos administrations that followed were blamed for their apathy towards the film industry. Heavy taxes were imposed even during the administration of Joseph Estrada, a former actor. Jeturian lamented this lack of interest in films as emblematic of the government’s lack of patronage for the arts in general, and films in particular “unlike Imelda Marcos who made arts alive during the Marcos regime” (Jeturian interview, 2006). Filmmaker Mario O’Hara concurs when he recalled how acclaimed filmmaker Eddie Romero announced publicly that Philippine cinema is dying due to the way the films are heavily taxed. O’Hara says that the Marcos administration ignored Romero’s plea to lower the taxes on films. “Even now, that problem [of heavy taxation] is still a problem in the present government” (O’Hara interview, 2006).

Tolentino maintains that because it is cheap to import Hollywood films to the country, there was no encouragement of Filipino film circulation. Hollywood films with strong opening weekends crippled the already weak Filipino film patronage. With the simultaneous worldwide screening of films such as *Spiderman*, *X-Men* and *Batman* on their respective opening days, film viewership has shifted toward these Hollywood blockbuster films. Acclaimed Filipino films like Jeturian’s *Pila Balde* (Fetch a Pail of Water, 1999) and

Aureus Solito's *Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros* (The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros, 2005) had to be exhibited abroad and given an award before they could get a theatrical release in the country (Figure 19). Film piracy also diminished the audience in movie houses, as unauthorized copies of videos turn up in various malls and streets of the metropolis. Having distinctive categories from 'clear copy' to 'DVD copy', these pirated videos thrive despite the various raids that occurred in the metropolis and confiscated copies of pirated videos.³⁹



Figure 19. Aureus Solito, *Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros*, 2005.

Yet despite the grim prognosis by Filipino film practitioners for the current state of Philippine cinema, some interviewees acknowledged that the independent and low-cost cinema and the so-called digital revolution have democratized filmmaking practices in the country, and injected new and fresher blood to the film industry (Tolentino interview, 2006).

³⁹ Pirated videos bearing a 'Clear copy' classification are actually films with grainy resolutions. These versions are initial pressings from the illegal activities of recording the films in movie houses. A 'DVD copy' on the other hand carries the clearest resolution of images. The 'DVD copy' contains all the features of a legitimate DVD except that it is on Region 0, which means it can be played on any DVD player around the world.

Digital filmmaker Khavn de la Cruz, hailed as the prime mover for the digital filmmaking movement, said that new works are created because of the accessibility of technology that made digital filmmaking easier. He observed that in 2006 alone, more digital films have been created and had debuts not only in local theaters but also in international film festivals. He also noted that movie theaters are now equipped to show digital films in the Philippines, unlike earlier, when the format only favored the screening of reel-based films.

There were also concerns raised that independent filmmakers whose initial forays into filmmaking might be co-opted by the mainstream film studios and that this may lead to the creation and perpetuation of non-challenging materials that mainstream media has been known for producing. Portes and Flores feared that this co-optation has a greater chance of happening but they also admit that the incorporation of ‘indie’ ideas into mainstream film and television may popularize the new medium.

When discussions revolved around possible tie-ups with foreign companies for a film project, O’Hara was very vocal about his disapproval. He says that the business venture of Filipino movies engaging in foreign co-production is not a good idea. Citing *Goodbye America* (1997) as an example, O’Hara claims that it was a slap to all Filipino directors when Thierry Notz was hired to direct the film. *Goodbye America* which tells the story of three sisters in the years following the exit of the U.S. bases from the country, received unanimously bad reviews. Notz would not direct another film after this, and ABS-CBN (the movie conglomerate which financed the whole undertaking) abandoned all future plans to engage in foreign co-production. O’Hara emphatically concludes: “*Sana hindi na maulit uli iyon kasi parang akala ng iba walang talent dito sa atin*”⁴⁰ emphasizing the loss of a national

⁴⁰ “I seriously hope that endeavor will not happen again because it makes it appear that there is a dearth of talent in this country by hiring foreigners” – Mario O’Hara interview, 2006.

character to such co-productions. This observation was in direct contrast to the study made by Mette Hjort about foreign co-productions involving Nordic cinema (2005). Hjort discusses how Danish cinema encouraged co-productions as a means of de-nationalizing their films and making them appealing for the international market. Distancing one's self from a definable national-cultural referent appears to be anathema in Philippine cinema since *Goodbye America*. That experience also bade goodbye to filmic co-productions.

IV. *What is Golden in the Golden Age of Philippine Cinema*

The term *First Golden Age of Philippine Cinema* was applied to the decade of the 1950s. Although no documentation exists to pinpoint the person who called it the First Golden Age of Philippine Cinema, various respondents claim that it was filmmaker Eddie Romero who famously proclaimed it. During this period, the presence of the so-called Big Four contributed to the production of 350 films that were produced annually.⁴¹ These studios were able to attract and recruit the acknowledged master Filipino filmmakers during this period, filmmakers such as Gerardo de Leon, Lamberto Avellana, Manuel Conde, Manuel Silos, Gregorio Fernandez, Vicente Salumbides and Cesar Gallardo (Garcia 1972). This is also the decade when the much-heralded film of Manuel Conde – *Genghis Khan* – competed in Venice in 1952. American novelist and film critic James Agee championed *Genghis Khan* as an excellent film, which in turn served as the turning point that not only catapulted *Genghis Khan* into Filipino film legend, but also made people believe that the decade of the 1950s was the country's most fertile period and placed the Philippines on the cinematic map of the world. Celso Ad. Castillo says that when Filipino films become recognized abroad

⁴¹ These Big Four film studios include LVN Pictures, Sampaguita Pictures, Premiere Productions and Lebran International.

then “we can say we are world-class” (Castillo interview, 2006). This quest to have international distribution also led to what Tolentino and Flores claim was the tendency of some filmmakers to pander to the taste of an international film community by creating films that replicate what has been done before.

It is also worth noting that *Genghis Khan*’s identification as a Filipino film due to its international success, revolves around the story of a non-Filipino character. Manuel Conde, who directed and starred as the titular character in *Genghis Khan*, made sure it had resonance for the movie-going public by making the spoken dialogues Tagalog, which served the purpose of standardizing Tagalog as a language everyone in the Philippines could understand and identify. Yet despite Conde’s popularity during this period, the Second Golden Age of Philippine Cinema blurred his importance because Bernal, and especially Brocka, were hailed as the two most important filmmakers the Philippines ever produced. Flores opines that if Philippine Cinema can be personified by a filmmaker, it should have been Conde and not Brocka, owing to the path-breaking strides that Conde made in the 1950s that opened the doors for other Filipino filmmakers to follow (Flores interview, 2006).

Films that do not match the quality of the films produced during the Golden Age of Philippine Cinema exist in an interstitial space. Most film historians deride the decade of the 1960s as the era of the exploitative *bomba* that used sex and violence to attract a film audience, as well as the rise of the *bakya* crowd⁴² (Lacaba, 1983). This period also marked the collapse of the Big Four, brought about by a growing labor movement that demanded higher wages and better working conditions for film workers (Lumbera 1981). This allowed smaller film outfits to thrive. This represented a transition period between the first and

⁴² *Bakya* refers to the wooden clogs worn mostly by working class women. The *bakya* crowd are people traditionally referred to as economically underprivileged.

second Golden Ages (1976-1986) but it is also the period between the beginning stages of turbulence and mass unrest in this period “and their symbolic eruptions in the popular arts” (Lumbera 1981, 75).

The Second Golden Age was identified as the period from 1976 to 1986, which falls under the Marcos Administration. Film historians note that 1976 produced classics such as *Ganito Kami Noon Paano Kayo Ngayon*, *Insyang*, *Minsa’y Isang Gamu-Gamu* (Once A Moth) and *Itim* (The Rites of May). Outstanding filmmakers who were closely identified with the Second Golden Age include: Lino Brocka, Ishmael Bernal, Mike de Leon, Peque Gallaga, Celso Ad. Castillo, Eddie Romero, Laurice Guillen, Gil Portes, Mario O’Hara, Marilou Diaz Abaya and Mel Chionglo. Filmmaker Mario O’Hara attributes the blossoming of the second Golden Age of Cinema to the worldwide film movements inspired and influenced by the French Nouvelle Vague. With the collapse of the studio system, filmmakers turned to independent production. But it is not only the filmmakers who shaped this period, but also the arrival of new production designers, writers, editors and a new attitude towards film and filmmaking (del Mundo interview, 2006). These attitudes and values are projected in the films that were created.

Flores contends that this arbitrary periodization for the second Golden Age neglects other films that were produced outside of this period. For example, Brocka’s *Tinimbang Ka Ngunit Kulang* (You Were Weighed and Were Found Wanting, 1974) was not included in the Golden Age even if the film is now considered a high water mark of Philippine filmic achievement (Flores interview, 2006) (Figure 20). The choice of 1976 as the origin coincides with the completion of the above-mentioned films in that year. Other films made before 1976 were deemed to be the same caliber except for rare exceptions. The repressive Marcos

period, ironically, spawned numerous films that were later hailed as classics. Philippine cinema under Marcos made possible a dialogue between the filmmakers and the Marcos dictatorship through the former's subversive films and the anti-fascist struggles. Brocka and Bernal showed poverty and the claustrophobic feeling of the 'squatters' to highlight the images that Marcos refused to show.



Figure 20. Lino Brocka, *Tinimbang Ka Ngunit Kulang*, 1974.

The democratic space during the post-Marcos period did not produce the same quality as the films that received critical acclaim both nationally and internationally. While it is debated what distinguishes a 'quality' film from the mediocre ones, Flores said that the issue of ascribing a Golden Age to Philippine Cinema reflects the snobbery that puts premium on 'quality' films when they reap major awards both locally and internationally. Furthermore, the rather specific and limiting timeline of 1976 to 1986 as the second Golden Age of Cinema is problematic because it neglects the historical and cultural significance of other

films that were completed before and after that period, like the aforementioned *Tinimbang Ka Nguni't Kulang*. This division into Golden Ages is a function of an evolutionist historiography that characterizes a film culture as having an origin and mature stages, in which pioneering films set the stage for the emergence of *auteurs* and their list of film 'achievements'.

V. The Filipino in Filipino Films, or the Post-National in National Cinema

Being Filipino becomes a difficult and intractable subject when the issue of identity is introduced to brand a film as Filipino. The issue of identity becomes mired in the issue of the national, as evidenced by President Marcos' manipulation of the discourse of Filipino identity to prop up his regime. The propaganda films he commissioned, like *Hari sa Hari, Lahi sa Lahi* (The King and Emperor, 1986), *Aguila* (Eagle, 1980) and *Iginuhit ng Tadhana: The Ferdinand Marcos Story* (1965),⁴³ along with commissioning his image and Imelda's as the modern-day incarnation of *Malakas at Maganda*,⁴⁴ were supposed to create a meta-narrative for the country's citizens about a homogeneous Filipino nation.⁴⁵ Flores claims that the whole idea of a Filipino identity in films is a static concept because 'being Filipino' is a contested subjectivity that cannot be reduced to ethnicity or race alone. However, he admits

⁴³ *Iginuhit ng Tadhana* literally means 'written by fate'.

⁴⁴ Although it varies from region to region, the image and mythology of *Malakas at Maganda* (strong and beautiful) is of their emerging and descending from their bamboo origins became the first Filipinos.

⁴⁵ Eddie Romero, who directed the two films, admitted that he is friends with the Marcoses, especially Imelda Marcos, but did not elaborate how he was approached to produce these films as the country's narrative.

that the dominant discourse of 'being Filipino' can also be strategic if it has radical potential.⁴⁶

Tiongson maintains that the search for an authentic Filipino is a vain search. Filipinos in various regions of the country underwent vastly different historical and geographical processes. The recognition of the heterogeneity and plurality of cultures within the national frame is a helpful first step. Imagining a nation also considers the country's various fringe cultures and how they enrich the cultural palette. This heterogeneity extends itself in the theoretical discourses of imagining history and the country's myths. While this supports Anderson's concept of imagined communities where the lack of face-to-face interaction among citizens unifies them through a common medium, Anderson did not imagine that people could fundamentally disagree with each other on how they view the nation.

Acclaimed film writer and historian Clodualdo del Mundo says that *Bayaning Third World*, for which he wrote the screenplay, rethinks Jose Rizal as the country's national hero. The film's screenplay was based on the famous article called 'Veneration Without Understanding', written by Filipino nationalist scholar Renato Constantino in 1970. By revisiting the myth of Rizal through the film, del Mundo wanted to reach out to a younger audience to engage them with this important history lesson. The film, however, bombed at the box office and del Mundo muses that it must have been because it was too different from the current crop of 'intellectual' films. He also felt that *Bayaning Third World* is too experimental for the commercial audience.

The fate of *Bayaning Third World* is similar to alternative filmmaker Kidlat Tahimik's films. Known among the international film audience on the strength of

⁴⁶ Flores cites examples such as the mobilization of Filipino laborers abroad to suspend their services to foreign institutions if their demands for better wages and more humane treatment are not met.

Mababangong Bangungot (Perfumed Nightmare, 1976), Tahimik is not a household name in the Philippines. *Mababangong Bangungot* won the International Critics Award at the Berlin Film Festival in 1977, where it has been hailed as a model of guerilla filmmaking and a throwback to the aesthetics of Third Cinema. Werner Herzog and Francis Ford Coppola's Zoetrope Films assisted in the eventual release and international circulation of the film. *Mababangong Bangungot* has provoked a flurry of scholarly debate in response to Fredric Jameson's assertion in 1992 that the film is a postmodernist pastiche and bricolage that illustrates the embeddedness of a Third World culture within late-capitalist networks. In the film, Kidlat Tahimik played a character whose fascination with progress in general and aircraft technologies in particular led to his travels to Europe and his eventual realization of the dangers of capital accumulation. Tahimik maintains that a Filipino film should depict a certain sensibility that "embraces our colonial contradictions, our aspirations" (Tahimik interview, 2006). Employing the European brand of magical-realist film that influenced his work, Tahimik explicitly underlines his point about Filipinos: "We are sleeping typhoons locked in our colonial cocoons" (Tahimik interview 2006).

O'Hara agrees with Tahimik in the use of magical-realism to make the Filipino film viewers pay attention to his film. His much-lauded film *Babae sa Breakwater* (Woman of the Breakwater, 2005) was created because "magical realism is nothing new in the country" (O'Hara interview, 2006). His use of popular Philippine folklore and supernaturalism to portray the poor conditions of urban dwellers in Manila is something that appeals to the Filipinos' particular fascination for the realist and the magical. His next project, *Vida Sari*, is a Malayan epic that hopes to depict the "root of Philippine culture and civilization". O'Hara says that he hopes it will be his last film to be shot using 16mm film because he will try his

hand at digital filmmaking after that. He is aiming for *Vida Sari* to be shown in schools so students can understand why certain contemporary cultural traits can be traced to early practices. He cites the penchant for making poetic declamations among Filipinos, even in jest, as bearing an historical affinity to the oratorical art form called *Balagtasan*. Historical epics portraying figures have proved to have staying power beyond their box-office record. This is especially true since the educational system at the elementary and secondary levels makes the viewing of Filipino films depicting historical events now mandatory.

Queer filmmaker Will Fredo, on the other hand, wanted to re-write the perceived trope of Filipino films as always teeming with slums, political unrest and white slavery. His film *Compound* (2006) was shot in an upper middle class urban residential area in Manila. He said that he wanted to create an alternative view of the Philippines, where people live in better neighborhoods with nicer amenities. Although *Compound* touched on national issues like kidnapping, bombing, illegal drugs and terrorism, he made the reference to actual events more blurry and less obvious. Yet Fredo wants to show that the problems besetting the poor are also similar to the people who live in compounds, the bastions of middle to upper-middle class dwellers. Despite *Compound*'s ruminative tone, Fredo wants to make the viewers identify with the dilemmas of the characters, and also to provide a narrative re-telling of typical Filipino films whose settings are not in urban slums.

On the other end of the spectrum is Celso Ad. Castillo. Unapologetic about the films he made that imitated and parodied the popular Hollywood films for Filipino consumption, Castillo says that it is not his intention to make a film that carries a Filipino cultural referent because he says it makes the film 'pretentious'. He openly admits that he was a copycat of more successful foreign films but that imitation also played a huge role in making him

expand his cinematic repertoire and be conversant with many filmic styles. This relates to the immortal scene in *Bituing Walang Ningning* and its acknowledgement of imitation. The film simultaneously recognizes imitation as part of the milieu, but dismisses it. Castillo's brand of copycat cinema embraces the richness offered by the stylistics of foreign films and, although he is not as resourceful as Kidlat Tahimik, both filmmakers appropriate Third Cinema in the cannibalization of foreign films and create a product that has Filipino registers.

Castillo writes the screenplays to all his films so that he can exercise greater freedom in terms of content, approach and mode of address. He admits to placing more importance on the visual aspect because as he says "a good movie has to be visual even without dialogues" (Castillo interview, 2006). His main influence draws heavily from the NewWave filmmakers, not only in France but also in Germany and Italy. He considers the New Wave filmmaking that swept the 1960s in Europe and elsewhere to be "closest to life".

Similarly, Eddie Romero cites European films as the inspiration for his films. Cited by Quentin Tarantino as influential to his own films, Romero acknowledges that there is no intention to explicitly address the ideological issue of Filipino-ness when he makes his own films. In *Ganito Kami Noon Paano Kayo Ngayon*, Romero admits that he wrote the screenplay out of extreme boredom. Being involved with Francis Ford Coppola's production of *Apocalypse Now* at that time, Romero patterned his film after picaresque films like *Tom Jones*. Despite winning most of the awards that year, Romero says *Ganito Kami Noon Paano Kayo Ngayon* was intended as a travelogue of the Philippines during the end of the Spanish era. For all his refusal to categorize his film to fit a nationalist agenda, *Ganito Kami Noon Paano Kayo Ngayon* is one of the required films shown annually to college students as part of an introductory course on Philippine history. As Tolentino insists: "even if the intention of

the director for his/her film goes this way, one can have an open reading and dialogue with the texts and have political and even subversive readings” (Tolentino interview, 2006)

(Figure 21).



Figure 21. Eddie Romero, *Ganito Kami Noon Paano Kayo Ngayon?*, 1976.

The issue of film spectatorship is also a tenuous one. Gil Portes recalls that his own *Munting Tinig* (Little Voices, 2003) was not a box-office draw in the Philippines but it made good business abroad. He narrated how the mostly Filipino audience who watched the film when it was shown in New York and California, where a large contingent of Filipinos reside, were reduced to tears after the film screening. Portes himself lives half the time in New York and half the time shuttling between his Manila and Barcelona homes. He made what he considered the first diasporic film called *Miss X* in 1979, which was followed by his critically-acclaimed *Merika* in 1982. Both films made box-office profits in the Philippines

when they came out because of his strategic casting of two of Philippine cinema's foremost actresses in both films – Vilma Santos and Nora Aunor. He maintains that his films occasionally borrow from foreign materials for inspiration but it is his job to imbue them with a sensibility that is “uniquely and distinctively Pinoy”.⁴⁷ In the case of *Munting Tinig*, he said he was inspired by Majid Majidi's *Children of Heaven* (1997). Although he did not specify what constitutes the ‘Pinoy sensibility’ present in his films, he said that a Filipino film ‘can be shot abroad as long as it is distinctively Pinoy but with a universal message’ (Portes interview, 2006). Film historian and self-described ‘filmologist’ Teddy Co insists that “there is no such thing as a pure, unfettered and essentialist Filipino film” because foreign influences are natural and real (Co interview, 2006).

Khavn de la Cruz balks at the suggestion of Filipino-ness in his own digital-format films. His intention was to popularize the use of digital technology as an alternative to the expensive 16mm and 35mm film formats. Although hailed as the pioneer of the digital film movement in his country, he is also a transgressor of the film's form through his daring experimentations. His films range from the slum dwellers in Quezon City to subterranean people who eat soil. By refusing to define his films as Filipino despite the local color that animates them, Khavn aligns himself with other filmmakers like Yam Laranas who de-contextualize the image of the Philippines in their films. Flores says that, unlike Laranas and Khavn, many filmmakers “peddles [sic] Filipino contexts for the sake of verisimilitude” (Flores interview, 2006).

This type of post-nationality in films resists the propensity to nationalize questions of identity, community and culture (Higson 2000). In light of the Philippine diaspora, labor migration and globalization, several contemporary films have been exploring various Filipino

⁴⁷ Pinoy is a colloquial name for Filipino (usually male). Its feminine counterpart is Pinay.

facets of life, where ascribing a sole identity to a Filipino is a roadblock to understanding the complexity of its national dynamics.

VI. *Pito-Pito Films: The Fast and the Cheap*

The so-called *pito-pito* films take their name from the studio's initial policy of completing each phase of pre-production, production, and post-production in seven days each. Lily Monteverde, the so-called grand matriarch of the shoestring *pito-pito* production, headed the biggest film studio, Regal Films. Adopted in the wake of the decline of film profits, the economizing efforts gave several new directors a start, and some have distinguished themselves as promising innovators. One of the most successful to emerge from this type of film production is Jeffrey Jeturian, whose first film debut in 1997 called *Sana Pag-ibig Na* (Hoping for Love This Time, 1998), for which he was hailed as the arrival of an heir-apparent to Lino Brocka. Together with Lav Diaz and Raymond Red, Jeturian was viewed as one of the new filmmakers to be accorded such distinctions from a film industry anxious to encourage promising filmmakers with daring visions in the post-Brocka, post-Bernal film scene.

Jeturian confessed that Ms. Monteverde provides a budget of two million pesos to the film director who agrees to the business and work ethic of her *pito-pito* film production⁴⁸. It is this guerilla-type of filmmaking that allowed him to experiment and create films that were artistically-challenging but commercially-risky. He remembers how watching *Manila in the Claws of Neon* changed his life and made him decide to become not only a filmmaker but one whose films always have political undertones or provide a social commentary.

⁴⁸ Ms. Monteverde imposes certain limitations that should be strictly adhered to: (1) 10 shooting days only, and (2) the use of 20,000 ft. of film negatives. (Source: Jeffrey Jeturian interview, 2006)



Figure 22. Jeffrey Jeturian, *Kubrador*, 2006

Jeturian's *Pila Balde* (Fetch a Pail of Water, 1999) was the film that made Filipino film critics and the movie-going public hail him as a new filmmaker of great distinction. Wary of the criticism that haunted most Brocka films that dealt with life in Manila slums, Jeturian directed *Pila Balde* to "show life as it really is among Filipinos" and avoid the fetishization of abject urban poverty (Jeturian interview, 2006). Instead of the unending squalor that Brocka favored as a critique of the quagmire that the country fell into under the Marcos regime, Jeturian on the other hand, showed the resilience of Filipinos living under those conditions and their unrelenting will to survive. Along with *Tuhog* (Larger Than Life, 2001) and his most recent film *Kubrador* (The Bet Collector, 2006), he made his actors absorb the local color of their *milieu* to become as authentic and ethnographically accurate as possible (Figure 22). Jeturian confessed that he would not have been allowed to adopt these approaches had it not been for the *pito-pito* filmmaking ethic that made this possible. Although it was designed to cash in on these low-cost films, *pito-pito* bears more than a

resemblance to Third Cinema's low- to no-budget film practices, and its resolute determination to show the conditions and survival of the most abject of subjects.

VII. *Digital Revolution, or How Indie is Indie?*

Mario O'Hara sums up digital filmmaking in the country as "anything goes, *kasi lahat puede*".⁴⁹ The digital format for making films has been embraced by young and mostly first-time filmmakers. The technology produced clearer image resolutions, is affordable and has the requisite features to allow more experimentation with the medium without having to incur high costs. Digital filmmaking was branded as the Digital Revolution to emphasize the growing popularity and accessibility of the technological facility. Suddenly anyone can shoot a film. Jeturian notes that the digital phenomenon is providing an outlet for filmmakers to be creative and not be stuck in the formula that mainstream filmmaking has been known to lapse into. Teddy Co observed that "Philippine cinema is already in the obituary page" (Co interview, 2006), before digital filmmaking arrived. Co considers this an exciting period not only for the institutional support that encourages first-time filmmakers, but because the Digital Revolution broadened filmmaking activity. For instance, Cell Phone Cinema has been thriving as a result of the Digital Revolution (interviews with Flores, Co & Khavn, 2006).

Khavn de la Cruz⁵⁰, hailed for his pioneering and ground-breaking digital films like *Bahag Kings* (G-String Kings, 2006) and *Iskwaterpangk* (Squatterpunk, 2007), creates as many as eight new films annually (de la Cruz interview, 2006). Billed as the "Che Guevara

⁴⁹ "Anything goes because anything is possible" – Mario O'Hara interview, 2006.

⁵⁰ Khavn de la Cruz goes by the name of Khavn.

of digital filmmaking”⁵¹ and the “Lars Von Trier of the Philippines”⁵², Khavn considers digital filmmaking in the Philippines as a venue to discuss and present various and alternative filmic views not tackled by mainstream filmmakers. Digital filmmaking “democratizes filmmaking and the topics and themes not dealt with before can now be done and expressed” (Khavn interview, 2006). He also notes that the quality of images for the DV (digital video) and HD DVD (high definition digital versatile disc) formats is improving and has become affordable. As a sign that the digital films have slowly gained headway, local movie theaters now carry equipment to screen these digital films.

Khavn, who studied under film *auteur* Kidlat Tahimik, has the grasp of Third Cinema aesthetics although he refused to see his work as Third Cinema. His website attests to his subversive filmic *oeuvre* and his fascination with unsettling the formal conventions of cinema.⁵³ European film critic Olaf Moeller of *Film Comment* calls him a “Filipino Renaissance Man” because of his prolific output and for breaking new ground in the cinematic tradition of the country. His own “This is not a Film by Khavn de la Cruz” production ethos de-centers film with a fixed identity. Khavn believes that even the act of making a film should be an on-going process and one that encourages debate.

Patrick Flores sees the digital filmmaking as transitional cinema but not necessarily new cinema, as it did not break new ground---especially in rewriting the language of film. O’Hara agrees with this assessment but he also predicts that after the explosion of ideas brought about by digitalization, “things will settle down eventually” (O’Hara interview, 2006). Digital filmmaking has been synonymous with the rise of independent filmmakers

⁵¹ Jose Victor Marin, festival director of the La Palma International Digital Film Festival (Spain).

⁵² Julian Fonfrede, Montreal Festival of New Cinema.

⁵³ <http://kantiasroad.com/khavn/index.htm>

who do not have to secure financial backing from a major producer to create a film. Being independent is nothing new in this country according to O'Hara, who claims that independent filmmaking started in the decade of the 1960's when the major studios collapsed. On the other hand, Flores counsels that being an 'independent' cinema practitioner in the Philippines should not be reduced to the use of the digital film medium. Mainstream movie conglomerates and media companies like ABS-CBN and GMA have been trying to bank on the popularity of independent filmmaking by creating made-for-TV movies, feature-length films and television series that use the digital format. Portes fears that the so-called 'indie' filmmakers are actually creating films because they are waiting in the wings to be picked up and co-opted by the mainstream industry. GMA and ABS-CBN, the two giant media companies in the Philippines, operate not only to produce films and television but also are in print media, recordings studios, telecommunications, and others. This set-up is a throw-back to the studio system in the 1950s with the Big Four. GMA and ABS-CBN have their own pool of writers, film directors, cinematographers and film stars. Collectively, these two media conglomerates have been influential in creating popular culture iconographies for a national constituency (Tolentino interview, 2006).

The arrival of the CineMalaya film festival has provided a venue for digital filmmakers to create outputs that have been synonymously categorized as 'indie'. Most of the digital filmmakers consider themselves to be independent filmmakers, although a number of them have already made the leap from creating independently produced films to ones commissioned by ABS-CBN and GMA. Khavn sees CineMalaya as a 'necessary step' to accommodate the recent output of fledgling filmmakers, but he opines that "[CineMalaya] is not the savior of indie-ness" (Khavn interview, 2006). CineMalaya obtains its funding from

the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) which has led some industry observers to question how much NCCA intervenes in the final film product that is created by ‘indie’ filmmakers.

Philippine cinema, according to Khavn, is seen as a ‘wild card’ from the perspective of international film festivals – or at least in the international film festivals where his films were screened and featured. Khavn views this development favorably because it means that Philippine films cannot be pigeon-holed into something its past cinematic outputs have been known for, or as Khavn says, “it’s a good thing because [Filipino films] push the boundaries”. He cites the unexpected international critical acclaim that greeted *Bahag Kings* as a prime example of pushing the boundaries, considering that the filming was an extended improvisation and did not adhere to any formal filmic standards.⁵⁴

VIII. *Kabaklaan, or the Rise of Queer Films*

In this predominantly Catholic country, no film with a homosexual story has been screened theatrically since cinema’s first inception in the archipelago until Deocampo broke that conservative bubble. Deocampo’s *Oliver* (1982) could probably be the first Filipino film that dealt with this taboo topic. Introduced to the rich filmic traditions of Europe, and especially France where Deocampo took residence for a time, he says that *Oliver* is his angry response to the Marcos regime that produced that society. The film is his own version of “recording the days of the tyrant” (Deocampo interview, 2006).

Tolentino avers that the niche of Philippine cinema in the international film market is one that depicts Third World gayness. He cites the alternative cinema of Nick Deocampo that

⁵⁴ Khavn took his degree in classical music. He claims that his films exhibit varying degrees of musical improvisation.

helped open doors, especially for the creation of queer films. Since *Oliver*, a number of films have surfaced that dealt with homosexuality, such as *Pusong Mamon* (Soft Hearts, 1998), *Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros* and *Ang Lalaki sa Buhay ni Selya* (The Man in Her Life, 1997). But none has created queer films with greater regularity and singularity of purpose than Crisaldo Pablo.

The prime-mover for Penniless Production, Cris Pablo said that contrary to many people's beliefs about Philippine cinema, it is actually in 'renaissance'. If Philippine cinema is dead or "dying for the longest time, how come it is still alive?" (Pablo interview, 2007). For him, 2003 marked the apex in queer filmmaking, when he directed *Duda* (Doubt) – the first queer film that was given a theatrical run. Since then, the door has been forever opened for his and other filmmakers' outputs that dealt with queerness. Although *Masahista* (The Masseur, 2005) became the first Filipino queer film to garner international awards, Pablo insists that *Duda* predates it by two years. Owing to a lack of funds, he was unable to send *Duda* to international festivals to compete. He also maintains that *Masahista* is "not a queer film but with a topical theme involving queer characters" (Pablo interview, 2007).

Appearing in queer films can be a career suicide for any actor who is carving an acting career in Philippine films. Pablo has always used non-actors for his films because he observes that they are 'invisible or anonymous' and can be good because their lack of training makes for a more authentic performance. Since *Duda*, he has employed popular actors as a marketing strategy because "*walang manonood sa pelikula mo kung wala silang kilala ni isang artista*".⁵⁵ Despite the lack of actors the film audience recognizes, *Duda* became a word-of-mouth phenomenon despite very little publicity. He remembers the time

⁵⁵ "No one will watch your film when the audience does not recognize a single actor in the cast".

when he had to personally talk to the management team of SM Cinema⁵⁶ to include *Duda* in their programming. A film patterned after his own life, *Duda* is also his coming-out film, meant to exorcise himself from his past. *Duda* may be the first popular queer film, but it is Pablo's third film (*Bathhouse*) that grossed the most among his films. He attributes that not only to the growing sophistication of the film audience for non-traditional films with non-traditional themes, but also to the main actor who played the lead role, whose tragic story involving drugs and extreme poverty became fodder for tabloid news.

Pablo observes that the international film audience, especially in the so-called First World, always wanted and expected to see films about 'squatters' and slum-dwelling in the Philippines. His own films touched the spectrum of Filipino gay males and females but he says he does not focus on slums, in order not to stereotype Philippine cinema. Interestingly, Pablo never considers his films as 'art films' whose main screenings happen in academic institutions or at the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP). His decision to open *Duda* commercially was his own way to distance his film from the 'art' crowd. He insists that "I am not an artist who makes art films. I am a communicator and my films are not saddled with artistic pretensions". He admits that the censors were not kind to *Duda* because it 'depicts gay promiscuity', yet he soldiered on with each of his successive films, which neither compromised his style nor the frank portrayals of Filipino queerness. His other film *Moreno* (Bronze, 2007) was slapped with an R-18 rating because of a 'homosexual point-of-view toward an indigenous tribe' (Figure 23). He notes that queer films are always given R-18 ratings by default owing to the influence of the Catholic Church, which demonizes queerness. Pablo observes that "digital films and queer films are two very difficult things to

⁵⁶ SM Cinema is the largest moviehouse conglomerate in the Philippines. Owned by business tycoon Henry Sy, 60% of the films shown are Hollywood films.

market in the Philippines”, which explains why no major sponsors associate themselves with queer films. He claims that he had to be savvy in marketing to make sure his films received exposure.

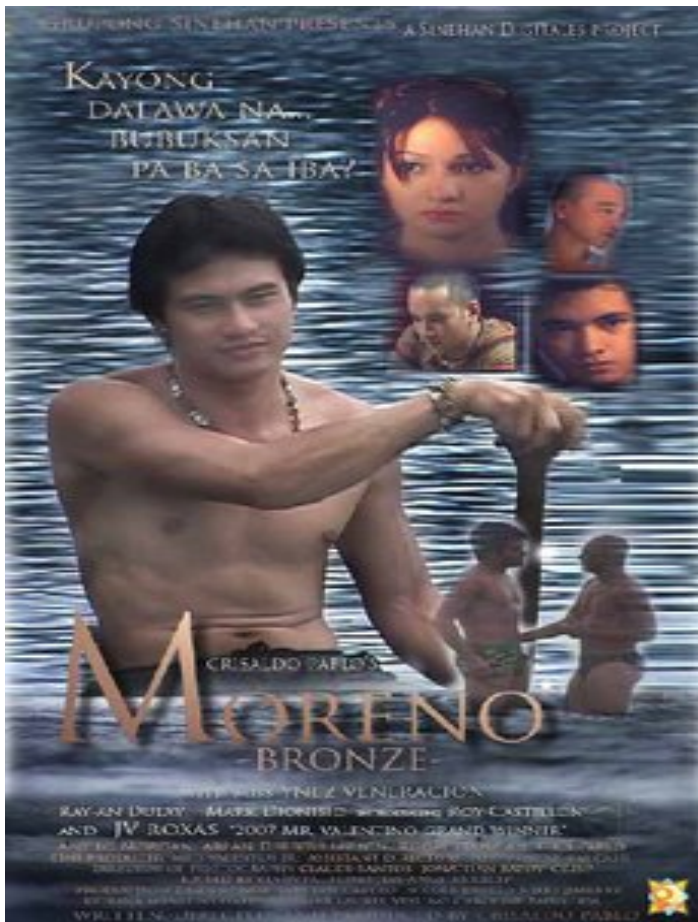


Figure 23. Crisaldo Pablo, *Moreno*, 2007.

Duda, *Bathhouse* and his other film *Bilog* (Circles, 2005) were all released internationally by Water Bearer Films. His other low-budget films have yet to be picked up for distribution. His willingness to experiment with film styles in a Third World setting allowed him to pursue themes that he feels are not adequately represented in Philippine cinema. He claims that his films have a brisk shooting schedule owing to budgetary

constraints. Working around the budget is difficult, but he always manages to stay within the allotted budget for his films. Pablo plans to make more films because, he observed, his films actually make money. He says, “This is proof that there is a kind of queer economy going on that supports queer films”. He cites the presence of Indiesine in a major mall in Metro Manila that dedicates itself to showing independent and queer films. He laughingly notes that his films never received serious film reviews. Pablo thinks that his films are probably not accorded respect because of their technical imperfections rather than the queer themes.

His next projects will be regional and rural in focus. He was pleased with the reception of *Bilog* and *Bathhouse* in the provinces outside of the metropolis. In imagining a queer nation in the Philippines, Pablo thinks that queer stories from the provinces outside of Metro Manila should be heard, and in their own language. Pablo’s insistence on making queer films somehow subversively reversed the popular thinking that no Philippine cinema house will screen a queer film because of a possible backlash from the Catholic Church. In forging a new path, through his daily battles with censors and financiers, he has opened a new door that celebrates the queer nation. Recent films that came out include Will Fredo’s *Pagdapo ng Mariposa* (A Butterfly Alights, 2008) and *Serbis* (Service, 2008), the latter was invited to the 2008 Cannes Film Festival.

IX. Regional Cinema

When did cinema become Filipino? Deocampo’s answer to that question is “When the medium came into the hands of native Filipinos.” (Deocampo interview, 2006). He maintains that the invocation of “Filipino”, which was meant to end the discussion during debates on national identity, is a problematic term. He says that the category of Filipino is

“mixed in the colonial past” (2003, 19) and the nativist assertion that Philippine cinema can only be done by an ethnic Filipino filmmaker is deeply flawed as it neglects the filmmaking traditions that influenced the cinematic articulation that informed the creation of films in succeeding decades. Furthermore, Deocampo asserts that Philippine Cinema has always been Tagalog Cinema because of the dominance of films that were completed with Tagalog as its choice of language. This supports the issue that films were produced in Manila because it is the center of the Catholic culture, which is the most enduring legacy of Spain.

Cinema in the regions outside of Manila produced sporadic output through the years. Most of these films were never shown outside of the region in which they were created. However, Tagalog-language films have been shot in regions outside of Manila, such as *Zamboanga* (South Seas, 1937) in Mindanao. Cebuano and Hiligaynon cinema in the central Philippines have each created films, but these were considered to represent regional cinema as they are not in the hegemonic language of Tagalog. The erasure of regional cinema has placed the efforts of filmmakers who are operating outside of the Metro-Manila outside the reach of radar, and therefore absent. This absence is mainly due to the fact that the so-called regional cinema output never became part of the circuits of circulation in Philippine film distribution.

In recent decades, a smattering of films have kept cinema from Cebu, Iloilo and Bacolod in the Visayas from becoming extinct. More recently, films like J.P. Carpio’s *Balay Daku* (Big House, 2002) and Elvert Bañares’ *Alipo-op sa Animo* (Fog in the Consciousness, 2007) have revived interest in Hiligaynon films (Figure 24).

Aside from the full length feature called *Alipo-op sa Animo*, Bañares has completed 32 short films. A native of Iloilo City, his brand of guerilla filmmaking involved what he

calls “one-man production”. He is quick to admit that his films do not have social relevance because “others can do it better than me”. Influenced by Mike de Leon and the Hiligaynon-speaking Peque Gallaga, he considers Manila-based and Tagalog-centered films as ‘cliquish’



Figure 24. J.P. Carpio, *Balay Daku*, 2002.

because they contributed to the de-emphasis and possible neglect of regional cinema. Long associated with Eksperimento,⁵⁷ Bañares said that part of the attraction for him to make films in the Visayas was a chance to visit his hometown in Iloilo in the central Philippines. He greatly admires the structure and rhythm of the Hiligaynon language, which has allowed him to experiment with its textures and myriad of possibilities. The “beauty of the culture of Iloilo” encouraged him to make a film that showcased its splendor from a native’s perspective. He claims that most of the Tagalog films that were shot on location in his hometown were watered-down versions of the place, because those filmmakers only wanted a regional setting to frame their story. The lack of immersion in local culture disregards the tensions inherent in a place, Bañares opines.

⁵⁷ Eksperimento is a film festival in Manila that accommodates experimental and surreal Filipino films.

While admittedly part of the Digital Revolution that swept the country, Bañares is not reliant on digital technology alone. His films combine new and expanded media to accommodate the surreal demands of his themes. He is dismissive of the new batch of digital filmmakers who think they can make a film just because the technology is accessible and affordable. “There should be a respect of the medium and the material,” he says. Philippine cinema to him is currently un-coordinated and it shows all the worst traits of disunification. He feels that, despite all the regional differences of emerging filmmakers, there should be a ‘unified front’ for both mainstream and independent filmmakers. Bañares is excited about the proliferation of regional film events which he considers ‘unprecedented’, mainly because of the avenues that have been opened up by the Digital Revolution.

Co reports that the Guerilla Filmmaking Workshops and the Mindanao Film Festival in Davao City, Mindanao, was organized in 2003. Rudolph Ian Alama, one of the group’s organizers, communicated with me through email that the goal of the group is “to empower and capacitate [sic] budding filmmakers, enthusiasts, hobbyists or film buffs in the art of making low-cost indie productions with a crash course in filmmaking, with different modules in story development, scriptwriting, cinematography, non-linear digital editing, producing, directing and acting”. Alama says that the group wanted to present Mindanao in a vastly different light from the Mindanao portrayed in popular Tagalog films. He observes that films made about Mindanao have a “tendency to be irritatingly preachy ... symptomatic of a black-and-white understanding of the complex situation in Mindanao” (email correspondence with R.I. Alama, October 10, 2007).

Deocampo insists that if we are forging a national cinema, then it should consider the contributions from the nation and not just from the Tagalog-speaking regions of the country.

X. The Future of Philippine Cinema

The majority of the respondents are optimistic that the future of Philippine cinema will be invigorated by the fresh blood injected into it by the digital filmmakers. Both Khavn and Tolentino maintain that newer digital film outputs constitute half of the total number of films created per year (de la Cruz and Tolentino interviews, 2006). Tolentino sees a marked rise of independent films that are not supported by a studio system. Younger filmmakers who are willing to take risks in the kind of medium afforded them will create risky narratives, Tolentino further predicts. Flores observes that as digital filmmaking becomes a dominant instrument in the creation of films, it will “develop a new language for cinema” (Flores interview, 2006). Most of the film output from the digital filmmaking canon that achieved a level of critical and commercial success are films that come close to being ethnographic (Flores interview, 2006). Recent films that have enjoyed acclaim and are ethnographic in nature include *Masahista*, *Kubrador* and *Ang Daang Patungong Kalimugtong* (The Road to Kalimugtong, 2006). Among the young filmmakers working in the digital format, Celso Ad. Castillo singles out young filmmaker Ron Bryant as symbolizing the new and emerging filmmakers who have the potential to bridge the gap created by the recognized films from the 1970s-1980s and to forge a new direction for Filipino filmmaking.⁵⁸

Khavn is looking forward to seeing what kinds of films Philippine cinema’s ‘old guards’ will produce in the era of digital filmmaking. He thinks that the new format may revitalize the creative impulses of these established film directors. He does not believe that there is a dichotomy between the quality of films that emerge from the mainstream and from

⁵⁸ Bryant was awarded Best Director in the CineMalaya Film Festival in 2006 for his film *Rotonda*. The film generated considerable excitement because of its affinity to the Brocka filmmaking aesthetic.

the fringes, because he also draws inspiration from films regardless of origin or the format that was used to create them. From the international film festivals that screened his films, Khavn thinks that Philippine cinema is now regarded as creating ‘unpredictable’ films because of their ‘daring executions’.

Among the recent trends is the country’s embrace of films that deal with the themes of theology and melodrama. Films like *Tanging Yaman* (A Change of Heart, 2000) and *Magnifico* (2003) took an explicit pro-Christian stance toward urban and rural living. More and more filmmakers are making films that touch on issues that are commercially risky because they are artistically challenging. Celso Ad. Castillo is working on the rebellion in Mindanao and a closer examination of the radical Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in the hope that Filipinos outside of Mindanao are aware of the issues in that war-torn region of the Philippines.

Tolentino predicts that more and varied representations of Filipinos in other national cinemas will continue in years to come. Because of the growing number of labor migrants who work as nurses, domestic helpers and care-givers in almost all countries in the world, the depictions of Filipinos in foreign films will reflect this trend (Tolentino interview, 2006).

The audience will determine the future of Philippine cinema but only to a certain degree. Flores advocates for the critical thinking among film-viewing that serious film discourse can foster. Despite the public’s fascination with awards, Flores maintains that raising the level of critical appreciation for Filipino films can happen if more film critics write more discursively rather than merely discussing the award-winning possibilities of a film. Castillo advocates that Philippine films should go global and set their sights on an international audience viewership because that is one of the ways the cinema of the country

gets noticed. He dismisses the parochialism inherent in making Filipino films for Filipino audiences. He says that Filipinos are not just citizens of their country but that they are global citizens (Castillo interview, 2006).

Clodualdo del Mundo thinks that the future of Philippine cinema lies not in mainstream cinema but along ‘the periphery of the industry’. The films of Brocka that thrived before, during and after the Marcos era and their status as outside-the-mainstream has contributed to the loosening of the grip of mainstream cinema on national narrative-making. Del Mundo thinks that the independent films that are part of the Digital Revolution have the greatest potential to reconfigure the national cinematic scene and to celebrate alternative and plural views of the nation.

XI. *Conclusion*

This chapter reveals that ascribing a national cinema to the country is not a useful analytical tool to describe the multiplicity of voices within the country. Post-nationality in films subscribes to the idea that no monolithic meta-narratives can produce a culture that is homogenous and unitary. Digital filmmaking, regional and queer films are some of the innovations that have the most potential to dismantle the hegemony of the mainstream media (Tagalog and Catholic). These innovations have the potential to unsettle the idea that there is a pure and unsullied culture that is not touched and altered by the cultures of close or distant neighbors. These film movements nevertheless have succeeded in creating alternative and subversive perspectives and approaches to the country’s narratives that bear the radical imprints of Third Cinema’s impact on colonized countries.

Film narratives with a distinctive local color, revamped genres, perceived enhancement of production quality, cultural policies such as screen quotas and tax breaks, and savvy marketing strategies are some of the contributory factors that have reenergized and refreshed production activity and local audience interest in films produced in the Philippines.

The next chapter deals with immigrant/diasporic films that were produced in dialogue with the kinds of alienation felt in the United States (the hostland) to the nostalgia felt for the homeland.

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Filipino – ‘Look Asian, think Spanish, act American’

E. San Juan, *Filipinos Everywhere*

CHAPTER 5

UNHOMED CINEMA: BETWEEN HOMELAND AND DIASPORA

I. Introduction

Diaspora involves the scattering of populations to places outside of their homeland. The term is derived from the Greek word *diaspeirein*, meaning to scatter. It was initially used to describe the exile of Jewish groups from Babylonia, the exit of the Greeks from a destroyed city, as well as the enslavement of Africans from their homeland to provide labor in the United States. Since then, the term has been used more broadly to describe other displacements of a massive scale. Various dispersals also required a qualifier to distinguish various diasporas (i.e. labor, imperial, cultural, etc). But when people leave their home countries, for whatever reasons, they rarely leave it behind completely. According to Hamid Naficy, “people in diaspora have an identity in their homeland before their departure, and their diasporic identity is constructed in resonance with this prior identity” (2004, 14). The Filipino diaspora, involving the mass deployment of skilled and semi-skilled laborers to other countries, is considered a recent phenomenon. Overseas Filipinos include those people of Filipino ancestry who decided to reside in another country, and labor migrants who are

gainfully employed in other countries as domestic helpers, nurses, sailors as well as unskilled laborers, and those who are on temporary visas. The term Overseas Contract Worker (OCW) which was once in wider circulation, has since been recast as Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) to “carry a ‘national’ inflection as well as encompass those who left or are working abroad without official authorization” (Hau 2004, 227). Recent films like *Anak* (Child), *The Flor Contemplacion Story*, *Bagong Bayani* and *Milan*, among others, problematize the lives of OFWs and their experiences in negotiating the First World spaces they inhabit.

There has been a notable increase in the migration of Filipinos to other parts of the world as early as the 1920s, with the United States as the main destination⁵⁹ (San Juan 2006, Hau 2004). The American Occupation in the Philippines officially lasted for 48 years (1898-1946) and resulted in the introduction of an educational system founded on the English language as its civilizing mission. This helps to explain why the archipelago’s populations have since looked up to the American model as the ideal (San Juan 2006). Filipina scholar Caroline Hau has noted that the American colonization of the country “created new channels for the outflow of people and products from the Philippines to the United States” (2004, 192). The Filipino imagined community has fashioned itself after an “imagined America” (Aguilar 2002, Hau 2004, Constantino 1978). According to some Filipino scholars, the Philippines continued as the United States’ neocolony with the advent of the Cold War in 1947, and has continued up to this day (San Juan 2006; Abinales & Amoroso 2005; Tadiar 2004). In the first two decades of American rule, the mostly-male contract workers were recruited by the Hawaii Sugar Planters Association to work as laborers. By 1930, there were

⁵⁹ The process began as early as 1904 when more than 1,200 Filipinos living in the archipelago’s major islands who were brought to the United States for the St. Louis World’s Fair to be displayed and justify the American imperialist ideology.

150,000 Filipino workers in the U.S. (San Juan 2006). S. Lily Mendoza asserts that the United States is “at once a site of desire(ing) as well as of lingering colonial shadows and ambivalences, or what [Filipino historian Renato] Constantino calls ‘the continuing past’.” (2006, xxv).

As of 2007, the Philippines – which is the world's second major exporter of labor after Mexico, has about 7 million people abroad — or about 21 percent of the total labor force and 10 percent of the country's 89 million inhabitants (DeParle 2007, Martin 1996). Figures from 2002 reveal that an estimated 7.4 million Filipinos in all regions of the world remitted U.S. \$7.402 billion, or the equivalent of 9 percent of the country's gross national product for the year (POEA 2003.) Caroline Hau calls the large-scale export of Filipino labor as “one of the most significant developments in the Philippines in the past thirty years” (2004, 227).

Hau notes that Filipinos in America (henceforth called FIA in this chapter), as opposed to the contractual laborers who must return to the country after the end of their mutually-agreed upon labor transaction with their respective employers, become a source of anger and envy from the middle class and intellectuals who are left in Manila. The FIA's departure from the country was seen as an act of “betrayal of the Philippine nation” (Hau 2004; Vergara 1996). In contrast to the OFWs who are the ‘bagong bayani’ (new heroes)⁶⁰ of the country for the remittances they bring to the economy (Abinales & Amoroso 2005), FIAs are “envied for their material success and the social distance from the rest of the population that their material success creates” (Hau 2004, 193). The middle class who model themselves the country's ‘essential citizen’ and the FIA engages and ‘polices each other's self

⁶⁰ Former President Corazon Aquino was the first one to hail the OFWs as the new heroes because of the remittances they send back home to their relatives.

presentations and contesting each other's definitions of what (ought to) constitute(s) 'Filipinoness'." (Mendoza 2006, xxv).

This chapter explores the kinds of geographies that map an intersection between film production, homeland, diaspora and the transnational identities of filmmakers who chose to relocate to the United States as their new home-space. The tension generated by the homeland or 'archipelagic space' (Tolentino 2001) and the new diasporic space of these filmmakers will be investigated and discussed with a view to unpacking issues of identities and positionalities that are caused by various mobilities. I also interrogate how filmic texts circulate between diasporas and homeland. In particular, the cinematic outputs of filmmakers who chose to work outside of the archipelagic space, will be the main focus of this study.

I conducted interviews in New York City and Manila in 2006 and 2007. Two film directors will be spotlighted in this chapter: co-filmmakers Sari Dalena and Keith Sicat and their recent film *Rigodon*. This chapter reads and situates *Rigodon* as well as Neill de la Llana and Ian Gamazon's *Cavite* (2005). These films were chosen for this study because they touch on the thematics of Filipino experience in another country that problematize the issue of homeland and diaspora. The choice to focus on *Rigodon* and *Cavite* reflects my encounter and engagement with these works, as well as my access to the filmmakers. The films I consulted do not purport to be representative of all the filmic works in the Philippine area of diaspora and national identities, but they are illustrative of the post-Marcos wave of migrations that position Filipino identities in interstitial spaces. This chapter discusses unhomedness and a kind of cinematic departure from earlier films of Filipino diaspora, by looking at *Rigodon* and *Cavite* as examples of what I call 'unhomed cinema'.

Insights from *Mababangong Bangungot* will likewise be sought, in order to discuss *Rigodon*.⁶¹ My interview with Kidlat Tahimik will be used to contextualize the different conditionalities that exist under different eras – from the Marcos era to the post-EDSA People Power Revolution period directly following the Marcos regime, as well as the interstitial years between these periods.

Bringing the conversation between the notion of “unhomedness” employed by Irit Rogoff and Homi Bhabha and that of Hamid Naficy’s theoretical construction of “accented cinema” to *Rigodon*, this chapter will look at the conditions of possibility that illustrate belonging and unbelonging. Benedict Anderson’s ‘imagined community’, as well as the debates surrounding the concept’s utility and applicability, will be discussed in relation to the film narratives of the chosen films.

II. *The Inescapable Dance: the Cinema of Sari Dalena and Keith Sicat*

Sari Lluch Dalena completed her MFA at New York University in 2007 on a Fulbright grant. Spending seven years in New York with her husband Keith Sicat, who worked at a television and documentary outfit in New York City, Dalena authored a number of short fiction films and documentaries, notably *Asong Simbahan* (Church Dog, 1995), *Mumunting Krus* (Small Cross, 1996), *Memories of a Forgotten War* (2001), *White Funeral* and *Rigodon* (2005). *Rigodon* marks her first collaboration with Sicat, who wrote the story and the screenplay. According to Sicat, he wrote the story of *Rigodon* in New York City because of extreme homesickness and to pay homage to the Filipino expatriate writers who lived in New York City, whose novels, poems and autobiographical sketches became

⁶¹ Dalena and Sicat claim that the creation and completion of *Rigodon* was highly influenced by Tahimik’s *Mababangong Bangungot*.

celebrated literary works in the Philippines after they were published. Sicat and Dalena also acknowledged the impact and tremendous influence of Kidlat Tahimik's *Mababangong Bangungot* in the birth and formation of *Rigodon* (Figure 25).



Figure 25. Sari Dalena & Keith Sicat, *Rigodon*, 2005.

Dalena likened the whole process of making *Rigodon* to giving birth to a child, due to the exacting demands the film required of her as a filmmaker. She was thankful for the Bayanihan⁶²-level of assistance accorded her and Sicat from the Filipino community in New York, as well as the institutional support of New York University and the artists' collective to which they belong. The Filipino community helped scout for locations for the film as well as tap contacts in the creative industries who could assist in the pre-production phase. *Rigodon* took two years to complete, including the pre- and post-production. The casting of the actors portraying the three main characters involved a series of networks that required familial as well as institutional connections. Filmmaker Lav Diaz contacted the Philippine-based actors

⁶² A support system marked by mutual cooperation and communal effort or *gemeinschaft* as sociologist Frank Lynch described this (2005).

to participate in the project, while the Filipino artists based in New York who are members of the Screen Actors Guild were responsible for recruiting the U.S.-based performers.

Philippine-based actor Joel Torre flew straight from the airport to *Rigodon*'s film set in New York City to begin his role as Dante (Figure 26).



Figure 26. Joel Torre in *Rigodon*.

Dalena admitted that there were no “getting-to-know-you” informalities between them and Torre owing to the film’s timetable that only allowed a few days of shooting. Chin-Chin Gutierrez who maintains an active television and film career both in the Philippines and the U.S. was also signed to the project to portray Salome. Arthur Acuña (Amado) on the other hand, is a New York-based Filipino-American stage actor who gained raves for his theater performances. It was Acuña who not only recruited award-winning Filipino theater actress Ching Valdes-Aran to the project but who also was responsible for finding other talents who acted small and incidental parts in the film. Dalena was impressed by the talent and dedication the main performers demonstrated during the filming of *Rigodon*. She singled out

Gutierrez's total immersion in the role and inputs to the creative process that helped maintain the camaraderie among the Filipinos involved in the film.

Rigodon is a dance that requires the dancers to go around in circles and partner with different performers. The dance is premised on the perpetually circular movements that offer no escape for the dancers, hence the constant search for resolution. The origin of this dance can be traced to the Spanish period when the Spaniards introduced this art form to the native population's dance lexicon, making this originally-foreign dance adapt the folk idiom, which was ultimately incorporated in the dance's modern incarnation. According to Sicat, the dance serves as a metaphor for Filipinos who leave the homeland to fulfill their dreams in a foreign country, but at what price?

Rigodon tells the story of three lives in post-9/11 New York. Sicat is of the opinion that Filipino diasporic subjects are and have always been the "outsiders of America", hence the film's interrogation of the Filipinos' place "after [the 9/11] event when the U.S. became paranoid." In order to emphasize the cultural diversity of the country's more than 7,000 islands representing approximately 70 ethnic groups, a number of distinct ethnicities were introduced in the film to give a national flavor to the undertaking. Multi-ethnicity became the basis of the national as characters speak in Philippine dialects and practice region-specific performances to represent the nation. This includes the Muslim dance from Mindanao, the fertility dance from Obando (Luzon) and the lullaby from Cebu (the Visayas).

Sicat claims that the choice to depict Filipinos from various ethno-linguistic groups is not a film stylistic but one anchored in realistic representations. "Filipinos are not just from Luzon, or Tagalog speakers. And not necessarily [of] Catholic [faith]," he observes.

What is revealing in *Rigodon* is the emplacement and reification of regional traits to the new environment that tell more about these displaced Filipinos' insistence on performing daily rituals in the language of their own region. Sicat insists that what makes the Philippines a nation is the shared national identity among its people, which allows this common national identity to permeate into the actions of every Filipino migrant. Dalena maintains that the "tribe-like regionalism" that she observed as still existing among the citizens of the archipelago should be made visible in *Rigodon*. The film's insistence on representing a country that is united in diversity also smoothes out the inter-cultural kinks and regional differences these people may have for each other if they were within the archipelagic spaces of the Philippines. Dalena concurs that the change in geographical *milieu* (i.e. being in the United States as Filipinos) aided in the erasure of conflicts, be they personal, ethnic or regional. She cited one instance in the movie where a Manobo woman from Mindanao is assisted by a Tagalog-speaking lawyer to legalize her stay in the United States. The conflict between Christians and Muslims in the Philippines was de-emphasized and rendered less important when these two Filipinos crossed the border of the country. This rendering is also problematic because it raises the issue that 'possessing' a Filipino identity has become naturalized when one leaves the homeland for another foreign country. San Juan asserts that owing to the status of the Philippines as a neo-colony of the United States, the Filipino identification is not with a "fully defined, genuinely independent nation but with regions, localities and place-defined languages and traditions" (2006, 42). What is elided in San Juan's argument, based on my own experience in the United States and as reflected in *Rigodon*, is the recognition and establishment of one's country of origin (the Philippines) as the initial point of interrogation before one's regional identity (Visayan/Ilonggo). Regional

identities are transcended when one crosses the border but they gradually re-assert themselves once the recognition of Filipino kindredness is established.

In *Rigodon*, Salome, who is a mail-order bride and married to a U.S. serviceman, has openly articulated her desire to have a baby with blue eyes and possessing other desirable features that best captures and personifies her American Dream. Yearning for assimilation and citizenship, Salome nevertheless performs distinctive and unmistakably Filipino practices such as wearing the Maria Clara-style traditional garb⁶³. Salome's act of performing this practice (i.e. wearing the dress) in the exclusive domain of her domicile in the United States, conjures the spectral presence of her country's two colonizers, Spain and the United States. She vacillates between two worlds. On the one hand, to test the efficacy of Philippine rituals for fertility and on the other, returning to Western-style medications when her ritual did not produce the desired effect she craves. Salome's nostalgic reifications of her region's cultural practice enunciate her tacit and unquestioned acceptance that these performativities are monolithically Filipino, and one that does not interrogate their colonial originaries. Keith Sicat says of Salome "the more she wants to be different, the more she remains the same." The contradiction brought about by Salome's desire to assimilate to her new environment puts into high relief her own performance of the elaborate traditional practices emanating from rural Philippines in the comforts of her private sphere. The tension generated by her public/private identities marks Salome's unhomedness and unbelonging to her new adopted country.

⁶³ This traditional dress was inspired by Jose Rizal's character named Maria Clara who represents meekness, femininity and obsequiousness. Taken from Rizal's anti-Spanish, anti-clergy novel called *Noli Me Tangere* (Touch Me Not, or The Social Cancer 1887).

This unbelonging which implicates Salome's actions "...is an interplay between old memories, current li[fe] ... those old intellectual and cultural traditions have oblique and complex continuities to the present" (Rogoff 2000, 7). Irit Rogoff's preoccupation with "unhomed geographies" and unbelonging is part of a larger critical discourse that traces its origin to Homi Bhabha and his constructions of the unhomed⁶⁴ and "inbetweenness" (Bhabha 1994). According to Rogoff, unhomed geographies offer a "possibility of redefining issues of location away from concrete coercions of belonging and not belonging determined by the state" (2000, 4). I argue that despite Salome's conflicted allegiance to both countries that highlights her link and connection to both archipelagic and diasporic spaces, her discontent, frustration and disenchantment with visibility and representation makes her marginal position unhomed. Sophia Siddique Harvey provides a condition to Rogoff's commitment to "strangeness and unhomedness" when she raises the issue of "spectral tropicality" that sheds light on "what has been repressed in this air-conditioned nation and what now returns in the form of disruptive places, landscapes and bodies" (2008, 25).

Rigodon's other character, Dante, is an intellectual who philosophically engages in the idea of nationalism by imagining the Filipino community around him in New York as truly national, bringing none of the regional conflicts they may have in the Philippines. He has helped numerous Filipinos obtain legal status by circumventing certain immigration rules both as a form of resistance and diasporic nationalism against the country that both provided a space for his basic existence and his intellectual ruminations. He is eager to assist in his compatriots' border crossing to the United States even if these forms of assistance are illegal. His clientele are mostly those who are undocumented, or what is colloquially known as

⁶⁴ Bhabha's reworking of Freud's *unheimlich* or the uncanny.

TNT⁶⁵ in the Philippines. Dante is conflicted by the contradictions of his continued stay in the United States and his desire to be away from it. An intellectual who is loosely modeled after Jose Rizal's character Crisostomo Ibarra⁶⁶ in *Noli Me Tangere*, Dante's fantasmic nightmare, in one scene, involves a boy asking him about the crime he has committed, to which Dante replies: "I am a Filipino" (Figure 27).



Figure 27. Joel Torre in a surreal dance in *Rigodon*

Dalena and Sicat said that this phrase was lifted from Carlos Bulosan's literary *memoir* *America is in the Heart* (1943) that details this expatriated Filipino poet's life as a laborer in the United States in the 1930s. According to Sicat, Bulosan's pre-eminence as a poet and purveyor of narratives about the Filipino-American experience led him and Dalena to pay homage to him in this segment of the film. In the context of the film, "I am a Filipino"

⁶⁵ TNT stands for "tago ng tago" which means to hide and disappear and refers to undocumented Filipinos in the United States.

⁶⁶ Crisostomo Ibarra is a character who is a product of middle-class upbringing and foreign education, but who struggles with the contradictions of his own class and his desire to put an end to the abusive reign of the Spanish in the Philippine territory.

clearly maps the ambiguity and contradiction of Dante's position regarding the two worlds he inhabits: an absent country that is imagined and a looming presence of another country that he engages in active unbelonging.

The phrase "I am a Filipino" also opens up questions about the transgressive power of one's identity in a foreign land. The alterity of Dante's self-identified Filipino identity that refuses to be submerged in Americana yet enjoys the domains of power that American laws provide him to continue his law practice, both implicates his nationality and identity as the specified violation to an unspecified crime. This non-specificity of crime brings to mind Rogoff's project of recuperating strangeness and unease that captures Dante's "loss from an earlier emplacement ... he thought he had ... [and] the insecurity of not having a coherent alternative to inhabit" (2000, 14-15). The unhomed dimension of his emplacement in the United States brought out his displacement and unbelonging.

The character of Amado is an aging boxer who Sicat claims is "a classic OFW" who is desperately finding ways to legalize his stay in the U.S. by becoming (once again) involved in boxing – a sport he used to engage in but now has to engage in again in order to stay legally in the country even if his physical might has long passed its peak. His being new to the U.S. allows him to serve as the cinematic filter through which the film-viewers assume his gaze, and allows them to look at the strangeness of the foreign culture. His life is in a flux as he is often haunted by the specter of his loved ones back in rural Philippines. The instability of his status and the loneliness of his existence has produced a geography of desire in which positionality – "an endlessly conflicted and unresolved positionality – allows for the multi-habitation of the problematic" (Rogoff 2000, 35). Or as Epifanio San Juan says in

reference to his own sojourn in the U.S. as an exile, “No destination nor destiny, only a succession of detours and displacements” (2006, 56).

Salome, Dante and Amado are all migrants, even if a formal title that makes one legal and the other a fugitive has yet to be inscribed, especially in Amado’s case. His refusal to come back to his native country despite the cultural haunting, places him in an unhomed space as he “unwrites the nation and national projects ... [because doing so] flagrantly displays a rejection of one national space for another more desirable location...” (Marangoly-George in Rogoff, 2000, 38). This is in direct contrast to the main protagonist in Kidlat Tahimik’s *Perfumed Nightmare*. Initially awed by the technological sophistication of Paris, he was ultimately disillusioned and repulsed by modernity’s displacement of workers in favor of machines. Kidlat’s character forms strong ties and solidarity with the displaced European workers when he realizes a commonality between them and the villagers he left behind in rural Philippines. Returning to the Philippines became the “more desirable” national space Kidlat Tahimik’s character eventually pursued, by uprooting the embedded colonial connections of the country. He re-writes the nation’s narrative by personifying Filipinos as “sleeping typhoons locked in colonial cocoons” and eventually bursting from that cocoon “so the butterfly can fly out and embrace the sun” (Tahimik interview, 2006).

Tahimik’s *Perfumed Nightmare* is a product of the resistant and alternative views of the nation that were produced during the repressive era of the Marcos regime. Tahimik claims that his outsider status as a filmmaker during the dictatorship manifests itself in his portrayals of Filipinos in his film who did not conform to the narrative of a New Republic espoused by the Marcoses.

As a nod to the outsiders in *Perfumed Nightmare*, the issue of outsider positions in *Rigodon* brings together a different set of outsiders who were brought to the film's super-stylized dream sequence. As a nod to New York City's distinctive group of outsiders, Sicat and Dalena found solidarity among drag queens and transvestites to participate in a carnivalesque performance of the rigodon. The dance involves the three main characters further reinforcing their outsider positions and unhomedness. Poet Jose Garcia Villa's texts were read by a Caucasian actor in voice-over as a double homage to the writer's stature in Philippine literature, and also underscore his own unhomed position. Villa has been accused of being "too American" by writers in the Philippines due to his insistence on living in New York City for much of his life until his death in 1997. Sicat encrypted an interstitial status to Villa's position by having his poem read by an American in the *tableau* of a rigodon as participated in by a group of outsiders. This act situates that poem (and by extension, Villa) in the *milieu* of the folk dance as a reterritorialization of his unhomed position. Sicat calls the dream sequence the crystallization and distillation of the film.

It also begs the question, who is the intended audience of *Rigodon*? Certainly not the audience in the Philippines who have not yet seen *Rigodon* in commercial theaters in the country⁶⁷. In the international film festivals where *Rigodon* was shown, Dalena observed that the audience was mostly comprised of non-Asians. Dalena claims that this phenomenon can be attributed to the curiosity about a film with Filipino characters. She also laments that "Filipinos back home do not patronize non-conventional films such as *Rigodon*". In New York, the film was shown in the International Asian American Film Festival and was invited for a screening at the Museum of Modern Art. On the film's website, the film clearly

⁶⁷ Dalena mentioned that *Rigodon* was shown in Manila in a film festival in 2006. She hoped that when she returns to the Philippines for good in 2008, that *Rigodon* will have a commercial run in commercial theaters.

distances itself from the recent and more visible blockbuster film called *Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros* (2006) when it privileges writer Eric Caruncho's review of the film as *Rigodon*'s own tagline: "*Rigodon* is unabashedly, unapologetically arty, with none of the populist touches that made *Maximo Oliveros* such a crowd pleaser" (Caruncho 2006, Q4).⁶⁸

Sicat said that the making of *Rigodon* is his and Dalena's statement to rework the trope where only Filipino immigrants can find emotional resonances in the film. He said that the immigrant position of the characters in *Rigodon* makes it relevant to any immigrant, regardless of ethnicity, who has encountered the same dilemmas shown in the film. Reacting to the notion that only a Filipino can make a Filipino film, Sicat sums it up when he says that *Rigodon* "can be anyone's story". The contradictory position of belongingness (at once a Filipino and pan-ethnic-immigrant) that Sicat hopes *Rigodon* makes clear, confronts the issue of the museumification of the authentic as only rooted in national signifiers. His demonstration that a film about Filipinos can speak to a broad audience, positions the film more with the so-called transnational films that veer away from the ghettoization of specific cultures. However, the issue of a common 'immigrant' experience is problematic in light of the slippery definition of the term, its own attendant issues of inclusion and exclusion, and the specific discourses that govern various immigrant experiences and encounters with new environments. This treats the concept of the 'immigrant' as unalterable, with a fixed identity that transcends regional specificities and, ultimately, is not open to modifications or changes. For example, immigrants' different statuses (in relation to work, visa, etc.) and encounters

⁶⁸ <http://www.rigodonfilm.com/pressframes.html>).

with the foreignness of their new environments cannot be assumed to have homogenizing and universalist registers.

That the Filipinos in *Rigodon* characterize a transnationality is challenged by E. San Juan when he argues in his book *Filipinos Everywhere* that Filipinos “are not ... transnationals” (2006, xiii). He reasons that “the putative ‘Filipino’ nation is in the process of construction, overseas Filipino contract workers have been considered transnationals or transmigrants—a paradoxical turn since the existence of the nation is problematic” (2006, 42-43). If San Juan’s assertion of the problematic nature of the Philippines as a nation is true, then it further enhances the unhomedness of Filipinos in the diaspora. It puts them in the interstitial space where homeland and their new environment do not even allow for a nation to be imagined.

III. *Returning to the Homeland*

If Salome, Amado and Dante are unhomed in their new environment, can they return ‘home’ to their native country and claim a homedness that eluded them in New York? Irit Rogoff has emphatically stated that “the dominant narrative of ‘return home’ is problematic not only for the legitimization it provides for territorial claims but also for the seamless naturalization of the concept of ‘home’ which it puts forth as a cultural metanarrative” (2000, 146-47). Indeed, home assumes a different ontological meaning when it is viewed in the insterstices of homeland and diaspora. In *Reflections on Exile*, Edward Said mentioned the presence of an “unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home; its essential sadness can never be surmounted” (2000, 173). This

sadness marks the realization that home is no longer a place where one can return to, as seen in Amado's statelessness, Salome's vernacular cosmopolitanism and Dante's resistance.

Ian Gamazon and Neil de la Llana's *Cavite* has been hailed by the *New York Times* as a return to the guerilla filmmaking first trailblazed by Kidlat Tahimik. While the stories for both films are different, the two films touch the issue of returning to one's country of origin after a prolonged estrangement. *Cavite* imbibes the guerilla filmmaking aesthetic of Tahimik and *Mababangong Bangungot*, not only in its nod to cast co-filmmaker Gamazon as the film's main protagonist and lead character, but also in its gesture to shoot the film at actual locations and to use of non-actors. While *Mababangong Bangungot* was shot in 16mm and relied on found footage to complete the narrative, *Cavite* made use of the affordable digital camera that allows multiple re-shoots and access to more advanced editing facilities (Figure 28).



Figure 28. Neill de la Llana & Ian Gamazon, *Cavite*, 2005.

In *Cavite*, Adam is a Filipino-American who returned to the Philippines to confront a kidnapper who abducted two of his family members, only to re-acquaint himself to the historical and cultural past of the country to which he bears little connection and resemblance. A mysterious caller informed him that his mother and sister in the Philippines were kidnapped and will be executed if he will not come back and perform certain demands. Upon his return, Adam's non-identification with the cities of Cavite and Manila as well as his non-facility with the Tagalog language immediately delocalizes him. He realizes that the Philippines is not a fantasy space that summoned signifiers of romanticized rural life, but one that has transformed the pastoralist ideal into a space of cruelty, terrorism and social Darwinism. While his reason for coming back to the Philippines stem from the threat of violence to his family, his return made him discover his undeniable roots to the country that engendered these acts of terrorism. He also realizes that this return not only served as an agent for his deterritorialization, but homeland as metanarrative was ruptured by his refusal to be part of it. As a FIA, Adam valorizes a distanced relation to the Philippines by his refusal to accept the legitimacy of terrorism in his country of ancestry. His position intersects with his own migratory history as well as the trajectory he chose for himself as an immigrant in the United States (Figure 29).



Figure 29. Ian Gamazon in *Cavite*

Cavite's stylistic device is meant to make the audience identify with Adam's dilemma, and condemn the histories of resistance against the government that produces this migration. The film offered a reverse of cultural tourism about the Philippines by showing the abject poverty and urban violence that *Rigodon* is trying to avoid. Sicat opines that Filipino films should shift the field of vision by not falling into the trap that 'glorifies poverty and squalor' that most Filipino filmmakers have the tendency to adopt⁶⁹. While *Cavite* was directed by two Filipino-Americans who went to the Philippines and shot footage depicting their national encounters with an alien country, *Rigodon* was helmed by two directors who grew up in the Philippines but chose to imagine a country from the lenses of those Filipinos in exile. Both de la Llana and Gamazon claim that filming Adam's travels to Cavite also mirror their own alienation from the country of their parents. The film's point of view aided by a shaky hand-held camera tries to make the film spectator assume the position of Adam,

⁶⁹ In films like *Babae sa Breakwater*, *Rotonda* and *Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros* among the more recent ones.

and by extension, the filmmakers' own points of view. Adam's first encounter with Third World conditions is also that of the filmmakers'.

Diasporas have been frequently described as 'imagined communities' and the diasporic or diasporized filmmakers are characterized by the "plurality, multiplicity and hybridity in the performativity of identity" (Naficy 2004, 6). This assertion strengthens the notion that the plurality and performativity of identity in *Rigodon* makes clear that Sicat and Dalena participate in the active celebration of the homeland by making the characters unhomed in their chosen home-space, and also unhomed to their nationalities. Despite the connections that Salome, Dante and Amado had in their native country, an active form of unbelonging against "mutualities and shared values and histories" characterize their refusal to be part of a meta-Filipino collectivity.

Home is rooted by default in America for *Cavite*, as the mythic homeland is shattered by the violation of an imagined ideal. The sense of the uncanny in *Cavite* also unhomes the film because of its choice to remain in the interstitial spaces located between diaspora and homeland, much like *Rigodon*. San Juan has an explanation for this unhomedness when he asserts: "We are now a quasi-wandering people, pilgrims or prospectors staking our lives and futures all over the world—in every nook and cranny of this seemingly godforsaken earth. Explorers and adventurers all." (2006, 74-75).

IV. Conclusion

The mass exodus of Filipino workers has created a homeland/diaspora tension. Anderson's notion of imagined community posits the idea that a nation is forged before the geographical borders are put into place, while San Juan challenges the notion of a Philippine

nation as already in place. This dialectic allows me to adopt Bhabha's reworking of Freud's *unheimlich* to propose an unhomedness among Filipinos in the diaspora. Unhomed cinema therefore positions Filipinos in the interstices of First and Third World spaces. The characters in *Rigodon* refuse a national meta-narrative through the enactment of ethnic praxis, while the homecoming returnee in *Cavite* rejects his native country's national givens (kidnapping and terrorism as common occurrences) even as he enacts the demands of these givens.

The filmmaking practice and production ethic of the two films also show the divergent approaches privileged by the filmmakers. Dalena and Sicat grew up in the Philippines but situated *Rigodon* in the United States to narrate the lives of diasporic Filipinos against the backdrop of the aftermath of 9/11. De la Llana and Gamazon, who identify as Filipino-Americans, completed *Cavite* in the titular place in the Philippines to delve into the issue of terrorism in the light of the United States government's War on Terror and the perceived Al-Qaeda links to the Philippines with its own renegade Muslim population. Both duos of filmmakers mirror their own experiences after their adopted countries as they reflect on Filipino identities caught in constant transition.

Unhomed cinema describes the interstitial space that Filipino films and their filmmakers occupy between homeland and diaspora. Whether the nation has a physical materiality or is imagined, unhomed cinema situates shifting Filipino identities against multi-ethnic praxis and multi-scalar mobilities.

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CHAPTER 6

FILMIC TEXTS AND CONTEXTS: CONCLUDING REMARKS

The concept of national cinema in recent years has come under increasing attack and scrutiny for both the dominant notions of a single, unitary and homogenous national culture as well as the geopolitical framework that contrasts Hollywood with World Cinema. On the one hand, the multiplicity of perspectives that exist within a national space defies the homogenizing categories of 'national culture'. When interrogated closely, 'national cinema' reveals "histories of crisis and conflict, of resistance and negotiation" (Higson 1989, 37), thus denying any claim to spatial solidarity. In fact, since they circulate transnationally, 'national cinemas' are not autonomous, but always already exist in conversation with other cinemas. On the other hand, framing 'national cinema' according to its point of production, reduces film to a commodity rather than a medium of communication.

And yet, film analysis typically considers the film as disconnected from the material world of its production, which fails to offer a dynamic analysis of the interconnectivity of places and meanings in today's film industries. By re-situating the space of cinema within a geopolitical framework, cinemas can be categorized according to their intended purpose (e.g. Western aesthetics, radical politics) rather than their national identity (Macdonald, 1994). To this end, Macdonald suggests that we "look at the spatial concentration of capital, personnel, and technology by studying its stability or movement, the locational decision-making process, the impact of capital movement on various peoples" (1994, 27).

My project considers how nation becomes imagined in cinema and the ways national discourse reveals power structures and vested interests that bear on 'national cinema' (Higson 2000). I look at cinema in the Philippines through the discourses of its films' texts and contexts. Ascribing a unitary homogeneity to the cinematic output produced within and outside of the country's archipelagic boundaries necessitates an examination of the complexities of regional localities and the multifarious ways its citizens conduct daily lives. When employing Benedict Anderson's notion of imagined communities, the cinema makes possible the creation of a national space of inclusion, beyond geographical barriers. When applied in the context of Philippine cinema, the Filipinos' encounter with various forms of colonialism, the fragmented nature of the country's physiography, and the diasporic communities that now populate the world, all contribute to the diversity of images represented in the archipelago's films. Each is a valid representation of Filipino life, with or without culture-specific referents.

Responses from the interviewees I queried reveal the complex determination of the country's film practitioners to ascribe a distinct national identity to its films, one that crosses boundaries and yet still has national and nationalist registers. These nationalist registers as experienced in the films, are imagined as taking the place of face-to-face interaction. In Anderson's terms, Filipino film viewers everywhere unite as though suggesting there is a commonality or a shared set of cultural beliefs.

There is, however, a danger in perpetuating a sense of Filipino community through films, if one factors in the multiplicity of identities and plural voices among the imagined space that Filipinos occupy. This plurality shatters the idea that a commonality is possible. It

is as though the national signifiers are implicitly understood by its citizens regardless of class, gender, ethnicity and ideology.

The film tradition of the Philippines demands a wider understanding of where much of the style, accents and sensibilities originate. Queerness, diasporic experience and the materiality of local cultures have certainly introduced innovations into the cinematic experience of the film-goers in contemporary times, especially in recent years. The democratization of digital technology has allowed young and daring filmmakers to make their own films with bold and intriguing themes. The paths of circulation such as local and international film festivals have encouraged various cinematic voices to tackle issues that interface the personal with the collective, the national with the transnational, and the enactments and re-enactments of national narratives with their contestations. While importance is placed on continued national patronage, film viewership, and popular acceptance of these films to create new ways of constructing one's identity out of plural *milieus*, their resonance extends beyond boundaries and national borders.

The growing postnationality of cinema, and not only in the Philippines, is one of the ways to imagine the nation. In diasporic films like *Rigodon* and *Cavite*, the longing for a national homeland from the space of a hostland, creates a national imaginary that positions the Philippines as an entity that is idealized. It is an entity that is assembled by how it is remembered and recalled. Meanwhile, a growing number of independent films produced in the country challenge the monolithic idea of a Filipino community and its core beliefs. These different ways of imagining a nation through their constructions in cinema from various geographical spaces also allows Philippine cinema to be imagined as unhomed or having no fixed residence.

In proposing this notion, I look at the histories and geographies of the Philippines and employ Anderson's imagined communities to make possible a conversation.

The physical and geographical fragmentation of the Philippine archipelago not only created multiple identities, but also made regional realities more concrete. Compounded by the country's multi-lingual populations, its people identify more with their regions rather than as national subjects. Thus it is not feasible to imagine a Filipino who bears all the characteristics of her/his compatriots from all over the islands. The embodiment of contradictory and dialoguing discourses of nations and identities eliminates the possibility of a homogenized country/Filipino. This explains why various and equally valid constructions of Filipino identity animate the film screen. In Khavn de la Cruz's filmic world, a Filipino eats soil and dresses in a stylized costume, while Crisaldo Pablo imagines a queer nation from within a strictly Catholic tradition. Similarly, the possibility of forgiving past colonial transgressors like the Japanese for their occupation of the country is possible in Mario O'Hara's film space, while the non-forgiveness for a dictator's cruelty is not possible in Lino Brocka's films. In Filipinos' daily interactions with tradition and cosmopolitanism, with hegemony and resistance, with reifications and contestations, and with the national and the transnational, the possibility of post-nationality is possible and real.

As a film geographer, my project's discursive explorations on the concept of a 'national' contributes to the literature of cinematic geographies. The concept of a nation has geographical dimensions that go beyond the physical demarcations of countries. Lukinbeal says that landscape can be a metaphor to serve an ideology. The Philippines and its filmic cultures are engaged with the reconfiguration of the material landscape and its metaphorical intentions. The depiction of a natural setting can serve to engage the audience in the national

particularities of a country, but it can also erase those pre-formed ideas of nation through the gradual disappearance of referents. Janet Harbord says that non-places (following Marc Augé) serve to destabilize the homogenizing tendencies of a nation. The anodyne and homogenized representations of places that resemble places regardless of their country of origin, erases the idea of national cinemas. She cautions that the fetishization of national cinema does not invite conditions of possibility for heterogeneity. The image culture of nations, especially when mediated by its governments and institutions, can lead to the demonization of differences as agents of change.

Film geography provides a range of discursive tools to imagine a nation. With particular resonance to my project, the discourse of Philippine cinematic visibility is rendered by the invisible cultural politics operating in the discourse. It involves the injection of geographical, cultural and historical specificity into the analysis in order to imagine the Philippine nation-space as a space of contestation and disjunctures. It requires imagining the familiar in the local as situated in the global, and the possibility of imagining a post-nationality to for an archipelagic cinema.

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APPENDIX

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES/RESPONDENTS

(1) Joyce Bernal (mainstream filmmaker, Star Cinema; director of *Masikip sa Dibdib*, *Booba*, *D'Anothers*)

July 5, 2006

4:00 pm

Starbucks Café, ABS-CBN Compound

Quezon City

Interviewers: Joseph Palis, Arnold Alamon

Camera: Arnold Alamon

Contact made possible by Minnella Abad, Cleotilde Abad

(2) Nick Deocampo (independent filmmaker of short documentaries and the full-length feature *Pedrong Palad*, film scholar, director of Mowelfund Film Institute)

July 6, 2006

6:00 pm

Mowelfund Film Institute

New Manila, Quezon City

Interviewer: Joseph Palis

Camera: Arnold Alamon, Sarah Raymundo

Contact made possible by Alvie Galido, Atoy Navarro

(3) Roland Tolentino (film scholar, professor, former director of the UP Film Institute)

July 10, 2006

2:30 pm

CSSP-Office of Student Affairs

Room 113, Palma Hall

University of the Philippines-Diliman

Quezon City

Interviewer: Joseph Palis

Camera: Tootsie Benipayo, Francis Orque

(4) Rory Quintos (mainstream filmmaker, Star Cinema; director of *Anak*)
July 11, 2006
6:45 pm
TV Production Section, Main Building, ABS-CBN
Quezon City

Interviewers: Joseph Palis, Sarah Raymundo
Camera: Arnold Alamon
Contact made possible by Minnella Abad

(5) Lito Casaje (playwright, independent filmmaker of *Batang Pro*, 1999)
July 11, 2006
8:00 pm
Second floor lobby, Main Building, ABS-CBN
Quezon City

Interviewer: Joseph Palis
Camera: Joseph Palis, Bob Aquino
Contact made possible by Bob Aquino, Raul Macapinlac

(6) Neil Daza (cinematographer of Chito Rono's films, independent filmmaker)
July 13, 2006
1:30 pm
Starbucks Café, ABS-CBN Compound
Quezon City

Interviewer: Joseph Palis
Camera: Joseph Palis
Contact made possible by Minnella Abad

(7) Charlie Peralta (cinematographer of directors Ishmael Bernal, Chito Rono, etc)
July 14, 2006
4:30 pm
Starbucks Café, Tomas Morato Avenue
Quezon City

Interviewer: Joseph Palis
Camera: Joseph Palis
Contact made possible by Minnella Abad

(8) Adolfo Alix, Jr. (writer of *Munting Tinig*, independent filmmaker/director of *Donsol*)
July 17, 2006

8:20 pm
First Floor Lobby
Cultural Center of the Philippines
Roxas Boulevard, Manila

Interviewer: Joseph Palis
Camera: Nerissa Picadizo
Contact made possible by Maxie Evangelista, Nerissa Picadizo

(9) Simon Ibarra (actor of *Donsol*, *Siquijor*, *Jeremias*, *Live Show*)
July 17, 2006
8:45 pm
First Floor Lobby
Cultural Center of the Philippines
Roxas Boulevard, Manila

Interviewer: Joseph Palis
Camera: Nerissa Picadizo, Maxie Evangelista
Contact made possible by Adolfo Alix, Maxie Evangelista, Nerissa Picadizo

(10) Benjie Garcia (director of *Batad: Sa Paang Palay*), Noel Taylo (director of *Upos* and *Kwarto*), Nico Olanka (director of *Ang Huling Araw ng Linggo*), Ed Cabagnet (CCP-Film), Nerissa Picadizo (director of *Restless X*), Elmo Redrico (actor in *Kubrador*, *Puwang*, *Parang Pelikula*)
July 18, 2006
10:45 am
Bulwagang Pambansang Alagad ng Sining, Fourth Floor
Cultural Center of the Philippines
Roxas Boulevard, Manila

FGD facilitators: Joseph Palis, Ed Cabagnet
Camera: Nerissa Picadizo
Contact made possible by Nerissa Picadizo, Elmo Redrico, Ed Cabagnet, Maxie Evangelista

(11) Jeffrey Jeturian (filmmaker/director and writer of *Pila Balde*, *Sana Pag-ibig Na*, *Bikini Open*, *Bridal Shower*, *Tuhog*, *Kubrador*)
July 18, 2006
5:00 pm
First Floor Lobby
Cultural Center of the Philippines
Roxas Boulevard, Manila

Interviewer: Joseph Palis
Camera: Nerissa Picadizo
Contact made possible by Archie Liao, Maxie Evangelista

(12) Will Fredo (diasporic filmmaker/director of *Compound*)
July 18, 2006
6:35 pm
First Floor Lobby
Cultural Center of the Philippines
Roxas Boulevard, Manila

Interviewer: Joseph Palis
Camera: Peter John Sta. Maria
Contact made possible by Ed Cabagnot

(13) Raymond Lee (UFO Films producer, co-writer of *Anak, Tanging Yaman, Milan, Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros*, producer of *Ang Pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros*)
July 19, 2006
5:15 pm
First Floor Lobby
Cultural Center of the Philippines
Roxas Boulevard, Manila

Interviewer: Joseph Palis
Camera: Nerissa Picadizo
Contact made possible by Adolfo Alix, Maxie Evangelista

(14) Teddy Co (film historian, filmologist)
July 20, 2006
8:45 pm
CCP Small Gallery (Bulwagang Fernando Amorsolo), Fourth Floor
Cultural Center of the Philippines
Roxas Boulevard, Manila

Interviewer: Joseph Palis
Camera: Elmo Redrico
Contact made possible by Noel Vera

(15) Gil Portes (director of *Munting Tinig, 'Merika, Andrea, Saranggola, Miss X*)
July 20, 2006
10:00 pm

First Floor Lobby
Cultural Center of the Philippines
Roxas Boulevard, Manila

Interviewer: Joseph Palis
Camera: Elmo Redrico
Contact made possible by Adolfo Alix

(16) Angel Aquino (actress of *Donsol*, *Mumbaki*, *Sana Pag-ibig Na*, *Laro sa Baga*)
July 22, 2006
5:15 pm
Barbara's Café, Second Floor Lobby
Cultural Center of the Philippines
Roxas Boulevard, Manila

Interviewer: Joseph Palis
Camera: Nerissa Picadizo, Elmo Redrico
Contact made possible by Nerissa Picadizo

(17) Dennis Marasigan (independent filmmaker of *Sa North Diversion Road*, CCP
Marketing Manager)
July 22, 2006
5:55 pm
Barbara's Café, Second Floor Lobby
Cultural Center of the Philippines
Roxas Boulevard, Manila

Interviewer: Joseph Palis
Camera: Nerissa Picadizo

(18) Kidlat Tahimik (visual artist, filmmaker of *Perfumed Nightmare*, *Turumba*, *Bakit
Yellow ang Gitna ng Bahag-Hari?*, *Sinong Nag-Invent ng Yoyo at Moonbuggy?*)
July 22-23, 2006
11:00 pm – 12:10 am
Barbara's Café, Second Floor Lobby
Cultural Center of the Philippines
Roxas Boulevard, Manila

Interviewer: Joseph Palis
Camera: Nerissa Picadizo
Contact made possible by Jennifer Mendez, Elmo Redrico

(19) Elmo Redrico (actor, production designer)

July 25, 2006

6:00 pm

Titus Brandsma Center

New Manila, Quezon City

Interviewer: Joseph Palis

Camera: Nerissa Picadizo

(20) Nerissa Picadizo (independent filmmaker of the short film *Stressful X*)

July 25, 2006

6:30 pm

Titus Brandsma Center

New Manila, Quezon City

Interviewer: Joseph Palis

Camera: Elmo Redrico

(21) Ron Bryant (independent filmmaker of *Baryoke* and *Rotonda*)

July 26, 2006

2:30 pm

Cine Adarna

University of the Philippines Film Institute

Quezon City

Interviewer: Joseph Palis

Camera: Elmo Redrico

Contact made possible by Nerissa Picadizo

(22) Khavn de la Cruz (independent filmmaker of *Ang Pamilyang Kumakain ng Lupa*, *Bahag Kings*, *Our Daily Bread*, etc. and founding member and organizer of (dot)Mov)

July 26, 2006

5:00 pm

Kamias Road, Quezon City

Interviewers: Joseph Palis, Ron Bryant

Camera: Elmo Redrico

Contact made possible by Ron Bryant, Elmo Redrico

(23) Clodualdo Del Mundo, Jr. (documentary filmmaker, film scholar, president of the Society of Filipino Film Archivists [SOFIA], and independent filmmaker of 2005

CineMalaya Grand Prize winner *Pepot Artista*)

July 27, 2006
2:30 pm
University Fellows Room
Second Floor, Yuchengco Building, De La Salle University
Taft Avenue, Manila

Interviewer: Joseph Palis
Camera: Joseph Palis, Alicia Manlagnit

(24) Celso Ad. Castillo (independent and commercial filmmaker of *Pagputi ng Uwak*,
Pag Itim ng Tagak, *Burlesk Queen*, *Tag-ulan sa Tag-araw*)

July 27, 2006
5:45 pm
Film Academy of the Philippines
Mother Ignacia St., Quezon City

Interviewer: Joseph Palis
Camera: Ron Bryant, Elmo Redrico
Contact made possible by Ron Bryant

(25) Patrick Flores (film critic, film scholar, 2006 president of the Young Critics Circle)

July 28, 2006
3:00 pm
Fourth Floor, National Museum
Lawton, Manila

Interviewer: Joseph Palis
Camera: Elmo Redrico
Contact made possible by Eileen Legaspi-Ramirez

(26) Mario O'Hara (writer, actor, director of *Babae sa Breakwater*, *Tatlong Taong*
Walang Diyos, *Bakit Bughaw ang Langit*, *Pangarap ng Puso*, *Babae sa Bubungang Lata*)

July 28, 2006
6:00 pm
First Floor Lobby
Cultural Center of the Philippines
Roxas Boulevard, Manila

Interviewer: Joseph Palis
Camera: Elmo Redrico
Contact made possible by Noel Vera

(27) Mark Gil (actor in *Batch '81*, *Palipat-lipat*, *Papalit-palit*, *Magnifico*, *Donsol*, *Rotonda*)

July 28, 2006

11:00 pm

Fleur de Lis Café

Tomas Morato St., Quezon City

Interviewer: Joseph Palis

Camera: Elmo Redrico

Contact made possible by Nerissa Picadizo

(28) Elvert Banares (independent filmmaker of *Alipo-op sa Animo*, film festival director of Eksperimento)

July 29, 2006

2:00 pm

Multi Media Room, Third Floor

Multi Media Arts Department, School of Design and Arts

De La Salle – College of St. Benilde

Taft Avenue, Manila

Interviewer: Joseph Palis

Camera: Joseph Palis, Constantino Co

Contact made possible by Nerissa Picadizo

(29) Victoria Belarmino (secretary of Society of Filipino Film Archivists [SOFIA], CCP-Film Department)

July 29, 2006

4:30 pm

Dream Theater, Tanghalang Manuel Conde, First Floor

Cultural Center of the Philippines

Roxas Boulevard, Manila

Interviewer: Joseph Palis

Camera: Alice Manlangit, Alvie Galido, Jovie Importante, Cristina Butiong

Contact made possible by Maxie Evangelista, Doy del Mundo

(30) Noel Taylo (independent filmmaker of *Upas* and *Kwarto*)

August 1, 2006

5:00 pm

Office of Student Affairs

Palma Hall Room #113

University of the Philippines

Diliman, Quezon City

Interviewer: Joseph Palis
Camera: Joseph Palis

(31) Jonah Lim (independent filmmaker of *Kaibigan* and *Afternoon Delight: When The Gods Start to Play*)
July 26, 2007
4:30 pm
Cultural Center of the Philippines
Roxas Boulevard, Manila

Interviewer: Joseph Palis
Camera: Joseph Palis
Contact made possible by Elvert Banares

(32) Adolf Alix (director of *Kadin (The Goat)*), Katski Flores (director of *Still Life*), Nix Lanas (co-director of the short *Doble Vista*), Jay Abello (director of *Ligaw Lihim*), Dennis Marasigan (director of *Tukso*), Jade Castro (director of *Endo.*), Sockie Fernandez (director of *Gulong*), Astrud (director of *Liwanag sa Dilim*), Jim Libiran (director of *Tribu*)
July 27, 2007
1:00 pm
Tanghalang Huseng Batute
Cultural Center of the Philippines
Roxas Boulevard, Manila

FGD Facilitator: Ed Cabagnot
Camera: Joseph Palis

(33) Nicanor Tiongson (professor of film at the University of the Philippines Film Institute; former MTRCB head)
July 31, 2007
11:00 am
Department of Film and Audio Visual Communication
College of Mass Communications
University of the Philippines
Diliman, Quezon City

Interviewer: Joseph Palis
Camera: Joseph Palis

(34) Eddie Romero (National Artist in Film; director of *Ganito Kami Noon, Paano kayo Ngayon*, *Aguila*, *Hari sa Hari*, *Lahi sa Lahi*, *Faces of Love*)

July 31, 2007

2:00 pm

2 Orestes Lane

Brgy. Bagong Lipunan-Crame

Quezon City

kulas7@skyinet.net

Interviewer: Joseph Palis

Camera: Joseph Palis

Contact made possible by Vicky Belarmino

(35) Earl Drilon a.k.a. Tengal (actor, multi-media artist)

August 1, 2007

11:30 am

Marikina Shoe Expo, Cubao

Quezon City

Interviewers: Joseph Palis

Camera: Joseph Palis

Contact made possible by Myra Garces-Bacsal

(36) Crisaldo Pablo (independent filmmaker; queer filmmaker of *Bathhouse*, *Duda*, *Moreno*, *Bilog*, *Metlogs*, *Pitong Dalagita*)

August 4, 2007

1:40 pm

Grupong Sinehan

21-C Kamias Road, Quezon City

Interviewer: Joseph Palis

Camera: Alex delos Santos

Contact made possible by Vicky Belarmino

(37) Raya Martin (independent filmmaker of *Maicling Pelikula ng Indio Nacional*, *Autohystoria*)

August 4, 2007

7:30 pm

Titus Brandsma Center

24 Acacia St., New Manila, Quezon City

Interviewer: Joseph Palis

Camera: Elaissa Mendoza, Joseph Palis

Contact made possible by Maxie Evangelista

(38) Keith Sicat (diasporic/independent filmmaker/writer of *Rigodon*)

September 21, 2007

5:30 pm

Lower East Side, New York City

Interviewer: Joseph Palis

Camera: Joseph Palis

Contact made possible by Doy del Mundo

(39) Sari Lluch Dalena (diasporic/independent filmmaker of *Rigodon*)

September 22, 2007

6:00 pm

Brooklyn, New York

Interviewer: Joseph Palis

Camera: Joseph Palis

Contact made possible by Doy del Mundo

(40) Momoy Fuentebella (independent filmmaker)

September 23, 2007

2:30 pm

Central Park, New York City

Interviewer: Joseph Palis

Camera: Joseph Palis

Contact made possible by Doy del Mundo