

PLACES, an extension program of *Pelikula: A Journal of Philippine Cinema and Moving Image*, widens and deepens the journal's task of tracing Filipino cinema and moving-image production beyond its usual centers. Through collaborations, workshops, seminars, and mentorship, it draws in new and emergent writers and cinephiles rooted in local film communities, publishing dossiers that are both forays and markers toward understanding the works, contexts, cultures, and histories through which place and cinema come to shape one another.

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Editor's Note

The articles gathered in this dossier mostly come from the fellows of the first Places Workshop in 2023, an extension program of the UP Film Institute's *Pelikula* journal, conceived and established by editor-in-chief Patrick F. Campos. As he notes, the workshop "broadens and deepens the journal's goal of documenting Filipino moving-image production beyond conventionally recognized centers" and "understanding the works, contexts, cultures, and histories of placemaking and place-based cinemas."

Hailing from two Mindanao cities, Cagayan de Oro and General Santos, the twelve chosen fellows began with a topic or concept and developed it through a series of writing and critiquing sessions. They were a mix of students, filmmakers, cultural workers, writers, and teachers who approached contemporary Mindanaoan cinema from different angles and questions, styles, and forms.

Filmmakers Gutierrez Mangansakan II, Alan Filoteo, Joe Bacus, and Adjani Arumpac, film scholar and critic Katrina Ross Tan and Jay Rosas, as well as *Pelikula* staff, namely, EIC Campos, then-associate editor Tito R. Quiling, Jr., and I as associate editor of this first dossier, shared our expertise and time as mentors. UPFI researchers Angela Chaves and Adrian Mendizabal coordinated the months-long workshop and provided constancy.

While a few fellows were caught up in their professional engagements and were unable to contribute to this dossier, we invited Hobart Savior, the founding festival director of Cinemagis at Xavier University in Cagayan de Oro, to write about the festival's history. This historicization of a university-based film festival is complemented by a historical narrative of a community-based film festival, Cine de Oro, written by its co-founder and filmmaker, Orpheus Nery.

Coincidentally, the full-length film *The Restless Heron* (2023), directed by Filoteo, made waves in key universities in Mindanao and generated critical attention. We thus decided to include four reviews of the film, curated by Christine Godinez Ortega through the Mindanao Creative & Cultural Workers Group, Inc., that converse with Christian Ely Poot's account of the filmmaking process for *The Restless Heron*.

The other articles in this dossier explore varied themes and concerns. Guided by their situatedness—and proximity to the filmmakers—in their region, they explore gender, war and memory, a filmmaker's biography, and the status of child labor in Mindanao.

Mubarak Tahir studies the representation of Moro women and *maratabat* in the cinema of Mangansakan, Alessandro Kennz Nioda talks about the regional queer in the film of Trishtan Perez, and Abigail James explores the notion of female gaze and the contributions of three women filmmakers in Cagayan de Oro, namely Jasmine Limas, Julianne Ilagan, and Mia Grace Solamen. Genory Vanz Alfasain reflects on the Mindanao conflict through Adjani Arumpac's *War is a Tender Thing* (2013). Meckhan Tagarda offers a brief biography of Orpheus Nery as a Cagayanon filmmaker. Elmina Rayah Dizon-Maniago examines the situation of laboring children in the films of Ditsi Carolino, Mangansakan, and Jarell Serencio.

As an initial effort to realize a vision, at a small budget at that, the workshop and publication faced birthing pains in the form of missteps, delays, and unevenness. Note, then, that some of the essays here are two or three years old. Nevertheless, we have taken the risk of the first step and cannot be gladder for it.

We are grateful for the funding support from the Office of Extension Coordination of the University of the Philippines Diliman and the administrative support of the UPFI, especially its directors Rob Rownd and Yason Banal. We also thank the contributors for their commitment and patience in working with the *Pelikula* team in bringing this dossier to publication.

Today, filmmaking in Mindanao is vibrant and active, and many stories are being told. Our hope is that more writers will rise to the occasion by critiquing the films to foster illuminating conversations on Mindanaoan issues and elevate the quality of public discourse on Philippine cinema.

—Elio Garcia
Special Issue Editor



Recalling the Mindanao Conflict: A Reflection on Adjani Arumpac's *War is a Tender Thing*

Genory Vanz Alfasain

Adjani Guerrero Arumpac's *War is a Tender Thing* (2013) is a personal exploration of the Mindanao conflict and its impact on her family's lives. It is a video essay that explores the longstanding war in Mindanao, Philippines, through the lens of the documentarist's family history.¹ It includes family members' testimonials, news videos and audio clips, and images of Mindanao locations, incorporating historical and personal narratives. This article approaches the film through memory studies to delve into the recollections of her family members and herself as the documentarist. It reveals how her family recalls their complex history and identity, intertwined with the second-longest conflict in the world.

Arumpac grew up in General Santos City. She had the privilege of spending her adult life in Manila, where she pursued a Bachelor's degree in Film and Audiovisual Communications at the University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman. Currently, she lives in Quezon City and imparts her knowledge and expertise as a faculty member at the UP Film Institute.

She is the offspring of a beautiful intermarriage between her mother, Araceli Guerrero Arumpac, who is of Ilocano descent, and her father, Aaron Arumpac, a Meranaw from Cotabato City. The filmmaker allowed her family to share their stories uninhibited, without interrupting or manipulating the conversations. In her documentary, the camera is strategically positioned from a single vantage point, poised to capture her family members' unfiltered reactions and emotions during the interviews.

Arumpac has been a prominent figure in the Philippine regional film scene for years. Her autobiographical trilogy on the internal diaspora in the Philippines began with her undergraduate thesis, *Walai* (2006), and continued with *War is a Tender Thing*.² Her works have been showcased in various national and international film festivals, including Cine Tootoo: Philippine International Documentary Film Festival, Salamindanaw Asian Film Festival, and Yamagata

International Documentary Film Festival, earning her recognition as a significant female documentarist from Mindanao.

In addition to Arumpac, other filmmakers from Mindanao have also explored the Mindanao conflict through documentaries. Notable examples include Gutierrez "Teng" Mangansakan II's *House Under the Crescent Moon* (2002) and Sheron Dayoc's *The Crescent Rising* (2015). These works provide a diverse range of perspectives on the issue. Jay Rosas, a film critic and programmer from Davao, characterizes these documentaries as platforms that foster a sense of "re-familiarization" with the Mindanao conflict. Such a process is important not only for the viewers but also for the filmmakers themselves.³

On dealing with the memory of the war

Investigations into the Mindanao conflict in the Philippines span a diverse range of fields, including historical, political, cultural, and social aspects. Numerous works of literature offer a profound understanding of conflict and its multifaceted nature. An interesting aspect of examining the Mindanao conflict involves the application of memory studies.



The camera is strategically positioned from a single vantage point, patiently poised to capture the unfiltered reactions and emotions of her family members during the interviews. Images are author's screenshots of Adjani Arumpac's *War is a Tender Thing*, used with permission.

Memory studies is an interdisciplinary field that examines how collective and individual memories shape our understanding of the past, influence present identities, and impact future actions. It integrates perspectives from history, sociology, psychology, anthropology, literature, and media studies to explore the processes of remembering and forgetting, the construction of memory, and its role in society.⁴

Jay Murray Winter and Maurice Halbwachs have made significant contributions to our understanding of memory, particularly in the context of collective memory. Winter's work delves into how societies remember wars, particularly World War I. In his book *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (1995), he explores the various ways in which the collective memory of the war has been preserved through memorials, literature, and public rituals. Winter emphasizes the importance of these remembrance sites in shaping how societies process and commemorate traumatic events.⁵ Meanwhile, Halbwachs introduces the concept of collective memory. His book *On Collective Memory* (1992) argues that memory is a social construct influenced by the groups to which individuals belong. According to Halbwachs, collective memory is selective and shaped by the current needs and interests of the group, highlighting the dynamic nature of how societies remember the past.⁶

The filmmaker's maternal grandmother, Ruperta "Mameng" Rodin Guerrero visited Feliza "Piling" Corpuz, a relative, in Patindeguen, located in the Municipality of Midsayap, Province of Cotabato (formerly known as North Cotabato).



She came here to interview about the family of Old Man (Modesto)

In the context of the Mindanao war, the theories of Winter and Halbwachs illuminate how the conflict has indelibly imprinted itself on the collective memory of Mindanao's residents, shaping their perceptions and recollections of subsequent conflicts. This collective memory is selective and influential.

As depicted in the documentary, the memory of Arumpac's family regarding the Mindanao war is not fixed but fluid, evolving with time under the influence of ongoing dialogues, narratives, and interpretations of the past. This memory is a mirror reflecting the past and a compass guiding the future. For instance, the final scene is open-ended, inviting viewers to share their understanding of the issue and suggesting that the Mindanao conflict remains an ongoing



non-landowners from Zambales

problem. The scene stands as a stark reminder of the repercussions of conflict and the importance of peace. It highlights the necessity of reconciliation and healing and the crucial role of learning from history to avert the repetition of violence. Consequently, the collective memory of the Mindanao war, though anchored in historical events, continues to mold the present and future of Mindanao's inhabitants.

Arumpac presents the collective memory of their family dynamics and personal recollections of the Mindanao conflict, and offers her insights into it. Her "act of remembering" offers a glimpse into narratives often overlooked or unheard in news reports or books. As viewers, we are invited to reflect on her act of remembering, which revisits a painful past and challenges us to reconsider established narratives of history we have come to know and accept.

Arumpac's documentary catalyzes Mindanawons to reflect on our memories of the war. It prompts us to reminisce about our family narratives and contemplate how these experiences have shaped our identities over the years.

The documentary acts as a memory trigger, particularly for viewers who have experienced similar situations. It provides a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics of the people of Mindanao and the underlying tensions within this context. Watching it feels akin to participating in a communal journey, one that navigates from her family's recollections to her own and then extends to our memories. Arumpac's insights enrich the broader shared memory surrounding these events. As an individual who is also a product of cultural intermarriage, I resonate with some of the nuances presented in the film. For instance, I understand the experience of being looked down upon by a family member simply because one of my parents subscribes to a different religion.

Arumpac shares that Modesto left behind "no single photo." His only legacy was a piece of land in Patindeguen.

Arumpac's documentary holds significant relevance in the present era when historical narratives can be manipulated to align with the objectives of those in power. It is a crucial counter-narrative that challenges such revisions and upholds the truth.

In the film, Atty. Abdul Arumpac becomes emotional as he recounts the story of his father, Macaurog Arumpac. Macaurog's journey from a celebrated war hero to an "accused criminal" highlights how those in power can manipulate narratives to serve their agenda. In his view, there is no war between Christians and Muslims; rather, it is politics that fuels this conflict. Baul Arumpac, the daughter-in-law of Macaurog, vividly recalls their harrowing experiences during the Marcos regime in the 1970s. She was perplexed by why the military was searching for her father-in-law, given that he was a soldier himself.

Both of them reflect on painful memories and grapple to comprehend the horrific fate of their father and their own harrowing experiences of the Mindanao conflict. It serves as a potent reminder that neglecting our history can fuel the cycle of violence and historical trauma. The wounds of the past can never truly heal if we disregard its lessons, which are invaluable for our present generation—forgetting the past risks repeating its painful chapters, denying us closure and the opportunity to learn and grow.

During a visit to her hometown, Mameng unexpectedly ran into Patalaga on the street. Recognizing each other, Patalaga was overcome with emotion upon seeing Mameng, immediately embracing her and shedding tears.



Baul Arumpac, Macaurog's daughter-in-law, recalls that soldiers were in pursuit of him. Tragically, her family and some locals were brutally massacred in their coconut plantation.





Aaron Arumpac highlights the issue of Moro stereotyping. He characterizes it as a "convenient excuse" utilized by both Muslims and Christians

Cultural stereotypes and reflection on the Mindanao conflict

The representation of Bangsamoro in cinema often perpetuates cultural stereotypes, which can significantly affect how these communities are perceived and treated. *Mangansakan* traces the Bangsamoro cultural stereotyping in Philippine cinema, spanning the Spanish colonial period to the present.⁷

Common cultural stereotypes portray the Bangsamoro as objects of colonial conquest and as people who are savages. Recently, these stereotypes have often oversimplified and reduced the Bangsa Moro to a single group, disregarding the diversity of the many ethnolinguistic groups, including their identities, beliefs, customs and traditions, and geographical locations.

In *War is a Tender Thing*, Arumpac's parents discuss their marriage, their experiences as Mindanawons, and their perspectives on the Mindanao conflict. One of the interesting aspects of the film is the exploration of the challenges associated with cultural intermarriage and its accompanying stereotypes. The film shows how cultural stereotypes affect Arumpac's parents' relationship. In one scene, the filmmaker's maternal grandmother, Ruperta "Mameng" Rodin Guerrero, disapproves of their relationship due to their youth and Aaron's Muslim faith. Mameng expresses her concern, saying, "Ayoko nang Muslim baka mag asawa nang marami." (I don't want a Muslim because he might marry many wives). This recollection of their love story provides insight into Moro stereotyping, which underscores the longstanding tension between Christians and Muslims in Mindanao.

A similar situation unfolds within Mameng's family, involving her brother and sister-in-law, Patalaga Rodin. While visiting her hometown, Mameng unexpectedly runs into Patalaga on the street. Recognizing each other, Patalaga is overcome with emotion upon

seeing Mameng, immediately embracing her and shedding tears. In a subsequent scene, Patalaga reminisces about how her husband's family initially disapproved of their relationship because she is a Muslim.

Aaron Arumpac highlights the issue of Moro stereotyping. He characterizes it as a "convenient excuse" by both Muslims and Christians. He asserts, "Hindi puwedeng magsama," indicating the prevailing belief that it is unfeasible for both groups to coexist, whether in romantic or platonic relationships. This belief also justifies not pursuing peace agreements under the pretext that coexistence in Mindanao would be futile.

The media plays a role in perpetuating stereotypes and misinformation about Mindanao and its people. Biased reporting has negatively portrayed Mindanao not only nationally but also internationally. For instance, in the past, national media outlets often used the term "Muslim group" whenever a bomb-related incident occurred in a specific area of Mindanao. Some reporters would generalize the entire island, portraying Mindanao as a war-torn region. Adjani Arumpac cleverly incorporates audio and visual clips from news reports discussing the Mindanao war, the Moro nation entity, and the peace agreement. She demonstrates how news shapes public perception and spreads misinformation.

During the *Woman/Hood: Changing Tapestries for Change* event in 2018, held in celebration of International Women's Day at the MSU-IIT campus in Iligan City, Arumpac talked about her documentary and shared her initial vision for crafting a personal essay film. This genre of documentary film employs literary techniques to generate evocative imagery.⁸

The term "essay film" is used to describe a self-reflective and self-referential documentary cinema that blurs the lines between fiction and nonfiction (Moss, 2021).⁹ A personal essay film is a subgenre of the essay film that focuses on the filmmaker's own experiences, thoughts, and reflections. These films often use a first-person narrative and blend documentary and fictional elements to explore personal stories and insights (Rascaroli, 2009).¹⁰

In the event, Arumpac said she aspires to delve into the complex dynamics of cultural intermarriage and to resurrect stories deeply ingrained in the collective memory of ordinary people—stories that remain conspicuously absent from historical texts, news reports, and official records.¹¹

When the Americans assumed control from the Spanish colonial rulers in 1898, three facets of US colonial governance played a significant role in intensifying the Moro struggle: (1) labeling and classification of the population; (2) discriminatory provisions of public land laws; and (3) the resettlement programs. These facets,

particularly the resettlement programs¹², had a detrimental impact on the indigenous inhabitants of Mindanao, as these initiatives led to the displacement and reduction in their population, pushing them to the periphery of society.

Arumpac's film provides a valuable exploration of the history of non-landowners' migration from Luzon and Visayas, as told through the narrative of Modesto Rodin. In the documentary, Arumpac reveals that Modesto, her grandmother's great-great-grandfather, migrated to Mindanao to begin a new life, much like many others of his time. Like other impoverished tenants from these two major islands, he too embarked on a journey in search of a better life and opportunities in Mindanao, often referred to as "the land of promise" because of its abundant resources. The core policy of homesteading, a land distribution strategy introduced by the Americans during the early 20th century¹³, resulted in substantial growth in the settler population in Mindanao, concurrently leading to a decline in the population of the original inhabitants, namely the Indigenous People and the Moros.¹⁴

Arumpac shows that Modesto left behind "no single photo." His only legacy is a piece of land in Patindeguen, located in the Municipality of Midsayap, Province of Cotabato (formerly known as North Cotabato). Intriguingly, he acquired this land by bartering two roosters. This narrative echoes the stories of other settlers who obtained their lands through similar means of barter exchange, trading items like five cans of sardines or a carabao. In some unfortunate instances, lands were forcibly taken from their original owners. This account offers a poignant look at the past and the



Arumpac incorporates her family's experiences during the Marcos dictatorship, particularly through the narrative of her paternal grandfather, Macaurog Arumpac.

struggles faced by settlers and the original inhabitants of Mindanao.

This aspect of history, often overlooked in books and educational institutions in the country, warrants a thorough discussion. The film is a significant platform to reveal the underrepresented history of the resettlement project in Mindanao. It is crucial to note that narratives about this program are



Toward the end of the film, the filmmaker poses a question to her mother about the Bangsamoro agreement. Araceli takes a moment to reflect before sharing her thoughts.

predominantly from the settlers' viewpoint, which often neglects the perspectives of the Moro and Indigenous Peoples, the original inhabitants of Mindanao. This film helps to balance these narratives and shed light on their experiences.

Through the narratives of Arumpac's family members and her own insights, the film gives voice to these unreported and unwritten stories. It helps us understand the complex history of the Mindanao conflict through their experiences. Given the complexity of the Mindanao conflict, Arumpac skillfully incorporates elements of historical facts into her family's recollections of their experiences of conflict in Mindanao. The narrative spans various eras, from the Spanish and American colonial periods through World War II, the land resettlement program, the Marcos dictatorship, and up to Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III's administration. Arumpac masterfully intertwines these historical narratives with her family's accounts, providing a rich tapestry.

The film consistently incorporates the narrative of the migrants who journeyed to Mindanao in pursuit of a better life. Unknown to them, their migration would contribute to the enduring conflict that today's generation of Mindanawons continues to grapple with. What sets this documentary apart is its presentation of a multi-layered explanation of the conflict, conveyed through the personal recounting of the individuals' experiences during the war in Mindanao. Their memories of the Mindanao conflict help us appreciate multiple perspectives of the conflict, highlighting both the narratives of Christian settlers and Muslims.

War is a Tender Thing aged well and remains relevant. This documentary and other narratives of the Mindanao conflict will continue to stir our collective memory, prompting reflections on our past and inspiring dreams for the future.

Genory Vanz Alfasain, also known as Yadu Karu, is an independent journalist, writer, and cultural advocate based in Sarangani Province. He co-founded the Sarangani Writers League, which promotes grassroots storytelling and the regional literary movement. His writings foreground indigenous narratives, sustainability, and regional identity, with work featured in *SunStar Davao*, *New Durian Cinema*, *Bangsamoro Literary Review*, and *Film Criticism Collective 3*. He directed, wrote, and produced *Bè*, which won Best Short Film (Sarangani Shorts Category) at the first SalaMindanaw Asian Film Festival. His second short film, *Jamir*, was nominated for Best Short Film at the 2014 Mindanao Film Festival.

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Maratabat Nu Kababayan: **Ang Kababaihang Moro sa Pelikulang** ***Limbunan ni Gutierrez Mangansakan II***

Mubarak M. Tahir

Introduksiyon

Isa sa mga ikinatatangi ng kultura at *kaadatan* o pag-uugali ng mga Moro ay ang tinatawag na *maratabat*. Bahagi na ito ng sistemang pag-uugali ng mga Moro partikular na sa mga Maguindanaoan at Meranaw. Ang konsepto ng *maratabat* ay malapit sa kahulugan ng “amor propio” ng mga Pilipino na ang ibig sabihin ay pagpapahalaga sa dangal at reputasyon. Ito ay pagpapakita ng pagmamahal sa sarili sa pamamagitan ng pagpapakita rin ng pagmamalasakit sa kapakanan ng ibang tao o komunidad. Ang *maratabat* ay matagal nang nakaugat sa tradisyon at kaugalian ng ating mga kapatid na mga Moro¹. Dagdag pa rito, ang *maratabat* ay malapit sa kahulugan ng salitang pride subalit hindi nito ganap na nagagampanan ang kahulugang kultural nito sa konteksto ng lipunang Moro. Kung gayon, ang representasyon ng kabuoang kultura at lipunan ng mga Moro sa iba’t ibang konteksto gaya ng pelikula ay isang *maratabat* (dangal, reputasyon at dignidad).

Ilang pelikula at teleseryeng Pilipino na rin ang nagtangkang dalhin sa pedestal ng nasyonal na lente ng kamera ang konsepto ng *maratabat* sa pamamagitan ng mga tradisyonal na pagkakasal o *këlilang* ng mga Moro. Isa sa mga halimbawa nito ay ang *Legal Wives* na ipinalabas ng GMA Telebabad Series noong 2021. Nasa konteksto ng kultura at panlipunang kaugalian man ito ng mga Meranaw ay hindi nalalayo ang *maratabat* ng mga Maguindanoan dito. Mahalagang panlipunang kasangkapan ang konsepto ng kasal o *këwing* sa mga Moro dahil bago, habang, at pagkatapos ng seremonya ay litaw na litaw ang konsepto ng *maratabat*. Mula sa pagsasaalang-alang sa mapapangasawa batay sa panlipunang estado at pisikal na kagandahan hanggang sa kung paano idedekahon ng lipunan ang pansariling kalayaan ng *tiwëlëi* o mag-asawa. Ang konsepto ng pangangasawa at pagpapakasal sa lipunang Moro ay isang *maratabat*—pagpapaangat sa sarili sa anumang aspekto ng buhay at lipunan bunsod ng liberalismo.

Mahalagang madalumat ang maratabat na ito sa iba't ibang konteksto at lente bilang representasyon ng kultura at lipunang Moro. Isa sa mga lunsarang dapat dalumin ay ang kalagayan panlipunang ng mga babaeng Moro sa mga pelikula. Sa pamamagitan nito ay masisipat ang representasyon ng mga Moro bilang hakbang sa pagtakas sa cultural appropriation, misrepresentation at cultural insensitivity dulot ng dinamikong salik dahil sa pluralistikong lipunan. Ayon kay Rolando Tolentino (2017), kumakatawan sa bansa at pambansang identidad ang katawan ng pambansang sinema. Sa karanasan sa ating pambansang sinema, ito ang mga pelikulang tumampok dahil sa mataas na kalidad ng kasiningan, kapasidad sa interrogasyon ng bansa at pambansang identidad, at representasyon ng marginal at subalternong karanasan at kolektibidad². Malaki ang ginagampanan ng sinema sa representasyon ng identidad ng isang lipunan gaya ng mga Moro.

Nabanggit naman ni Paul Grant (2015): "where once problematic categories in film history seemed to have reached their respective aporiae due to distribution, technology or spectator/participant-ship, what we are calling cinema today has liberated some of these historical constraints as a result of the seismic shift in just about every aspect of the cinematic-network-apparatus."³ Sa siniping pahayag na ito ni Grant, mahalagang pagtuunan ng pansin ang mga elemento ng pelikula partikular na sa mga usaping historikal na tumatalakay sa kalagayang panlipunan ng mga sangkap at elemento na ginamit sa loob ng mga rehiyonal na pelikula na ito gaya ng mga tauhan ng Limbunan ni Gutierrez "Teng" Mangansakan II kasabay ng pag-unlad ng teknikalidad ng mga pelikulang ito. Dagdag pa ni Grant:

This is primarily because even while the regional approach offers a more heterogeneous and hybrid expression of what makes up a nation—expressions that give more credence to indigenous, local and perhaps above all linguistic distinctions—it still maintains or at least did in a more classical mode of film production, constitutive parameters that tend towards a potential homogenization.⁴

Malinaw na sa pag-usbong ng mga makabagong kaparaanan ng dulong sa pelikula lalo na sa mga rehiyonal na pelikula ay haybrid din ang pagpapahayag sa pagkakakilanlan ng isang bayan dahil sa impluwensiya ng klasikong kaparaanan ng moda ng produksiyon ng mga pelikula.

Sa konteksto ng rehiyonal na pelikula, mahalagang muling tahakin at babaybayin ang mga pelikulang direktang naglalantad ng kalagayang panlipunan ng mga tauhan nito bilang representasyon ng kultural na lente ng isinasabuhay na komunidad sa iba't ibang anggulo ng kamera. Ayon pa kay Patrick F. Campos (2021), "There is a need to develop a paradigm that can account for the expansion of cinematic reach and visualization while remaining sensitive to historical context and cinematic place-making politics."⁵ Kung ang

isa sa mga mahahalagang elemento ng kahulugan ng rehiyonal na pelikula ay ang pagtatampok sa komunidad ay mahalaga ring pagtuunan ng pansin ang mayoryang bumubuo sa yunit ng komunidad. Sa pamamagitan nito ay nadadalumat ang representasyon at pagkakakilanlan ng mga tauhan batay sa kanilang kinabibilangang kultura at panlipunang kaugalian.

Sa kultural na konteksto, dadalumat ang kalagayang panlipunan ng Këbëbëyan ë Moro sa pelikulang Limbunan ni Mangansakan sa lente ng multikulturalismo, sosyo-kultural, sosyo-ekonomik, sosyo-politikal at feminismo. Sa pamamagitan nito ay matutukoy ang kabuuang presentasyon ng kababaihang Moro sa loob ng pelikula at kung naipapahayag at napapanatili ba nito ang pagkababae ng mga Moro bilang nakadekahong kalagayan pangkasarian sa lipunan. Bilang bahagi ng komunidad ng Heneral Santos, ang mga Moro partikular na ang mga pangkat mga Maguindanaoan ay mahalagang madalumat ang kalagayan ng këbëbëyan na ito sa loob ng pelikula bilang kabuuang representasyon ng mga babaeng Moro. Sa pamamagitan nito ay masisilip ang pagpapahalaga sa representasyon ng mga tauhan batay sa pinagmulang kasaysayan, kultura at lipunan nito bilang bëbëi—hindi dahil babae lang.

Lente at Anggulo ng Pelikulang Moro

Sa mga nagdaang dekada ay malayo na rin ang narating ng mga rehiyonal na pelikula. Mula sa isang payak na pagtatanghal ay nakumutan ito ng dinamikong pagtanggap sa pagbabago ng kaparaanan ng pagtatanghal at pagpapamalas ng sining Pilipino gaya ng pelikula simula pa noong 1922. Sinundan pa ito ng mga rehiyonal na pelikula mula sa iba't ibang rehiyon sa Pilipinas bilang pagtatangkang maiangkla ang pelikulang ito mula rehiyonal, nasyonal at internasyonal maliban pa sa ang pangunahing layunin nito ay maikintal ang kuwento at naratibo ng isang komunidad gamit ang pinakamataas na antas ng sining—pelikula.

Kasalukuyang Kalagayan ng Pelikulang Moro

Ang nakalulungkot na bagay sa Mindanao ay tungkol lamang sa giyera ang kukunin ng media. Halos hindi tayo interesado tungkol sa pagsang-ayon at interfaith diyologo ngunit iyon ang nakagaganyak sa Mindanao. Ipapakita sa iyo ng mga pelikulang ito ang iba't ibang mga tanawin at mukha ng Mindanao.⁶

— Michael Frank Alar, 2016

Sa payak na pagpapakahulugan ang salitang Bangsamoro o Moro ay sosyo-politikal na identidad. Binubuo ng 13 etnolinggwistik na pangkat ang Bagsamoro o mas kilala sa Moro. Ang pangkat na ito ay may kani-kanyang natatanging wika, kultura at lipunan. Sa kabila ng daybersidad na ito ay lagi nang may pagkauhaw sa panlipunang

pagkakilanlan tungo sa pambansang pagkakilanlan o national identity. Kung naipapakilala man ang mga Moro ay isang artipisyal na paglalarawan lamang sa kanilang kultura at lipunan maging ng kanilang pagka-Moro dahil sa iba't ibang salik panlipunan. Hindi nakapagtataka na nananatili pa rin ang nosyon na ang Mindanao ay kapuluan ng gulo at gyera at ang mga Moro ay terorista.

Ayon kay Vivienne Angeles (2016), "early portrayals of Philippine Muslims in film show them not only as a people who profess a "heathen religion" but also whose culture is dominated by notions of superiority and violence against women and non-Muslims."⁷ Sa pahayag na ito, malinaw kung ano ang nabuong imahen sa mga Moro-Muslim sa loob ng mga pelikula. Sa kabila ng naikintal na imahen na ito ng midya ay nagpapatuloy ang ilang manlilikha ng sining na itaguyod ang pambansang pagkakakilanlan ng mga Moro sa pinakadakilang paraan at iyon ang representasyon ng wika, kultura at lipunan nila sa loob ng mga rehiyonal na pelikula maging ng sa mga pambansang pelikula gaya ng Mindanao ni Brillante Mendoza noong 2019 na pinangungunahan ni Judy Ann Santos—ilan lamang ito sa pagtatangka ng mga taga-labas.

Sa konteksto ng pelikulang Moro bilang rehiyonal na pelikula sa kasalukuyan, mas marami ang nangangahas na gumawa ng mga pelikula batay sa lente ng Moro sa kabila ng pagiging hindi kabilang ng mga filmmaker na ito sa lipunan ng mga Moro. Hindi nakatakas sa kritisismo ng mga kilalang manunulat na mga Moro ang pelikulang Mindanao ni Brillante Mendoza dahil sa malayong konteksto nito. Ayon kay Amir Mawallil mula sa artikulo ni Tyrone Velez (2020), the film Mindanao "reduces an island so full of cultural and ethnic diversity to a single narrative. There are many narratives in Mindanao. To show only one is inaccurate... it becomes a flawed narrative."⁸ Dagdag pa ni Velez, "Maguindanaon filmmaker Teng Mangansakan notes the film lacks knowledge on geography and representation. How can a vinta in Sulu sail in Liguasan Marsh in Central Mindanao? How can a character travel from Davao to Maguindanao in one jeepney ride for four hours?" Nabanggit din ni Perez, "Mangansakan also chided how one Maguindanao character was made to mix a traditional attire with his military uniform while performing a traditional dance, saying this a 'bastardization' of Maguindanao culture."⁹

Sa mga pahayag na ito ng mga manunulat at filmmaker na mga Moro, isa itong pagsasawalambahala sa konteksto ng Bangsamoro at mga Moro hindi lamang historikal at maging ng heograpikal na lente. Sa madaling sabi, ang hindi pagbibigay-diin sa mahahalagang konteksto ng isang naratibo ng isang komunidad at pangkat ay kalapastanganan sa pagrerepresenta sa mga ito sa malawak na anggulo ng pelikula. Sa bandang huli, ayon kina Mawallil at Mangansakan mula kay Velez, "Both Mawallil and Mangansakan drive the point that the film lacks research and grounding on the geopolitics of the Moro people. For them, this is not about the Moro people or about Mindanao. Representation matters."¹⁰ Mahalaga ang wasto

at akmang representasyon sa pelikula bilang pagbibigay-buhay sa kabuuang búhay at imahen ng isang pangkat, komunidad at lipunang Moro.

Nagpatuloy ang paggawa ng mga filmmaker ng mga pelikulang tumatalakay sa Mindanao at Moro. Noong Hulyo 13, 2016 ay walong independent filmmaker ang nagkaroon ng proyekto sa pelikula sa “The Long Reach of Short Films” sa Cine Adarna sa Unibersidad ng Pilipinas Diliman. Layunin ng proyekto na ito na iwasto ang maling paniniwala laban sa Bangsamoro at mga Pilipinong Muslim sa Mindanao. Ayon kay Manuel Domes (2016), “Sinusubukan naming maghanap ng ibang paraan upang malutas ang isyu sa Bangsamoro. Mahalaga ang mga pelikula upang lumikha ng mga talakayan at diyalogo at maapektuhan ang emosyonal.”¹¹ Sa pahayag na ito ni Domes malinaw na ipinapakita ang kahalagahan ng mga rehiyonal na pelikula upang matugunan ang pangangailangang informative lalo na sa usaping kapayapaan. Mauunawaan lamang ito kung wasto at akma ang pagkakasakonteksto ng mga Moro sa mga pelikula. Dagdag pa niya, “Ang aming pangunahing pokus ay hindi gaanong sa mas mataas na antas ng diskurso ng kapayapaan ngunit sa antas ng edukasyon sa kapayapaan, pag-unawa sa konteksto, at pagbigkas nito.”¹² Sa madaling sabi, layunin ng mga pelikulang ito na maipaunawa nang magaan sa mga awdyens ang mga naratibo batay sa maayos, wasto at mahusay na panlipunang konteksto.

Sa kabila ng mga pagsusumikap ng mga manlilikha ng pelikula na ito na mapalitaw ang iba’t ibang naratibo at dánas ng mga Moro at Muslim sa lente ng pelikula sa daybersidad na konteksto ay mahalagang bigyang pansin kung napapanatili ba ng mga rehiyonal na pelikula na ito ang representasyon ng realidad at hindi ang idealistikong dánas na hinulma at nililikha lamang ng masalimuot na imahinasyon ng isang manlilikha.

Ang Manlilikha at Likha na Pelikulang Moro

Isa sa mga pundasyon at haligi ng panitikan at sinema bilang manunulat at direktor ng pelikula na nagtatanghal ng kultura at lipunang Moro ay si Mangansakan na kasalukuyang nakatira sa Lungsod Heneral Santos. Noong Setyembre 2019, sa isinagawang panayam ni Genory Vanz Alfasain, isang manlilikha ng pelikula at kritiko, mahusay na nailahad ang pananagumpay ni Mangansakan sa larangan ng paglikha ng sining.

Kinilala si Mangansakan bilang isa sa mga ilaw ng sinema sa Pilipinas. Ang pagkilala na ito ay ibinigay dahil sa kanyang natatanging likhang sining at kontribusyon sa pambansang sinema. Sa humigit na dalawang dekada ng kanyang karera sa paglikha ng pelikula, si Mangansakan ay nakalikha, nakapagsulat, at nakapagdirehe ng mga short at feature films at nauna na rito ang dokumentaryong *House Under the Crescent Moon* (2002) na sinundan naman ng kanyang mga obra na *Cartas de la Soledad* (2011), *Qiyamah* (2012), *The Obscured*

Histories and Silent Longings of Daguluan's Children (2012), at *Daughters of the Three Tailed Banner* (2016). Ang kanyang mga likhang pelikula ay nakatulong sa paghulma at pagpapaunlad ng rehiyonal na sinema sa Pilipinas lalo na sa Mindanao. Noong 2016 ay nilikha niya ang dokumentaryong pelikula tungkol sa Palimbang Massacre na *Forbidden Memory* at *Bird of History* naman noong 2018.

Ang mga likhang pelikula ni Mangansakan ay itinampok at ipinalabas sa humigit isandaang international film festivals at art exhibitions sa Warsaw, Edinburgh, Thessaloniki, Dubai, Singapore, San Francisco, Bangalore, Dubai, Seoul, Tokyo, Wiesbaden, Dhaka, Brisbane, Manila, at iba pang mga bansa.¹³

Sa kasalukuyan ay aktibo si Mangansakan sa iba't ibang rehiyonal at pambansang mga gawaing pampelikula maging ng mga palihan sa mga malikhaing pagsulat ng iba't ibang samahan at organisasyon sa bansa.

Salalayang Teoretikal na Lente

Sa pagtalakay ng mga nakapaloob na kultural na konsepto at panlipunang kaugalian na matatagpuan sa pelikulang Limbunan ni Mangansakan na magpapatingkad sa kalagayan ng mga babaeng Moro ay iaangkla at ihahabi ito sa lente ng teoryang multikulturalismo. Layunin ng kulturalismo na pangalagaan ang kultural na kaakuhan ng mga pangkat-etnikong rehiyon gaya ng mga Moro. Ang salalayang teorya na ito ay ginawang batayan at gabay ang konsepto ng multikulturalismo ayon sa mga teoristang sina Anderson at Gellner (2009)¹⁴. Nabanggit ni Watson (2000) mula kay Demeterio (2009)¹⁵, "In such a perspective the enhancement of a sense of local belonging and an awareness of diversity paradoxically encourage a strong commitment to national goals and institutions."¹⁶ Sa pamamagitan ng multikulturalismo ay nagbibigay ito ng espasyo sa mga pangkat etniko tungo sa pagbubuo ng bansa. Ito ay nangangahulugan na ang mga nakapaloob na kultura at panlipunang kaugalian ng isang pangkat ay maitaas sa pedestal ng pambansang relasyon at identidad dahil sa mga kultural na elemento. Ang mga kultural na elemento na ito ay kinapapalooban ng maratabat mismo ng pangkat gaya ng mga Moro dahil ipinagmamalaki nila ang mga ito.

Maaaring sandata ng mga Moro ito sa kanilang pakikisama sa ibang mga pangkat tungo sa pagbubuo ng bansa o nasyonalismo at hindi lamang ang rehiyonalismo. Ayon kay Demeterio,¹⁷ "Gamit ang balangkas ng multikulturalismo, lilitaw na hindi pala kailangang patayin ang rehiyonalismong kaugalian, at dapat pa ngang palakasin ang rehiyonalismo para mas madali at maging mas mabisa ang ating pagsasabansa. Magkakaiba kasi ang antas ng nasyonalismo at antas ng rehiyonalismo, at maaaring maranasan sabay-sabay ang mga damdaming ito." Ang pagpapanatili sa kultural na identidad at panlipunang kaugalian sa mga pelikula partikular na sa kalagayang panlipunan ng mga babaeng Moro ay hindi pagdedekahon sa kanila

subalit ito ay salamin ng realidad, katotohanan at lipunan. Dagdag pa ni Demeterio,¹⁸ "Ang multikulturalismo ay isang kamalayan, o ideolohiya, na minsan ay naisasabatas, na kumikilala at nasisiyahan sa pagkakaroon ng isang estado ng maraming maliliit na bansa, sinisikap ng kamalayan at ideolohiyang ito na mananatili ang kultural na pagkaka-iba-iba, at mabibigyan ng pagkakapantay-pantay ang lahat ng mga etnikong grupo na nasasakop ng estado." Sa pagtataguyod ng kamalayang ito ay lunsaran ang mga pelikulang hayag na nagpapalitaw ng kalagayan ng mga babae na nakakabit ang buhay sa kultura at lipunang kanilang kinabibilangan gaya ng mga Moro.

Ang Pelikulang *Limbunan*

Isa sa mga naunang likhang pelikula ni Mangansakan na nag-iwan ng marka sa larangan ng sinema ay ang *Limbunan* (The Bridal Quarter, 2010). Ito ang kauna-unahang full-length Bangsamoro na pelikula na tumatagal ng 82 minuto na pinangungunahan ng mga artistang sina Tetchie Agbayani, Jea Lyca Cinco and Joem Bascon.¹⁹ Nakatuon ang pelikula sa buong buwang paghahanda ni Ayesah (Jea Lyca Cinco) upang ikasal sa isang lalaking kailanman ay hindi pa niya nakikita. Ang salitang *Limbunan* ay halaw sa salitang Magindanawon na *limbung*, na nangangahulugan sa wikang Ingles na confined. Ang panlapi o affix na -an ay nagsasaad ng pagiging lokatibong aspekto nito na nangangahulugang quarter o confined area. Ito ang pook na pamamalagian ng isang babae bago pa man siya ikasal. Sa kultura at tradisyon ng mga Maguindanaoan ay bahagi ito ng proseso ng paghahanda ng isang babae bago siya ikasal. Hangarin ng gawain na ito ilayo sa anumang temptasyon at kapahamakan ang babae maliban pa sa ideya na upang mapanatili nito ang taglay nitong kagandahan bilang isang babae na haharap sa kanyang mapapangasawa.

Limbunan, 2010. Imahe mula sa *The Invisibility of the Visible: Emancipated Mindanaw and Sulu in Philippine Cinema*



Ang pelikulang Moro na ito ay umiikot sa naratibo ng mga kababaihan na nakadekahan ang mga sarili sa itinatakda ng kultura at lipunan na kanilang ginagalawan. Ayon sa paglalarawan ni Oggs Cruz (2010), kritiko ng pelikulang *Limbunan*: "It is a very quiet film. Talk, although very frequent, is deliberate. Silence is an enforced practice, especially among women."²⁰ Isang metaporikal na implikasyon ang

kanyang ginawang paglalarawan sa pelikula gaya ng paggamit ng mga katagang quiet at silence kung saan ang salita na ito ay literal na naglalarawan din sa kalagayang panlipunan ng mga tauhang babae sa loob ng pelikula na pinatatahimik ng kultura at tradisyon. Dagdag pa ni Cruz,²¹ "*Limbunan*, in all its stylized storytelling and its undeniable splendor, is most importantly, a very personal ode to his often misunderstood and misrepresented cultural roots." Sa madaling sabi, ang pelikulang ito ay isang panawagan at pagtangis upang ilahad ang naratibo ng mga panlipunang salik na karaniwang hindi nauunawaan ng iilan. Sa talumpati ni Chairperson Bainon G. Karon ng Bangsamoro Women Commission ng Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, naging pambungad niya ang pahayag na

Historically, women had been considered powerless, underrated, vulnerable, and a commodity. Their roles are simply being housewives, taking care of the children, and doing household chores. Women were sold as commodities during the war. In traditional Moro families, sons preferred to be educated over their daughters, and daughters were married off for peace offerings and political gains. For the longest time, women have been silenced by the idea that "men are superior, and women are inferior. This kind of discrimination forced women to be better by empowering themselves through education, political participation, and fighting for equality. Silent battles, ideas, and dreams became their norms. Women were silent."²²

Malinaw na inilalahad dito ang kalagayang panlipunan ng mga babaeng Moro mula sa paglalarawan sa mga ito bilang mahihina patungo sa pag-iisteryotipo sa kanilang mga sosyal na gampananin bilang mga babae. Dagdag pa rito, sa kasalukuyan, ang kalagayang panlipunan ng kababaihang Moro ay nababatay sa salimbayang pag-iral ng mga konseptong pangkababaihan sa katutubong ádat, paniniwalang Islam, sitwasyong pang-ekonomiya at pampulitika sa lipunang Moro. Nangangahulugan lamang ang eksistensyal na kalagayan ng mga babaeng Moro ay nakaangkla pa rin sa ádat o kaugalian at panlipunang pag-uugali, ekonomiya at politika.

Lunsaran ang pelikulang *Limbunan* upang dalumatin ang kalagayan ng kababaihang Moro sa pelikula upang matalunton ang kapanatilihan ng ganitong pag-iisteryotipo sa kasarian dulot ng itinakdang norm ng kultura at tradisyon at kung paano ginamit ang kalagayang ito sa lente ng pelikula.

Pagtalakay at Analisis

Buláwan nang maituturing ang panahon ngayon—modernisasyon at globalisasyon. Ang panlipunang pagbabago na ito ay naging daungan din pagkamulat ng realidad sa iba't ibang panlipunang isyu gaya ng usaping kasarian at kung paano uhaw na

uhaw ang lipunang Pilipino sa sekswal na pagkakapantay-pantay o gender equality. Bunsod ng liberalismo—isang politikal na pilosopiyang yumuyukod sa karapatan ng indibidwal, ay ganap na naisulong at naipag-adya ang karapatan at katungkulan ng mga kababaihan sa lipunan. Subalit taliwas ito sa lipunan ng mga bēbēi ē Moro. Ang usaping kababaihan ay tumatagos sa mga usapin ng uri, lahi, paniniwala, at nasyonalidad.

Sa pelikulang *Limbunan* ni Mangansakan, hayag na ipinamalas ng pelikula ang konseptong feminismo sa loob ng kanyang pelikula. Isa sa mga pinakamalaking pangkat-etniko ng mga Pilipinong Moro ay ang mga Maguindanaoan na karamihang bumubuo sa bilang ng populasyon sa Lungsod ng Heneral Santos, na sa kabila ng distansya nito sa ibang lokasyon na kinalalagyan ng pangkat gaya ng Cotabato, Maguindanao, Zamboanga, Sarangani at iba pa ay napapanatili pa rin nito ang pagkakapareho ng kultura nito. Masasalamín sa pelikulang *Limbunan* ang kaadátan at palityála. Ito ay kolektibong tradisyon, paniniwala at panlipunang kaugalian ng mga Maguindanaon. Ang pag-aasawa ng mga lalaki ng higit pa sa isa, pagkakasundo ng mga magulang sa anak sa isang kasal na minsan ay humahantong sa forced marriage at ang labis na pagkiling sa kakayahan at eksistensiya ng kalalakihan sa lipunan ay ilan lamang sa mga panlipunang kaugalian na ipinakita sa pelikula.

Taliwas sa liberal na pananaw, ang pag-aasawa para sa mga Maguindanaon ay desisyong pang-angkan at hindi personal. Ang mga magulang ang nagdidikta ng kasal at pumipili sa mapapangasawa ng kanilang mga anak lalo na ng babae. Kadalasang naiimpluwensyahan ng politikal o pinansyal na interes ang pagpapakasundo ng mga magulang sa kanilang anak sa isang kasal. Pinaniniwalaang pinapatatag ng kasal sa pagitan ng dalawang angkan ang bigkis ng ugnayan at pagkakaibigan ng mga ito. Kung mayroon mang sumasang-ayon sa dikta ng kanilang mga magulang ay mas marami pa rin sa kababaihang Maguindanaon ang tahimik na tumututol kagaya ni Ayesah. Ang pagpapakita ng pagtutol sa napagkasunduang kasal ay itinuturing na pagtalikod sa angkan at pagtalikod na ito ay pagsira sa ugnayan ng mga magkakamag-anak na higit na ipinagbabawal sa Islam. Malinaw na ipinagpipilitan sa mga kababaihan na piliin ang karangalan ng kanilang pamilya kaysa sa kanilang damdamin—isang pagtatakwil sa sariling maratabat.

Ang pagkakaroon ng mabuting anak ay rizq o biyaya galing sa Allah. Ipinapakita dito kung papaano binibigyang-diin sa kulturang Maguindanaon ang konsepto ng filial piety bilang mahalagang salik sa pagkamit ng kaginhawaan ng mag-anak. Ito ay sa pamamagitan ng pagtalima sa nais mangyari ng mga magulang lalo na ng ama, kabilang na ang pagpayag sa napagkasunduang kasal. Kung iisipin, ang ganitong gawi ng pagpapairal ng konseptong filial piety ay hindi balanse, at sa katunayan ay isang manipulasyon sa haq o karapatan at maratabat ng isang babaeng Moro sa lipunan. Bagaman ang relihiyong Islam ang kinikilingang paniniwala ng mga Maguindanaon,

nagdulot ito ng paglitaw ng kontrobersyal na kontradiksyon sa kaugalian ng pagpapakasal. Sapagkat ang sapilitang pagpapakasal ay hindi pinapahintulutan sa Islam at napapasok ito sa usaping haram— anumang gawain na hindi pinapahintulutan sa Islam. Parehong ang lalaki at babaeng ikinakasal ay dapat na pumapayag sa kasal. Sa katunayan, ang pahintulot ng babae ay mahalaga at dapat na makuha. Ang anumang kasal na sapilitan ay itinuturing na bátil o walang bisa. Gayunpaman ay nahati ang pagkiling ng mga Maguindanaon sa kultural at Islamikong perspektiba sa pamamaraan ng pagpapakasal.

Sa kultural na konteksto ng kasal ng mga Maguindanaoan, kalimitan, hindi pa man nakakatungtong sa hustong gulang ang mga batang babae ay hinahanapan na sila ng mapapangasawa o ipinagkakasundo na ng kanilang magulang o kaanak. Isa sa mga batayan ng kapasyahang tinitingnan ng mag-anak sa mapapangasawang pamilya ay ang sosyo-politikal na katayuan sa buhay ng pamilya ng lalaki. Ang pagpapakasal ng anak na babae sa lalaking galing sa mas maimpluwensya at mayamang angkan ay itinuturing na maratabat at kaginhawaan ng pamilya. Sa madaling salita, ang mga anak na babae ay susi ng angkan upang maiangat ang kanilang social status. Kung kaya't sa mga mag-asawang Maguindanaon, kalimitang mas may kakayahang pinansyal ang asawang lalaki kaysa babae. Isa ito, maliban sa dikta ng relihiyon, sa dahilan kung bakit ang mga kalalakihan ang siyang nasusunod ang pasya sa pamilya man o sa lipunan. Isa rin ito sa mga dahilan kung bakit malakas ang loob ng ilang kalalakihan na mag-asawa muli o pagduduwaya, bagay na ikinababahala ng mga asawang babae. Ang pag-aasawa ng babae ng lalaking “bisaya” o hindi Muslim ay itinuturing na malaking kahihiyan o kalapastangan sa buong angkan ng pamilya. Nangangahulugan lamang na ang mga babaeng Moro at Muslim ay para lamang sa mga lalaking Muslim—isang manipestasyon ng isang etnosentrikong pangkat.

Samantala, sa lente ng sosyo-politikal na gampanin ng isang babaeng Moro, madalang lamang mapahintulutan ang paglahok ng mga kababaihan sa politikal na diskusyon at mga gawain. Ang pangangasiwa sa loob ng bahay at pangangalaga sa pamilya ang pinakapangunahing tungkulin na iniatas at itinakda sa kanila ng lipunan. Kabilang din sa kinakailangan nilang pagsumikapan ay ang walang patid na pagbibigay kaluguran sa kanilang asawa. Kung kaya't may mga babaeng Moro na pinipili na lamang ang tumandang dalaga matakasan lamang ang rehas na kung tawagin ay “buhay may asawa.” May iilan namang mapalad na ginawang pamukaw-sigla ang pagiging ina.

Samakatuwid, ang babaeng Maguindanaon ay kung hindi isang babaeng anak na may pinansyal na halaga, ay isang asawa o ina na biktima ng sekswal na diskriminasyon na nag-uugat sa kinagisnang kultura at doktrina. Gaya ng inilarawan sa pelikulang *Limbunan*, ang anak na babaeng Maguindanaon, bagamat iniingatan ng pamilya upang hindi madungisan ang kapurian ay hindi napapahalagahan

nang ganap at tama. Masasalamang sa pelikula ang realidad ng isang babaeng Maguindanaon na madalas pagkaitan ng kultura at politika ng karapatang makapagdesisyon para sa sarili— isang batayang karapatang pantao na patuloy na ipinaglalaman ng babaeng Moro.

Konklusyon

Mëwëtan dën i nëwme në kaiingëday ë pelikula o malayo na ang narating ng panlipunang pelikula. Salamin ng mga nakaimbak na dânas sa lipunan ang gawang sining. Nilikha ito sa pinakadakilang paraan at paglalarawan sa realidad ng isang babaeng Moro na inatasan at tinakdaan ng lipunan kung ano ang kanyang hangganan bilang isang babae. Ang pagkababae ng isang Moro ay umiikot at nakadekahon sa kultural, sosyal, politikal at esperituwal na konsepto, bagay na hindi madaling tibagin o baguhin ng anumang pluralistikong pagbabago at impluwensya sa kapaligiran. Bahagi na ito ng kasaysayan at dânas ng lipunang këbëbëyang Moro at Maguindanaon na kabuuan ng maratabat ng lipunan.

Sa pagpasok ng sinema sa Pilipinas ay nagbigay daan ito upang mas mapataas pa ang pagkilala sa mga pangkat mula sa iba't ibang rehiyon na hindi naaabot ng lente ng kamalayang Pilipino gaya ng mga Moro sa iba't ibang konteksto at aspeto ng panlipunang eksistensya. Subalit sa pamamagitan ng sinema ay itinatanghal at dinadala nito sa mataas na pedestal ng pagkilala sa mga panlipunang kaugalian ang mga Moro at kaugnay na mga usapin sa lipunan nito. Sa kabila ng pagsusumikap na ito ng mga manlilikha at manunulat, humahatak at nagbubukas din ng oportunidad ang iilang pelikula gaya ng Mindanao ni Brillante Mendoza, na naglalantad ng buhay ng mga Moro na taliwas sa katotohanan at wastong pagsasakonteksto nito. Dahilan ito upang makabuo ng maling impresyon sa lipunang Moro lalo na sa pagusbong ng midya sa kasalukuyan. Sa paglabas ng bagong pelikula ni Mendoza na *Moro* (2023), muli niyang binigyang buhay ang lipunang Moro na nangangailangan din ng isang rasyonal at imperikal na pagtingin sa konteksto nito.

Ang *Limbunan* ni Mangansakan ay isang mahusay na paglalarawan sa kalagayang panlipunan ng mga babaeng Moro. Sa aspektong ito ay hindi na usapin kung ano ang heograpikal na batayan ng pelikula subalit ang wastong representasyon ng kultura at lipunang Maguindananoan sa lente at anggulo ng pelikula na sumasaklaw sa buong rehiyong kinalalagyan ng mga babaeng Moro. Ang kauna-unahang pelikulang Moro na ito na may ganap na haba ay isang pagtatangkang iangat sa pinakamataas na pedestal ang likhang sining pampelikula bilang lunsaran ng pagpapakilala sa kultura at lipunan ng mga Moro tungo sa pagkamit ng pambansang pagkakakilanlan liban pa sa kultural na pagkakakilanlan, pagkakapantay-pantay at preserbasyon. Kinakatawan nito ang kahulugan ng rehiyonal na pelikula bilang representasyon at hindi distorsyon ng nakaimbak na mga dânas ng isang lipunan.

Ang panlipunang estado ng mga kababaihang Moro-Muslim sa

Pilipinas ay malawak ang aspekto na naimpluwensiyahan ng historikal, politikal, kultural, at sosyo-ekonomikong mga salik. Umuusbong pa rin ang mga hamon at ang komprehensibong pag-unawa sa panlipunang kalagayan na ito ay nangangailangan ng pag-unawa sa konteksto para sa mga talakayan at pagpapatupad ng lunas habang may pag-unlad sa larangan ng edukasyon at politikal na representasyon.

Hindi pa naisasapanahon ang ganap na pagbabago sa lipunan ng kababaihang Moro at kung paano ito inaasahang umayon sa agos ng pangangailangan ng lipunan batay sa impluwensiya ng iba't ibang pangkaisipang konsepto gaya ng feminismo. Sa pagkakataong ito, ang kultural at Islamikong pananaw ay hindi nagtutunggali sa pagdedekahon sa kalagayan ng isang babae. Ngunit isang pagkakapit-bisig upang hindi kumawala ang norms na ito batay sa kultura at kautusan ng Islam. Sa kasalukuyan, hindi ganap ang modipikasyon ng kalagayan ng mga babaeng Moro, ngunit dahan-dahang kumakawala sa tradisyonal na pagtatakda sa kasarian ang mga babaeng Moro. Isang hakbang sa muling pag-aangat ng mga babaeng Moro ng kanilang maratabat.

Si Mubarak M. Tahir ay isang katutubong Magindanawon mula sa Datu Piang, Maguindanao. Naging creative writing fellow siya sa iba't ibang rehiyonal at nasyonal na mga palihan. Noong 2017 ay nagkamit ang kanyang personal na sanaysay sa Carlos Palanca Awards. Bilang tagapagtaguyod ng wika, kultura, at sining ay isa sa kanyang mga gawaing pang-akademik ng mga mag-aaral niya ay ang paglikha ng mga pelikula na nagpapakita ng lipunang Moro at Lumad. Sa kasalukuyan ay miyembro siya ng fakulti ng Departamento ng Filipino, Kolehiyo ng Agham Panlipunan at Humanidades, Mindanao State University, Lungsod Heneral Santos at kumukuha ng PhD Malikhaing Pagsulat sa Unibersidad ng Pilipinas Diliman.

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Women's Work: The Women Filmmakers of CDO

Abigail C. James

The underrepresentation of women filmmakers is an ongoing problem in the film industry, even in the 21st century.¹ The issue permeates the widest circles of Hollywood filmmaking, with a few steady strides in recent years. According to Erin Hill, writing about Hollywood in its classical era, "Women were never absent from film history; they often simply weren't documented as part of it because they did 'women's work,' which was—by definition—insignificant, tedious, low status, and noncreative."² This shows the disregard for female presence in the film industry, which likely carries over into the lack of acknowledgment of the women who dared to grasp the helm of production. In this case, the "women's work" is the conceptualization, writing, and directing of the films. By undertaking this, women filmmakers command attention in a male-dominated industry and, I argue, put forth the "female gaze."

In the Philippine context, women filmmakers at the national and commercial levels have had some success, but on a regional level—specifically in Mindanao, as in this article—much remains to be done in raising and recognizing women filmmakers. Given the tiny pool of filmmakers, particularly in Cagayan de Oro City (hereafter CDO), women creators are few and far between. Many, if not most, have gone into dormancy, although their legacies remain. Their experiences, struggles, and, most importantly, their work must be documented as a beacon for those who wish to come after. They were here, they existed, and they created.

Women's presence in film festivals and success in competitions signal hope, but the circumstances of regional filmmaking and other personal challenges have created roadblocks for the women filmmakers of CDO. For this article, it felt imperative to hear from the women who put in the work, having them contextualize in their own words what they felt about these issues and their visions for the future of CDO filmmaking, with particular interest in their gender and journey. Featured here are the films by women situated in CDO that impacted the regional and national scene. The respondents

were included based on referral; networking in the film scene lent significant help to acquiring an audience with the filmmakers. Important to the selection criteria was that these women must have made films in CDO and continue to live there, contributing in some ways to the proliferation of CDO cinema, whether in the past or present. Thus, this article features three women filmmakers: Jasmine Limas, Julianne Ilagan, and Mia Grace Solamen.

The Female Gaze

Laura Mulvey coined the term "male gaze" in her groundbreaking work *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975), asserting that the film apparatus is oriented toward the masculine gaze.³ Part of the male gaze is how women are portrayed through the lens of men or a patriarchal viewpoint behind the production. Relatedly, Terese de Lauretis in *Oedipus Interruptus* (1999) puts forth the concept of cinematic identification, where "certain patterns or possibilities of identification for each and all spectators must be built into the film."⁴ De Lauretis highlights the objectification of women in cinema and how the female spectatorship defaults into identifying themselves as objects because of how their fictional counterparts are portrayed onscreen. Theories of the apparatus are inseparable from the fact that cinema is male-dominated.

So what happens if men are no longer in charge of the frame? I take this as the starting point of speculating the "female gaze," a gaze supposedly highlighting the desires of women instead. Many have tried to argue for the presence of the "female gaze" in cinema since the publication of Mulvey's work, but concrete definitions have been elusive so far. Some, such as Caetlin Benson-Allott and Katy Stewart, argue that the female gaze does not exist in cinema, given cinema's male dominance. Benson-Allott (2017) emphasizes how the concept cannot be defined without acknowledging the intersectional qualities of femininity, which is also a critique of Mulvey's original concept that focuses mainly on the experiences of the white middle-class and the gender binary.

In *The Female Gaze in Documentary Film: An International Perspective* (2023), Lisa French attempts a solution. Acknowledging that the female gaze is not "homogeneous, singular or monolithic, and it will necessarily take many forms"⁵ and is "informed by contexts not limited to only sex and gender,"⁶ the book pinpoints a possible definition. According to French, at its core, the female gaze is "the communication or expression of female subjectivity—a gaze shaped by a female 'look,' voice and perspective—the subjective experience or perspective of someone who lives in a female body (female agency is privileged)."⁷ This echoes de Lauretis' call for "continued and sustained work with and against narrative, in order to represent not just the power of female desire but its duplicity and ambivalence"⁸ to truly flip the script on the male gaze and empower female representation in film.

Though French defines the female gaze in documentary filmmaking, her definition can be carried over into narrative film when a woman is in control of what is seen on the screen. Their gender informs how they portray their stories and the handling of their narratives.

This brings to mind how George Miller, director of *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), specifically requested his wife, Margaret Sixel, to edit the movie because he “wanted to create an action film through the eyes of a woman.”⁹ Other films by women such as *Jeanne Dielman 23 Commerce Quay, 1080 Brussels* (1975) by Chantal Akerman, *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943) by Maya Deren, and *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (2019) by Celine Sciamma highlight the centering of female agency and characterization through aesthetic choices that counteract the dominant portrayal of women in film as objects for pleasure only. This is made possible by their creative control of the medium. Regional filmmaking is often a small production, with directors assuming the roles of writers and producers, and having a woman in a central leadership role reflects the female gaze across any subject matter (even if the characters portrayed may not be female per se).

To round out the discussion on the female gaze are the comments made by Joey Soloway in their speech at the Toronto International Film Festival. Soloway argues that the female gaze is more than “a role reversal where women objectify men, or having a woman as the main character in a typical action film. It goes a step further and invites the viewer to feel as a woman feels.”¹⁰ Soloway later describes the female gaze in three essential parts: reclaiming the body, using the camera, and returning the gaze. April Mullen adds, “Women have this vulnerability and connection to a depth of emotions that I can see and feel in certain moments of truth in the films we create.... The female gaze offers a unique perspective on human beings. Women see the world differently than men.”¹¹

With these pieces of the puzzle, the female gaze can be better understood as a tool of empathy, a way to reconfigure the female figure in cinema after an extended history of patriarchal ideologies. The female gaze invites the viewers to question their objective desire and provides a more nuanced perspective on the subject matter.

The CDO Film Scene

It is important to conduct a preliminary survey of the environment in which filmmakers operate to understand better the factors that foster and hinder women filmmakers in Cagayan de Oro. As in other parts of the country, CDO benefited from the digital filmmaking boom of the 21st century. By the late 2000s, the filmmaking competition Cinemagis was accepting participants and awarding the best Northern Mindanao had to offer.¹² Spearheaded by Hobart Savior, Cinemagis is often regarded as the cradle for CDO filmmakers, with prominent names like Joe Bacus and Orpheus Nery

getting their start after gaining awards there. In 2019, Cinemagis was rebranded as the Northern Mindanao Film Festival and continued through the pandemic.¹³ The school-based, NCCA-funded competition saw many participants spill over into other Mindanao film competitions, such as the Salamindanaw Asian Film Festival and Cinema Rehiyon. All three women filmmakers interviewed for this article have competed in Cinemagis at one point.

However, though the festival is over ten years old, the filmmaking scene in CDO remains small. Compared to other cultural hubs like Cebu and Davao, the platform alone has not been able to build a consolidated filmmaking community, despite its long history and the number of filmmakers it has previously featured. On top of this, the active figures in CDO filmmaking are predominantly male. Thus, women filmmakers in the city continue to navigate this reality, crossing paths with more recognizable names and trying to fit in their circles. The lack of a community has exacerbated the underrepresentation of CDO filmmakers in general, and for the women trying to make their way in the craft, the problem is multiplied. They often work independently of other CDO filmmakers, creating their circles, which they may define for themselves.

Jasmine Limas

Jasmine Limas began her filmmaking journey in 2011 as a Developmental Communications (Dev Com) student at Xavier University-Ateneo de Cagayan. She described her education in Dev Com as significantly influencing the stories she chose to feature in her films. The course has its students frequently working with marginalized communities, using their skills to give voice to those on or below the poverty line. It is no wonder that her first film, *Carmen* (2011), focused on the lives of young parents struggling to provide for their daughter.

Carmen, the mother, is shown as a secret sex worker, accepting clients for the price of Php500, a sum that her partner, a bottle collector, would have to work a week to earn. She uses the money to buy milk, bring their daughter to the more affluent places in town, and save some for school supplies. Though people confront Carmen, she is unapologetic about the work she does to provide for her daughter. She remains steadfast in asserting that she will provide for her daughter by any means necessary. It calls into question Philippine society's perceptions of sex work and shows a nonjudgmental narrative. No great tragedy befalls Carmen for choosing to use her body to gain much-needed sustenance for her family. Instead, there is an invitation to empathy. The handling of Carmen's character highlights Soloway's discussion on "reclaiming the body." Limas described how she used the camera carefully to convey the intimate scenes. She was adamant about how they must be tasteful and not



A still from *Carmen* (2011).
Credit: Jasmine Limas

for the sake of objectifying her female character. She “uses the frame to share and evoke a feeling of being in feeling, rather than seeing,” as Soloway describes.¹⁴

Carmen also aims for authenticity in portraying the circumstances of its characters. There are long, uncut shots of the title character’s husband looking for bottles to cash in for a measly sum. It highlights the contrasting realities of the urbanization of CDO. In between shots of communal spaces presented as the clean outward face of the city is the bitter truth of its urban poor citizens, who do physical labor to make enough to feed themselves for the day. There is no fetishizing of the marginalized in the film, which reflects Limas’ genuine investment in developmental communication, which likely contributed to the positive reception. The film won several awards during Cinemagis, making her first effort as a filmmaker a success.

Limas fondly described her time as a filmmaker in the 2010s. She worked with a small team, having to borrow equipment from friends because she did not have her own camera during her earlier films. She cited her connection with her editor as a primary reason for the success of her films. Together, they organized Eye Opener Productions, whose title card is shown in all four of her films. Production of the films was wholly self-funded, her team’s passion being the motivation to create. This is evident in her second film, *Kunhod* (2013), which was shot in Bohol, Limas’ hometown. The film follows a local fisherman as he sets out for an early morning catch, while documenting environmental degradation caused by excessive littering. The film included several underwater shots and required Limas to rent a boat to follow the fishermen into the sea between Bohol and Cebu.

Limas described how the fishermen would not let her onto their vessel because it was “bad luck” for any woman to set foot on it. They believed this would yield a small catch. This forced Limas to find alternative transportation that would let her be present for the nighttime shots, which she recalled was dangerous (due to the small size of the rented boat) and expensive. During the shoot, she convinced the fishermen to let her on so she could direct the scene, but afterward, they blamed her for the small number of fish caught.

Despite facing this discrimination, Limas still did justice to the story of the fishermen and included an attempt to emphasize the environmental issues plaguing her hometown, which reflect nationwide problems involving single-use plastics. A few years ago, the Philippines ranked third worldwide in contributions to ocean plastic pollution.¹⁵ Environmental concerns can be linked to the idea of “Mother” Nature, the personification of nature, and its “life-giving and nurturing aspects.”¹⁶ In *Kunhod*, the end is a call to care for the environment as it provides for us; neglect her, and the effects are devastating for the most at risk, like the rural communities who rely on natural resources for nourishment.

Kunhod would be featured in Cinema Rehiyon in 2014, opening the doors to more opportunities for Limas. At Salamindanaw, she pitched her idea for a full-length film, which was awarded a production grant. It was during this time, however, that health reasons prevented her from continuing her filmmaking career. Due to the medication she was taking, she could no longer write the stories for her films, which was her favorite part of the filmmaking process.

Unable to write, Limas decided to stop filmmaking in 2015 after her last film, *Ang Lihim ni Natividad*, was shown at that year’s Cinemagis. She described this last one as her favorite. The story follows a young, religious woman from a small barrio as she struggles with her faith and her love for her first cousin. The two exchange letters in secret before deciding to make their relationship public. Like *Carmen*, the film does not aim to pass judgment. Instead, it merely observes and describes unobtrusively, particularly concerning the feelings of Natividad. This is akin to Soloway’s description of the female gaze: “It uses the frame to share and evoke a feeling of being in feeling, rather than seeing...the emotions are being prioritized over the action.”¹⁷

Discussing her experience as a filmmaker in CDO during her active periods, she mentioned her disappointment with the lack of community among those working in the scene. She said a certain attitude of exclusivity between the camps prevented them from working together and supporting one another. She related how competition was often intense with other filmmakers, to the point that they would not share news of opportunities, perhaps because the opportunities available to regional filmmaking were limited in the first place. Because of this, she said she could not make lasting

friendships, particularly with the male filmmakers, and preferred to work with her chosen circle instead. She remarked that her gender never felt like a factor in this, though she would often be the only woman during workshops and pitching sessions.

This experience is echoed in what she hopes to see in the CDO filmmaking scene as it develops. She hopes that a stronger community will be fostered in the city, especially among women filmmakers. Limas acknowledged the difference in connecting with other women filmmakers, saying that women have a particular understanding of each other. This understanding is depicted in her films that feature women prominently, showing that women are not merely objects but nuanced figures with many facets. This tendency in her work calls to mind the idea of the female gaze, a concept that has yet to be adequately defined but still attempts to describe the advent of female-centered media.

Limas wants the women filmmakers of CDO to be brave as they navigate the scene. She encourages them not to be afraid, though they might face several challenges working in this collective medium. Relating her experiences of plunging headfirst into filmmaking, she wants other women to take the risk of telling their stories and finding the right people to guide them. Though she is no longer actively involved in filmmaking, she still supports CDO cinema. She highly praises other women filmmakers, especially Julianne Ilagan, whom she met through regional film festivals.

Julianne Ilagan

In 2020, the Inday Film Workshop welcomed several fellows from around Mindanao to a months-long film creation process. Organized by Cine de Oro, a local filmmakers' organization, and partially funded by the Film Development Council of the Philippines (FDCP), it resulted in the creation of short films by women participants. The conceptualization and implementation came from Julianne Ilagan, the first woman to direct a full-length feature produced in Mindanao.¹⁸ Thanks to the connections she had established during a short but remarkable run as a filmmaker, she brought mainstream names to speak at the webinar, including Che Villanueva, Bianca Balbuena, Shayne Sarte, and Antoinette Jadaone.

Ilagan described her motivation to implement the workshop as the hope of creating a safe space for women filmmakers. Like Limas, Ilagan would often be the only woman in a room full of men at pitch meetings and even during more casual get-togethers of film artists. Ilagan's early career as an aspiring filmmaker is directly tied to her mentor, Joe Bacus, whom she approached to learn the craft despite having no film background. Ilagan's desire to pursue film started with her love of storytelling—she was a literature major from Xavier University. Though she began with writing stories and poems, she explained that her imagination is very visual, leading her to find

a more fitting home in film. Once she set her mind to pursuing film, she committed to learning all she could before attempting it herself.

Ilagan's first film is *Balut. Penoy. Asin.* (2016). It is the story of a balut vendor who doubles as a drug dealer. Some customers ask him for the boiled duck eggs, some ask for "asin," a code for the street drug shabu (crystal meth). Eventually, the balut vendor is tricked into following a woman who says she will get her wallet but then lures him into a dark alley to be clubbed by an unseen assailant. The vendor is wrapped in duct tape and newspapers, then abandoned beside his scattered wares. Made in 2016, it is an early depiction of the Duterte administration's war on drugs and the multitude of extrajudicial killings (EJKs) that ensued.¹⁹ Indeed, the subject matter was ahead of its time, with concerns of EJKs yet to reach national consciousness until a few years later.

The cinematography feels almost documentary-like, with lingering shots of Corrales Avenue, a popular nightlife hub in CDO. Ilagan acknowledged this technique as purposeful. She said she enjoys venturing into the thin line between reality and the imaginary in her filmmaking, displaying the world as it is while incorporating fictional elements into narratives and constantly dwelling on plausibility. This style echoes April Mullen (2023), who argues, "To me, the female gaze is transparency—the veil between audience and filmmaker is thin, and that allows people in more."²⁰

Ilagan's film shows two sides to the story of a small-time drug dealer. The man selling "asin" is not the typical villain that the mass media or Duterte's government would want people to believe. He helps a homeless man by giving him a few eggs so he will not go hungry. It is a more sympathetic view, revealing the reality of many who turn to the drug trade—they are merely trying to survive in a society that does not care for them.

Ilagan's signature is carried over into her other films, including her full-length feature, *Kauyagan* (2017), which portrays the lives of

A still from *Kauyagan* (2017).
Credit: Julianne Ilagan



the Lumad as they struggle to sell their ancestral land to provide a better life for their tribe. Shot in Bukidnon and alongside the Indigenous peoples featured in the film, it was a monumental endeavor for a young filmmaker. Ilagan recounted the hurdles she had to overcome, from production to the aftermath to questions of ownership. As a woman filmmaker, she had to advocate for herself, perhaps more than necessary, to have her voice and vision accepted.

These production issues hit close to home for Ilagan, who lamented the lack of producers in CDO, which she considers essential if the local industry is to continue. She explained how important the presence of producers is, sometimes even more important than directors, to ensure a thriving film scene. Without willing producers, filmmakers are left to do it themselves, putting an enormous burden on one person to get their films out there. According to her, this is why many aspiring local filmmakers are forced to leave the city to find funding and proper promotion. She commended Bacus and his circle for continuing their filmmaking in CDO despite limited opportunities.

As an apprentice filmmaker, Ilagan was often described as a go-getter, as if she was chasing a deadline. Even with little experience, she was ambitious enough to undertake significant projects and pitch her ideas in Manila. Having made waves in Cinemagis and Cinema Rehiyon, she joined official gatherings of filmmakers, though she felt put off by the treatment given to her based on her gender. Once, someone made a comment that she seemed to be playing “yaya” (nanny) to her colleagues from CDO. More sinisterly, Ilagan experienced cases of sexual harassment played off as jokes from other directors during a filmmakers’ night at a festival. Describing herself as “boyish” and able to defend herself, she expressed worry about other women who might be meeker and facing the same situation. These experiences motivated her to create a filmmaking community for women with the Inday Film Workshop.

Ilagan is not currently making films, though she is still working on projects for the National Commission on Culture and the Arts (NCCA) and plans to return to creating her brand of films once she secures a reliable producer. Her recent film, *Akong Palangga* (2021), chronicles her life, particularly during the pandemic, with her relatives as actors to portray the necessary scenes. The film is even more documentary-like, as Ilagan appears in it herself, featuring video calls to her sister, a nurse in the U.K., and her wheelchair-bound father. This closeness with her family is a driving force for Ilagan; she takes care of her sister’s two children as well as her father, who let her pursue her passion for filmmaking early on.

Women are at the center of Ilagan’s narrative. She lets the emotions spill over, with Ilagan-as-character and her sister exchanging heartfelt sentiments and their fears about the ongoing pandemic. The sentimentality is genuine but also orchestrated by the vision of the director. It shows a woman’s role when tasked with domestic duties while pursuing a career.

Being a primary caregiver in their family has challenged Ilagan's filmmaking journey. During the filming of her first full-length feature, her father began experiencing health issues. She would do their day's worth of shooting in Bukidnon, then make the hours-long trip back to CDO to care for him. This situation was exacerbated further when his condition resulted in a second amputation. Along with being her nieces' guardian, these have prevented Ilagan from leaving the city for longer periods. She has no regrets about it, though, and credits her family as an inspiration. She said she figures it is best to live her life before diving back into filmmaking again, as it will surely give her more creative fodder.

Ilagan encourages future women filmmakers to put in the work. Echoing her journey, she emphasizes how much effort she put into learning the ropes, which entailed a lot of listening, observing, reading, watching films, and taking risks. She said she hopes that women filmmakers from CDO will be more proactive in their craft and remain steadfast in her offer to help those interested in the medium. She mentioned that she is entirely willing to have another iteration of the Inday Workshop project but acknowledges her limitations as its leader. She hopes the women filmmakers of CDO will form their community to implement it again.

Mia Grace Solamen

Of the ten fellows of the Inday Film Workshop, three were from CDO: Grace Joy Gallogo, Kyra Jandayan, and Mia Grace Solamen. All three were able to write, direct, and produce a short film from their experience in the workshop. *About Ivy* (2021) was Mia Grace Solamen's film, which was eventually featured at the Northern Mindanao Film Festival (formerly Cinemagis).

The film is about the eponymous Ivy, a city scholar who lives with her aunt, a food vendor. Because of personal struggles, Ivy does not do well in private school and loses her scholarship, forcing her to deal with the consequences of her actions. This echoes the first of Soloway's three essential parts of the female gaze: "It first reclaims the body wherein the female body is used to communicate emotions, that is to evoke sympathy from the viewer."²¹ In Solamen's film, Ivy portrays a young woman's struggle to cope with a turbulent home life and the pressure to succeed despite many things working against her. It is a similar issue many lower-income women face, letting the viewer empathize with the follies of the main character.

The film is characteristic of Solamen's unmistakable style, as seen in several short films posted on her *Facebook* page, Mia More Films. It is where the young filmmaker uploads most of her works. *About Ivy* is also hosted on Juanflix, the FDCP Channel. Solamen is only 23 years old but has made around 30 short films, reflecting her love for the art. A PHINMA – Cagayan de Oro College graduate, Solamen characterized film as her outlet for the many stories she

wishes to share with the world. It is the medium that has captured her interest the most, and she said she wishes she could do it full-time. However, as mentioned in the previous sections, being a regional filmmaker is particularly challenging. She currently works as a photographer to supplement her income.

Solamen's films more often feature women as protagonists, exploring the different facets of humanity through a feminine lens. Her short films, such as *Katy Free* (2021) and *Before You Close* (2021), examine child neglect and mental health issues. Here, Soloway's second essential part of filmmaking with the female gaze is evident: "The camera allows us to feel how it feels like to be the object observed," or, as she phrases it, 'The Gazed gaze.'²² Solamen uses her filmmaking to explore the feminine presence in many different aspects. As Trinh T. Minh-ha (2020) asserts, "a woman moving around freely, making herself vulnerable to abuse by exposing herself to every look, is always a threat to the male prerogative of scopic exclusivity."²³ Thus, the female gaze challenges this and its audience to look upon the female subject as themselves and evaluate the multiplicities present in this experience.

A still from *About Ivy* (2021).
Credit: Maria Grace Solamen



There is a level of modesty as Solamen describes her journey, emphasizing that her earlier works were more of an experiment. Even though her films have low production value, there is raw talent that can be further developed, showing that being an artist is a process of continual evolution and that women filmmakers from the regions should be allowed to hone their artistry. The female gaze with marginalized voices must be put into focus.

Solamen's choice of feminine subject reflects how she feels about her gender. She writes from a place of knowing, a personal outlook evident despite the sometimes speculative themes of her films. Her experience during the Inday Film Workshop was positive, as it enabled her to connect with other women filmmakers who understand what it is like to be an "other" in the industry. She said she is acutely aware of how men dominate the CDO film scene and wishes more women would venture into the community.

Recently, Solamen expressed her struggles with continuing her filmmaking to the point that she told some people she was on the verge of quitting. Personal problems have been a serious issue, and the young filmmaker's struggles are ongoing. However, during the interview and after, Solamen said she wishes to pursue her craft despite the challenges. She hopes people will pay more attention to CDO filmmaking, respect the culture, and take the time to learn more about the place and its people. She wants women filmmakers to trust their instincts and find their voice when creating. She encourages women filmmakers to write with purpose and to study storytelling to help improve the narratives put out there.

Conclusion

The film industry in CDO remains "emerging" despite its lengthy history of festivals and competitions. Ilagan described it as "seasonal" as it only comes alive when local filmmakers call for entries. While those who remain in the city battle for relevance and recognition on a broader stage, the women filmmakers do so with the added burden of being marginalized within an already sidelined art scene. Though, as a culture, women are often acknowledged and appreciated, we must not be lulled into a false sense of inclusivity.

Women filmmakers face specific challenges, but their works present even more unique perspectives on the craft of filmmaking. They must be supported and recognized to help usher the way for more. Despite the untenable nature of the female gaze as a unified concept to view films, the bottom line is the woman filmmaker's role as an advocate of this gaze. In a male-dominated industry, a woman producing, writing, and directing a film with their unique perspective is already a thing of significance.

The women filmmakers of CDO highlight the female gaze as a tool for empathy and understanding and a nuanced representation of the female subject's inner and outer world. Their work affects the greater landscape of regional filmmaking in Mindanao as they present an alternative viewpoint to the prevailing realities of gendered film production. They continue to encounter challenges both related and unrelated to being women, showing the intersectional struggles of filmmakers who exist at the margins.

Still, their impact persists in their creations through aesthetic choices that reflect the female gaze as the embodiment of female subjectivity, which is non-encompassing or heterogeneous yet profoundly human. The work needs to be done to acknowledge women's accomplishments by amplifying the voices of women filmmakers at the regional level to help create a better picture of what is considered Filipino—and Filipina—cinema.

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Peli[kulang] – The Journey of a CDO Filmmaker: Into the Lens of Orpheus

Meckhan Tagarda

What drives a person to leave behind a promising degree after graduation and devote his life to filmmaking?

Orpheus shares his perspective on his journey and why settling on the art of filmmaking in Cagayan de Oro (CDO) was—and remains—worth it, despite the lack of opportunities in the city. Orpheus John Nery, an independent filmmaker born in CDO, has been mainly filming his hometown as its setting and is now in his fourteenth year of contributing to Cagayanon cinema.

"I can tell you the exact moment *nga gipili nako ang film*," he said as he recalls when he was needed either to shoot a film project or do his responsibilities in the office as a student assistant. "*Dadto ko nipili katong nihawa ko sa office, nipadulong dayon ko sa shoot.*"

Before he started his journey in filmmaking, Orpheus studied literature. He grew up surrounded by the visual arts. "*Naay art mentor na nag tudlo sa ako ug visual art, so I grew up illustrating cartoons.*"

Orpheus collaborated with local filmmakers such as Joe Bacus, who directed his short film *Litrato* in 2011, which sparked a passion among the group. "*Nagstart gyud ko adtong nagclassmate mi ni Joe in 2011, second sem sa DevCom. Naa mi short film project under instructor Mary Ann Chiong, ako nagsulat sa screenplay. The first short ni Joe, it was based on my short story.*" The filmmakers submitted the film to Cinemagis afterward.

Orpheus made his debut short film, *Orpheus*, in 2015 during the Mindanao Screen Lab of the Salamindanaw Asian Film Festival, when they were given a series of individual tasks as part of the exercises to make a short film. "*Wala ko kabalo nganong kadto na concept akong gipili, pero mas comfortable ko sa 'The Orpheus of the Underworld' kay namesake man nako, [ug] nakabalo ko sa story niya.*"

The process was not easy. During the pre-production, Orpheus had a challenging time achieving what he envisioned. *"Nangita ko og actors na magplay, [pero] since kami man tanan gipahimo og exercise, wala kaayo available actors sa location na magplay sa akong gusto na roles."*

However, that did not stop Orpheus from going through the process. Instead, he utilized the stock footage from his and others' phones and stitched them with the new clips he shot to connect everything. *"Since Orpheus man akong pangalan, unya Orpheus of the underworld pud ang story about...all I needed was ako."*

Meanwhile, Eurydice's character was played by a workshop fellow named Kim, and she was the only person consistent in the stock footage. Orpheus found the challenge rewarding during the post-production when he saw how his material could make sense. *"Sa edit ra gyud nako nakita unsaon sya pagtahi, and luckily nagwork man sya."*

When Orpheus made the biggest decision of his life, he knew his purpose was not just to produce films but to make an impact and bring positive change to the CDO film culture. *"I felt the need to stay here and develop pa ang film sa city. Gusto lang ko magcontribute bitaw? Unya sa akong point-of-view sa una, lisod magcontribute kung naa ko sa lain nga lugar."*

Part of his objective was to activate critical thinking in reading films of the Kagay-anons. And one of his ways is to share insights from his experience making experimental films. *"Like non-linear na type of storytelling or lahi-on ang form sa film? Nakakita ka og film nga fish-eye lang tanan, ingana bitaw? Mao na ang madumdoman nako na challenges sa una, unsaon nato pagdeliver bitaw sa message na gets nila without sacrificing our creative choices in making films."*

Finding passionate filmmakers in a city filled with freelancing multimedia artists was also a defiance. Films are usually produced in these parts by "seasonal filmmakers," where the artists are motivated to make a film for the sake of an event. Orpheus wishes for a more sustained filmmaking practice in CDO even when it's not film festival season. *"Ayha na bitaw maghimo og films kung ting call for entries na. Walay natural drive bitaw nga maghimo ta bahalag walay pasahan."*

Meckhan Tagarda is a filmmaker and theater artist from Cagayan de Oro. He is the founder and former president of the Xavier Ateneo Film Society of Xavier University, where he finished a Bachelor of Science in Development Communication.

Bulawanong Bahandi: The Genesis of the Cine de Oro Film Festival

Orpheus Nery

Room to Grow

In 2016, Imoortals Productions, a collective comprising Joe Bacus, Rodiell Veloso, Clark Cabantan, Maki Calo, and me, initiated an alternative film wave. Our endeavor involved creating and curating a collection of experimental short films with the explicit intention of submitting them to the Northern Mindanao Digital Short Film Festival (formerly Cinemagis Digital Short Film Festival), based in Xavier University-Ateneo de Cagayan. Of the five of us, mine and Maki's entries were selected to compete under the student category, while Bacus's, Cabantan's, and Veloso's short films were programmed as out-of-competition special features.

This experience made us contemplate whether Cagayan de Oro's (CDO) film landscape was evolving, given the diminishing opportunities for filmmakers to create distinctive works. At that time, film festivals in CDO were all affiliated with educational institutions or local government units. We pondered the need for a platform designed for "uncategorizable" works and thus began conceiving a film festival by filmmakers for filmmakers.

Well before this idea took root, Bacus had developed a short film concept dedicated to those affected by Typhoon Sendong, a calamity that claimed nearly 1,300 lives on the night of December 16, 2011. He integrated this commemorative spirit into the film festival, making it an essential element from the first to the current edition—its soul.



Official poster of the Cine de Oro Film Festival 2023. All photos used with permission

In 2016, our group met CDO-based filmmaker Julianne Ilagan. Having seen Bacus's *Ika-Tulo'ng Putahi* (2013), she hoped to connect with us to learn the intricacies of making films. This meeting marked the commencement of a years-long collaboration with her production company, Blackfish Productions. Initially, Ilagan took on a pivotal role as one of our producers, later venturing into creating her short films. Her journey with us culminated in 2018 with the completion of her first full-length feature, titled *Kauyagan* (Way of Life), which earned a place as an official entry in the 4th ToFarm Film Festival.

Our collective has actively participated in the SalaMindanaw Asian Film Festival since its inaugural edition (known initially as the SalaMindanaw International Film Festival). Drawing inspiration from SalaMindanaw's intimate gatherings and intellectual engagements, we endeavored to shape the Cine de Oro Film Festival similarly under the guidance of Bacus's mentor and SalaMindanaw festival director Gutierrez "Teng" Mangansakan II.

For the festival's top honor, we engaged the artistic talents of esteemed Kagay-anon visual artists and sculptors Jericho Valjusto Vamenta and Michelle Lua. After extensive deliberations and creative brainstorming sessions involving Bacus, Vamenta, and Lua, the sculptors crafted a remarkable design featuring a woman carrying the Oro, the mythical golden giant fish that sleeps beneath the city. This trophy became known as the Golden Giant Fish Award.

Limketkai Supermalls served as our festival's venue host, providing all-day access to their activity center. They also arranged the



The Golden Giant Fish trophies, designed and sculpted by Jericho Valjusto Vamenta and Michelle Lua

screening of *Markado: The Moon Devourer* (2018) in their cinemas as the festival's opening film. On the other hand, out-of-competition films were programmed to screen at Karumata restaurant, which was also the residence of Vamenta and Lua, who have cultivated a vibrant artistic community in their welcoming space.

When it came to the festival's nomenclature the deliberation was brief. To us, it was and has always been Cine de Oro.



Inaugural Edition

Inaugurated on December 15, 2019, the maiden installment of Cine de Oro, under the direction of Joe Bacus, featured a curated selection of short films from the Philippines, Asia, and Europe. Many of these international contributions were obtained through the connections Bacus established during his 2016 residency in Bavaria, Germany, with his fellow delegates who had showcased their works at the 17th edition of the Landshuter Kurzfilmfestival.

The opening film was Bacus's debut feature-length film, *Markado: The Moon Devourer*, which made its homecoming after being previously featured at the QCinema International Film Festival in 2018 and the Focus on Asia - Fukuoka International Film Festival in Kyushu, Japan, in 2019.

Cine de Oro's main competition comprised the Main Competition (Cagayan de Oro) and the Open Category (Mindanao). Both categories attracted submissions that had previously been showcased in other festivals, as we anticipated for the first edition. The roster of entrants included regular participants from the Northern Mindanao Digital Short Film Festival, such as Angelo Dabbay, Tat Soriano, and Adrian Manapil, all vying for the Golden Giant Fish Award.

The festival's distinguished jury panel consisted of Malaysian filmmaker Bradley Liew (*Singing in Graveyards*, 2016), Thai filmmaker Phutti Phong Aroonpheng (*Manta Ray*, 2018), and Filipino production designer Benjamin Paderno (known for *Heneral Luna*, 2015) for the Open Category. The Main Competition's esteemed jurors included



Journalist Shaun Uy and Festival Director Joe Bacus unveiling the poster and logo of Cine de Oro 1

Mindanaoans Teng Mangansakan (*Forbidden Memory*, 2016), Bagane Fiola (*Baboy Halas: Wailings in the Forest*, 2016), and Hesumaria Sescon (*Yuta: The Earth*, 1991).

The Open Category's jury awarded the Golden Giant Fish Award to Khurshid Kalabud's *Mountain to Cry For* (2018) and conferred the Silver Giant Fish Award, denoting the grand jury prize, to Jay Rosas and Mark Limbaga's *Budots: The Craze* (2019). The Golden Giant Fish Award was bestowed upon Angelo Dabbay's *Baruganan* in the Main Competition, while James Elaco received the Silver Giant Fish Award for *Ang Reyna nga Wala'y Saput*.

Cine de Oro's inaugural edition marked a significant initiation into the city's film scene and garnered notable coverage in local media outlets, including the Philippine Information Agency and the Mindanao Daily News.

Teddy Co addressing CDO filmmakers, CDOFF 2



Through the Pandemic

In the subsequent year, we orchestrated the festival's second edition despite the ongoing challenges posed by the evolving COVID-19 pandemic. Ilagan assumed the role of festival director, proposing valuable contributions to the festival's portfolio. Under her leadership, several new segments were introduced, including Cinebayi, a dedicated forum spotlighting women in cinema, and the exclusive Indaypendent Film Workshop designed to offer intensive mentorship to aspiring female Mindanaoan directors. Esteemed figures in the film industry, including former Film Development Council of the Philippines (FDCP) chair Liza Diño-Seguerra and documentary filmmakers Adjani Arumpac (*War Is a Tender Thing*, 2013) and Sari Dalena (*Ka Oryang*, 2011), both with roots in Mindanao, played pivotal roles in developing the participants' projects.

A few weeks following the festival's conclusion, we organized an extension of educational initiatives in filmmaking. Renowned production designers Benjamin Padero and filmmaker Carlo Tabije, known for their contributions to significant Filipino films like *Heneral Luna* and *Motel Acacia* (2019), along with international endeavors like *Nocebo* (2022), provided valuable insights into the field of production design in film and television in the Philippines.

Sponsored by the FDCP, the Indaypendent Film Workshop continued to develop the short films of its participants in the succeeding weeks until their completion. The pioneering workshop fellows included Aeon Rhys Abad (Zamboanga City), Bea Luistro (Zamboanga City), Chynna May Dalogdog (Davao de Oro), Eureka Gregorio (Valencia City), Grace Joy Gallogo (Cagayan de Oro City), Karina Jabido (Davao City), Kimberly Joy Kilat (Zamboanga City), Kyra Jandayan (Cagayan de Oro City), Mary Claire Amora (Agusan del Norte), and Mia Grace Solamen (Cagayan de Oro City). After completing their projects, Mary Claire Amora's *Out* went on to screen in competition at the 19th Mindanao Film Festival.

Resurgence

In response to the economic downturn primarily caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, we deliberated on suspending the event in 2021. The prevailing restrictions on mass gatherings, the stringent health protocols we had to adhere to during film or film-related productions, and the substantial challenges of securing funding underscored the group's collective decision to take a hiatus.

The break we took in 2021 gave us more time to analyze the roadblocks we encountered in the first and second editions, plan the program, and secure additional funding. Realizing the enduring challenges of the latter, we decided that that year's edition might just become a more intimate celebration akin to a private movie night. At the last lap, however, friends from the local art community showed their support to help us realize our goals for the third edition. Local business 1001 Nights Boutique Inn responded favorably to our sponsorship invite. Moreover, the Xavier Ateneo Film Society of Xavier University - Ateneo de Cagayan offered a partnership with us in facilitating the event, and fellow artists like Vamenta and Lua, along with singer-songwriter Arthur Nery, who served as the third edition's major sponsor, all gave their unconditional fidelity to the festival.

With Julianne Ilagan no longer affiliated with the festival since the second edition's conclusion, Joe Bacus returned to serve as festival director for the third Cine de Oro. The festival opened on December 16 at Karumata, Barangay Macasandig, with Cebuano filmmaker Keith Deligero's *Kordero sa Dios* (2012). Notable additions to this edition included the Experimental Category, supplanting the original Open Category (Mindanao) to offer a platform for more

alternative works and midnight screenings. The opening day was marked by an extensive lineup of screenings featuring exhibition and main competition films, extending into the late hours. The post-midnight segment was reserved for a special screening of films from the Ngilngig Fantastic Film Festival in Davao, creating a cinematic experience that transcended the traditional screening hours.

The jury was composed of Teng Mangansakan, actor and producer Alwyn Uytingco, and Jojo Sescon for the narrative category; writer/director Eduardo "Dodo" Dayao (*Midnight in a Perfect World*, 2020), Davaoeño filmmaker Bagane Fiola, and the godfather of Filipino experimental cinema, Roxlee (*Juan Gapang*, 1986), for the experimental category. This set of jurors chose among the respective categories of short films to be the recipients of Cine de Oro's Golden Giant Fish Award.

We gave Lifetime Achievement Awards to Reuben Rabe Canoy (writer, *Sa Dulo ng Kris*, 1977) and Lorenzo M. Dela Serna (*Sa Imong Lawas ug Dugo*, 1979) on December 17 for their lasting contributions to the history of Cagayan de Oro cinema, to Canoy as a film producer, screenwriter, author, and the former mayor of Cagayan de Oro, and to Dela Serna as a film director, screenwriter, radio, and print director.

The festival also paid a solemn tribute to the anniversary of the tragic midnight flood caused by Tropical Storm Sendong and incorporated live performances, including a spoken-word presentation by poet Adeva Esparrago and a performance art piece by Nicolas Aca. I remember that, as we gathered around Esparrago's and Aca's performance, holding lit candles, it started to rain, adding an eerie effect to the tribute.

Perez (center) accepting the Golden Giant Fish Award - Main Competition from Mangansakan (left) and Bacus (right) during CDOFF 3





The daughter in Mijan Jumalon's *Ola*, CDOFF 3 Closing Film

In the awarding ceremony, the jury for the narrative category, titled "Bulawanong Bahandi" or "Golden Harvest," conferred the Golden Giant Fish Award and the Silver Giant Fish Award to Trishtan Perez's *i get so sad sometimes* and Edmund Telmo's *A Sabbath on the Longest Day of the Year*, respectively, with a Special Mention to Kurt Soberano's *Golden Bells*. In the Experimental Category, "*BuL4w4n0nG B4h4nD1*," the esteemed jurors awarded the Golden Giant Fish Award to Maria Estela Paiso's debut film, *It's Raining Frogs Outside (Ampangabagat Nin Talakba Ha Likol in Sambali)*. *One by One MMXXI*, by Manila-based filmmaker Timmy Harn, won the Silver Giant Fish Award. A Special Mention was also given to Dodoy Megriño's seminal *Jakol, or Claire de Lulu in 'D' Major*.

Closing Cine de Oro Film Festival was Zamboangueño filmmaker Mijan Jumalon's *Ola*, which artfully conveyed the grief of a mother's loss and served as a tender note to cap the event.

Keeping True

As I write this in 2023, approximately seven weeks before the Festival's fourth edition, our efforts primarily focus on fundraising and reviewing the initial batch of entries. Notably, the submissions in 2023 represent a fresh cohort of cinematic works, as they were created in December of last year. This eligibility requirement deviates from the precedents set in the earlier editions, where an entry's production timeline was not subject to expiry.

The core organizing team, comprised of myself, Bacus, Rodiell Veloso, and the addition of veteran journalist Mike Baños, who has undertaken the role of identifying potential sponsors from his extensive network, initially contemplated the prospect of foregoing the 2023 edition and postponing it to the second quarter of next year, a decision influenced by the proximity to December 16 and the occupancy of most businesses during the final quarter of the year. However, friends Jericho Valjusto Vamenta and Michelle Lua have again graciously extended the use of their art space as a collaborative

space for local artists should we encounter limitations in our sponsorship endeavors.

Look at Me—I'm the Captain Now

On November 7, 2023, during one of our pre-production meetings, Joe, immersed in academic responsibilities, proposed my appointment as the festival director for the 2023 edition. I had compelling grounds to decline the responsibility initially. The nomination occurred a mere 38 days before the festival's commencement, with no finalized opening film in our possession. Furthermore, our outreach for sponsorships had yielded no responses from potential benefactors, and the prospects of approval for Calo and my FDCP festival assistance application appeared tenuous from the outset. We eventually focused on getting ratings and permits to screen the films in public. I assumed the role, nevertheless, motivated by the imperative to showcase the submissions received from CDO after a hiatus of two years. We had to celebrate them. We had to show them on the big screen.

CDOFF 4 Festival Night



Approximately one week preceding the opening film, the initial positive responses from patron sponsors began to materialize. The Philippine Veterans Bank, represented by Baños, generously offered a documentary they had produced, *Valor: The Legacy of Col. Emmanuel V. De Ocampo* (2016), by Kagay-anon filmmaker Bani Logroño, to serve as our opening film. This development alleviated our logistical challenges, facilitating the groundwork needed to secure permits to screen the CDO entries in the cinema.

Despite these positive strides, a deficiency persisted in funding allocations for crucial components such as the Golden Giant Fish trophies, catering, guest accommodations, and honoraria for jury members and resource speakers. My plans to incorporate discussions of often-overlooked facets of CDO filmmaking, such as producing, assistant directing, sound design, and post-production, remained

hampered by financial constraints. While our available funding predominantly envisioned an intimate cinema experience (with one-time screenings of CDO films), a transformative turn of events unfolded three nights before D-Day.

A call from Casa de Canitoan, a boutique hostelry, extended a gold sponsorship and offered accommodations for all our guests. This fortuitous development, complemented by Arthur Nery's gold sponsorship, empowered us to extend invitations to guests from Manila, including luminaries such as Jay Altarejos and Alwyn Uytingco.



Midnight Screaming segment of CDOFF 4

The opening film and CDO shorts unfolded at Limketkai Cinema 3, followed by an engaging audience interaction with the filmmakers. The fourth edition of the festival was officially opened.

I introduced novel segments, including outdoor screenings, the Cinemarathon—a 24-hour filmmaking challenge—and a music night, constituting a collaborative fundraising initiative with the Indie CDO music collective. Concurrently, I preserved traditional segments such as midnight screenings catering to enthusiasts of horror and gore, the Sendong tribute featuring a hum performance by Michelle Lua, and a spoken poetry rendition by Palanca awardee Mikael de Lara Co, accompanied by everyone holding lit candles at Karumata. Additionally, the Mindanao forum provided a platform for filmmakers such as Teng Mangansakan, Bagane Fiola, Edmund Telmo, and Aedrian Arajo to deliberate on the current state of Mindanao cinema and its progressive trajectory.

Solar Pictures sponsored the screening of Jay Altarejos's *Jino to Mari* (2019) for our Midnight Screaming segment, with the director actively engaging with the audience, sharing insights into the film's production.

Distinguished jury members, including Mangansakan, academic Evans Yonson, and experimentalist Anna Miguel Cervantes, adjudicated *Desilya* (2023) by Toni Cañete as the recipient of the Golden Giant Fish Award for Best Film in the CDO category. Moreover, Mangansakan, Fiola, and visual artists Michelle Lua and Jake Vamenta collectively conferred the Golden Giant Fish Award for Best Film in the Open Category to Mikael Joaquin of Pangasinan for *Diak Kayat Magna Maisa* (2023).

A notable focal point of the ceremony was the posthumous bestowal of the Lifetime Achievement Award to a luminary of Philippine cinema, Teddy Co. The citation for this prestigious accolade, presented by film critic and filmmaker Jay Rosas, is articulated as follows:

“National unity can only result if there is a knowledge, understanding, and respect for the varieties of Filipino cultures.”

With this statement, Teddy Co—Philippine film historian, curator, and archivist—set out to embark on an exhaustive but important exploration of Philippine cinema in the periphery, away from the spotlight and glamour of the mainstream. In regional film communities and film festivals, Teddy sought out the unheard, untapped, and underrepresented. While his seminal essay was written in 1988, his efforts would continue until his co-founding of the annual Cinema Rehiyon, a gathering of filmmakers from different regional film communities all over the Philippines.

Mangansakan during an audience interaction after the screening of his *Topografia*, CDOFF 4



The film industry in Manila knows him best as someone with an encyclopedic knowledge of cinema, especially Philippine cinema. But for regional filmmakers and stakeholders, he will be best remembered as a champion of our cinema in the regions, particularly in his capacity as chairperson of the National Committee on Cinema of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts, during his many terms.

Teddy's passion and unwavering support became the inspiration to many regional filmmakers. He talked with us, agreed and argued with us, and altogether, sought a cinema that is alternative and counter-narrative to what has been a predominantly homogenous representation of Filipino culture through cinema. Through these discourses, we continue to grapple with and redefine a cinema that is evolving.

We mourn his passing, but most importantly, celebrate his indelible contributions. His indefatigable spirit, forever nudging us in our corners as we map the movements of a cinema we can call our own.

For the inspiration and the spiritual nudge, we give the Golden Giant Fish Award for Lifetime Achievement to a staunch advocate of Philippine regional cinema, Teddy Co."

The festival culminated with Mangansakan's *Topografia* (2022), serving as the conclusive installment of his Moro2orrow duology on an emotive note. Mangansakan fielded inquiries from the audience, elucidating on the intricacies of the production process and offering inspirational narratives on realizing the project with minimal funding, following the bifurcation of his original narrative into two films.

Reflecting on the Cine de Oro Film Festival 2023, its fruition appeared improbable at its inception. In retrospect, the event's success can be attributed to the eleventh-hour sponsorships and our collective commitment to celebrate CDO films and filmmakers. With the culmination of this edition, we have transcended the initial three-year phase, hopefully solidifying the festival's foundational pillars. Our wish is for it to continue inspiring the emergence of more Kagayanon filmmakers and artists, all while retaining its inherent essence and vision with the help of friends and supportive businesses we met along the way. We initially discussed future collaborations, such as hosting movie nights and conducting workshops in schools or public venues throughout the year, in the hopes of keeping the Oro film scene alive.

Orpheus Nery is a short fiction writer and filmmaker born, raised, and based in Cagayan de Oro. He started making short films in 2011 with Joe Bacus, primarily as a production designer and screenwriter. The works of Sherad Anthony Sanchez, John Torres, and Guy Maddin contributed to how he approaches filmmaking. Cine de Oro 2026 will be his second run as its festival director.



CINEMAGIS Sustains the Harvest

Hobart P. Savior

Igniting the appetite for cinema

Establishing Cinemagis as a film festival in Northern Mindanao came after several years of igniting the interest of students in watching art and/or independent films through what I called Cine Arte—a film appreciation program using world cinema, which was included in the syllabus I crafted for the Humanities classes at Liceo de Cagayan University in 2003. Cine Arte showcased films for four Saturdays, from 8:00 AM to 6:00 PM, with four films each, totaling 16 films watched and discussed every semester in a 250-seat audiovisual room. Cine Arte became an avenue for elevating film appreciation through guided discussions, reviews, and criticism of the films presented. Humanities and Literature teachers and guest artists served as discussants and moderators during the conduct of each film screening date or block. In 2005, we hosted filmmaker and film historian Nick Deocampo as he presented his films *Edades: Victorio C Edades and Modernism in Philippine Art* (2004) and *Mother Ignacia: Ang Uliran* (1998) through a craft lecture series.

Cine Arte also featured notable films such as *Insiang* (1976), *Maynila, sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag* (1975), *Tinimbang Ka Ngunit Kulang* (1974), and *Ang Tatay Kong Nanay* (1978) by the National Artist for Film and Broadcast Arts Lino Brocka (Philippines); *Mga Munting Tinig* (2002) by Gil Portes (Philippines); *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991), *The Road Home* (1999), *Not One Less* (1999), and *The House of Flying Daggers* (2004) by Zhang Yimou (China), *In the Mood for Love* (2000) and *Happy Together* (1997) by Wong Kar-wai (Hong Kong), *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) by Ang Lee (China); *Rashomon* (1950) by Akira Kurosawa (Japan); *Amores Perros* (2000) by Alejandro Gonzales Iñárritu (Mexico); *El Crimen del Padre Amaro* (2002) by Carlos Carrera (Mexico); and *Life as a House* (2001) by Irwin Winkler (USA).

The said world cinema premiere also featured “pink films” to open the conversations on sex, sexuality, and the responsible viewing of nudity in films. These films included *Lan Yu* (2001) by Stanley Kwan (Hong Kong), *Formula 17* (2004) by Yin-jung Chen (Taiwan), *Y Tu Mama Tambien* (2001) by Alfonso Cuarón (Mexico), *Aimee and Jaguar*

(1999) by Max Färberböck (Germany), *Maurice* (1987) by James Ivory (USA), *The Pillow Book* (1996) by Peter Greenaway (UK), and *Mambo Italiano* (2003) by Émile Gaudreault (Canada). With these films, the conversations held, and the interest in cinema that came through, I realized I was already curating for a film festival.

In 2006, I brought the program to the Mindanao State University – Iligan Institute of Technology (MSU-IIT) in my humanities classes. In 2007, Cine Arte was appended with a college-level short film competition, the first I organized and held at MSU-IIT. In the same year at Xavier University (XU), Fr. Weng Bava launched a film appreciation program he called Cinemagis. Like Cine Arte, Cinemagis showcased films from various countries. A year later, I moved to XU and served as the director of the Culture and Arts Office, now called Xavier Center for Culture and the Arts (XCCA). Following my passion for films and film screenings, and my hope of sustaining the appetite for cinema, our center organized the very first digital short film festival in Northern Mindanao under the brand Cinemagis, which continues to be one of the relevant regional film festivals in the country to date. Cinemagis is held every third week of January at Xavier University Little Theater and SM City Cagayan de Oro Cinemas. Except for 2024, the festival was held only at Xavier from April 3 to 6 for its comeback.

Spotlight on filmmaking potentials

When we first framed Cinemagis, it was deliberate and clear that the festival would serve as a platform for celebrating the potential of Northern Mindanao filmmaking. We considered whether we would get positive responses from the community when we called for entries in 2008 for the first edition of the festival held in 2009. Gladly, we received sixteen entries: thirteen from junior high and college students and three from young professionals. The filmmakers came from the region's major localities, including Bukidnon, Cagayan de Oro City, Iligan City, Ozamiz City, and the Province of Camiguin. The submission of entries doubled a year later, and the festival has screened over 300 titles through the years.

Despite the lack of film schools offering degrees and professional training in our region, we trusted the potential of students and experienced filmmakers, given the advent of digital technology, their ability to use their cameras, and their rich narratives. We also optimized the available training from various Mass Communication and Development Communication courses, the establishment of the Special Program for the Arts (SPA) of some DepEd Junior High Schools, and the inclusion of Media Arts in the Arts and Design Track of the Senior High School program being offered in the region. The abovementioned programs serve as a training ground for students who aspire to become filmmakers and multimedia artists. The senior filmmakers relied on their efforts and passion to harness their cinematic talent.

To nurture the filmmaking potential in Northern Mindanao, Cinemagis began harvesting and programming filmmakers and their works in the region. It has become a breakthrough film festival in Mindanao since it started in 2009, six years after the Mindanao Film Festival was established. Cinemagis continues to this day, emerging as one of the longest-running avenues for film exhibition and audience development, craft lectures and workshops, and gathering of regional filmmakers whose ability, intent, and talent reflect Mindanao's aspirations, experiences, expressions, social issues, and voices, all taken from the contexts and constructs of local lores and the pressing realities of the present.

It is worth noting that the Cinemagis filmmakers range in age from fifteen to fifty. The competition component features films in two categories: student and senior. The surge in submissions proves that many aspiring filmmakers would like to participate and be programmed at Cinemagis. In fact, we usually receive more submissions from the students than the seniors. Regardless of category, Cinemagis has strengthened the skills of Northern Mindanao filmmakers, creating a significant body of work that will bring them national and international recognition and contribute to the rising Mindanao film industry.

Beyond form: Themes and social aspects of Cinemagis

Cinemagis has continued its mission to amplify filmmakers' personal, social, and rhetorical voices for fifteen years. True to its name, a compound of *cine* or film and *magis*, an Ignatian value that encourages one to do or give more than what is expected, Cinemagis maintains its careful curation and programming to consistently identify and represent Northern Mindanao's way of life, identity, color, and sensibility.

With these, Cinemagis adhered to the following themes in its earlier editions:

- Peace (Inner Peace or Personal Peace and Societal Peace)
- Human Rights
- Gender and Development
- Culture and Folklore Awareness, Sensitivity, and Understanding
- Harmony with the Environment
- Health and Sanitation
- Food Security
- Life's Funny and Subtle Contradictions

Exemplifying the abovementioned themes are short films like *Kasing Kasing Amang* (2008) by Shaun Alejandro Yap Uy, which reconcile family conflicts stemming from gender stereotypes and poverty through acceptance, love, and understanding. *Carmen* (2011) by Jasmine Limas boldly presents a mother's resort to sex work to make ends meet for her child and family. *Tutob* (2012) by Kissza

Campano carefully examines the prejudices and stereotypes faced by a Maranao who simply wished to cross a military checkpoint to bring medicine and medical supplies back to his rural community. *Window of Dreams* (2009) by Rosalie Zerrudo, *Guano* (2013) by Javey Martinez, and *Backwash* (2012) by Joey Sendaydiego are short films about the effects of climate change that bring havoc on the environment and the lives of the people. Their films offer alternatives to mitigate climate change and environmental degradation. *End of War* (2014) by Joe Bacus is an honest take on how the war between the Philippine military and the Moro rebels affects civilians, especially those caught in the crossfire. *Balut. Penoy. Asin* (2016) by Julienne Anne Ilagan is a subtle exposition of the rampant drug selling, drug abuse, and the perils of the war on drugs during the Duterte administration.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the festival embarked on a new journey to expand participation by filmmakers from various parts of Mindanao. Since we could only conduct the festival online in 2021 and 2022, filmmakers from Caraga, Davao City, Davao de Oro, Marawi City, and Zamboanga City were invited and programmed. Themes expanded to include physical, emotional, and mental health; environment and climate change; preservation of life and human dignity; values and family solidarity; and sustainable development goals.

The Cinemagis practice and experience

Apart from Cinemagis, the festival's short film competition with student and senior categories, the festival's colorful facets include its selection process, curation and programming, festival components, craft lectures and workshops, and the awards night.

The call starts every September, and the deadline is every December 27th. The festival is held in January of the following year. Every December 30th, a selection panel determines which films will be programmed in the competition and their corresponding nominations. The Cinemagis festival management appoints the selection panel headed by the Festival Director and Curator. They are tasked with evaluating and assessing the films and filmmakers for their adherence to the suggested themes and the quality of their content and cinematic language. The selection panel ensures that the festival's standards and rubrics are observed in the selection, nomination, and determination of winners. The selection panel's decision is final, irrevocable, and respected.

After the selection process, the filmmakers accepted into the competition are informed through formal correspondence. They are invited to the Cinemagis Filmmakers Orientation Meeting, where they are given instructions on the components of the festival, their expected attendance at the various activities scheduled, and go through pictorials and video shoots for publication materials and the opening billboard of Cinemagis. The meeting also serves as a

gathering where they all meet and greet to foster camaraderie and build a community of artists who can work together and collaborate.

The festival opens with a red-carpet nomination night at the Xavier University Little Theater. The festival director and a prominent guest, on behalf of the Cinemagis festival management and the selection panel, announce the nominations. During Cinemagis 7 in 2015, acclaimed director Brillante Mendoza announced the nominations alongside the festival director, as Cinemagis 7 coincided with the Brillante Mendoza Film Festival, which took place at SM Uptown in Cagayan de Oro City.

The nomination night includes the Cinemagis Ritual, an exchange of an item that best represents each film, as determined by the filmmaker, with a seedling prepared by the festival management. The filmmakers are expected to grow the seedlings as a symbol of their commitment to environmental preservation. The nomination night closes with a special feature-length film programmed as TANGLAW, usually a film by a notable Mindanaoan filmmaker. Special feature-length films include *Qiyamah* (2012) by Director Teng Mangansakan; *Crossfire* (2011), *Riddles of My Homecoming* (2013), and *Hospital Boat* (2009) by Director Arnel Mardoquio; *Ang Nerseri* (2009), *Lando at Bugoy* (2016), *Kakampi* (2016), and *Kamunggai* (2017) by Director Vic Acedillo; *Tu Pug Imatuy* (2017) and *Kaaway sa Sulod* (2019) by Director Arnel Barbarona; *Chasing Fireflies* (2012), *The Crescent Rising* (2015), and *Women of the Weeping River* (2016) by Director Sheron Dayoc; *Kauyagan* (2018) by Julianne Ann Ilagan. We recently featured films programmed as Cine Icons and Lakbay Cine by the CCP's Film, Broadcast, and New Media Division Production and Exhibition Department, and SAGIP PELIKULA by ABS-CBN.

Following the nomination night are the regular film screenings in various programs. First up is the LANTAW program for the short films in competition. Next is VIVA MINDANAO, showcasing short films from various Mindanao film festivals, such as the Mindanao Film Festival, NABIFILMEX, and Ngilngig Film Festival. One recently added Cinemagis program is MGA INDAY, MGA ONDO for films on gender and development. Cinemagis has also included the RELOADED program for films from previous winners, and EXTRA for films submitted but not included in the final cut.

The screenings of these films are held at the Xavier University Little Theater, SM City Cagayan de Oro Cinemas 1 and 2, select schools for Cinemagis Caravans and Reloaded, and at Kiosko Kagawasan, an outdoor venue at DV Soria Park in Cagayan de Oro. With these venues, Cinemagis attains stature as a serious regional cinema institution, institutionally supported and widely patronized by the community.

We are proud to share that Cinemagis has gained a following and patronage from the Northern Mindanao audiences. Film

enthusiasts, from basic to higher education students at public and private schools, and the general public, watch the films featured in Cinemagis. We reach an average of three thousand audiences. Cinemagis only requires the audience to donate goods, such as pad paper, pencils, canned goods, noodles, soap, and sanitary napkins as entry passes. These goods are given to the less fortunate communities in the region through Xavier University's social development efforts and NSTP programs. This unique aspect elevates Cinemagis' social responsibility to the community.

Each year, Cinemagis programs craft lectures titled Sine Talakayan and workshops titled Sine Likha. Both the lecture and workshop are free to all competing filmmakers, non-competing filmmakers, faculty, and students of Media Arts, Arts and Design, and Communication Arts, as well as to the general audience who wish to learn about film craft, appreciation, analysis, and criticism. Speakers and lecturers of both programs are prominent leaders and film directors, producers, and production designers, such as Vicky Belarmino, Gabby Fernandez, Liza Diño-Segguera, Arnel Mardoquio, Arnel Barbarona, Jerrold Tarog, Baby Ruth Villarama, Coreen 'Monster' Jimenez, Patrick Campos, Aped Santos, Julianne Ann Ilagan, Joe Bacus, Ben Padero, Elio Garcia, Carthelyn C. Adajar, Pepe Manikan, and Ilsa Malsi, among others. The lectures and workshops include film appreciation, independent cinema and media arts, Mindanao cinema, film production, documentary filmmaking, directing, production design, sound design and scoring, editing, research, and criticism.

In its 14th year, Cinemagis partnered with the UP Film Institute's *Pelikula: A Journal of Philippine Cinema and Moving Image* under the program Pelikula Places, which trained Cagayan de Oro-based writers. They presented their articles last April 6, 2024, at the XU Little Theater, which tackled the status of Cagayan de Oro and Northern Mindanao cinema, insightfully shedding light on the achievements of filmmakers Joe Bacus, Julianne Ann Ilagan, and Orpheus Nery. They also presented the impact of Cinemagis on the community.

The Sine Talakayan and Sine Likha are jointly sponsored by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts through the grant Cinemas in the Regions, crafted by the National Committee on Cinema (NCCA) and the Film Development Council of the Philippines through its program, FDCP Film Talks. With the relevant topics and high-caliber speakers for Sine Talakayan and Sine Likha, Cinemagis thoughtfully provides opportunities for our filmmakers and film enthusiasts to learn and gain knowledge and competence in filmmaking.

One of the most interesting components of Cinemagis is the jury meeting to ascertain the winners. It is a friendly and collegial discussion, evaluation, and even a debate. The jury judges the student and senior categories with the following awards and

achievements in Art Direction, Cinematography, Story, Editing, Sound Scoring, Actor, Actress, Director, and the major awards such as 3rd Best Short Film, 2nd Best Short Film, and Best Short Film.

Cinemagis ensures that the jury members are competent figures in Mindanao and Philippine cinema, arts, and culture. The prominent names include the foremost film archivist, historian, and scholar, the legendary Teddy Co, Steven Patrick Fernandez, Felimon Blanco, Miguel Rapatan, Jag Garcia, Teng Mangansakan, who also programmed the short films for the earlier editions of Cinemagis, Arnel Mardoquio, Gabby Fernandez, Rudolph Ian Alama, Arnel Barbarona, Orvil Bantayan, Vic Acedillo, Karen Malaki, Quintin Cu-Unjieng, Patrick Campos, Sheron Dayoc, Bagane Fiola, Anito Librando, Shaun Alejandrae Y. Uy, Baby Ruth Villarama, and Jerrold Tarog. The array of personalities who have served as jury members testifies to the seriousness, breadth, and depth of Cinemagis as a significant film festival in Mindanao, if not the entire country.

The Cinemagis Awards night is held at the atrium of SM City Cagayan de Oro, and as the last major component of the festival, it announces the major winners and special awards, such as Breakthrough Film Material, Special Jury Prize or Citation, Audience Choice, Male and Female Stars of the Night. All winners receive their specially crafted Cinemagis trophy, which has morphed over the years from materials such as *mangima* stone, bamboo, and red clay, known as Bulua clay, an iconic material for Bulua pottery in Cagayan de Oro. Following the awards night is the Cinemagis and FDCP Night, an after-party sponsored by the Film Development Council of the Philippines. The event aims to conduct a filmmakers' exchange and networking. With a sumptuous dinner and cozy entertainment, the Cinemagis and FDCP Night nurtures conviviality amid healthy competition and cultivates respect and unity among filmmakers whom we consider as gems in Northern Mindanao cinema.

Cinemagis opens opportunities and celebrates achievements

Having the National Committee on Cinema (NCC) of the NCCA recognize our efforts of establishing a film festival in Northern Mindanao by giving Cinemagis a grant to fund its annual festival is a huge achievement and opportunity to strengthen the core intent and purpose of Cinemagis to harness the region's filmmaking and elevate film appreciation and education.

In 2015, the FDCP supported Cinemagis 7 by providing financial and technical assistance so the festival could strengthen and expand its existing programming, especially the Tanglaw program, which showcases full-length feature films. The FDCP talks allowed the Northern Mindanao Community to meet and learn from the big names of Philippine Cinema. The FDCP Night added color and fun, making Cinemagis more memorable for the filmmakers.

This recognition and grant also include Cinemagis' inclusion in the NCC's Cinema Rehiyon network. In fact, Cinemagis and Cinema Rehiyon were both established in 2009. Hence, the first winners of Cinemagis, Shaun Alejandrae Y. Uy (*Kasing Kasing Amang* and *Uray*) and Tzaddi Esguerra (*Kiss the Rain*), were featured at the very first national film festival for regional filmmakers held at the Cultural Center of the Philippines. To date, Cinema Rehiyon continues to include and recognize Cinemagis as one of its formidable Cinemas in the Region, and every major Cinemagis winner has the opportunity to be part of the Cinema Rehiyon delegation.

After their stints in Cinemagis and Cinema Rehiyon, most Northern Mindanao filmmakers pursue their passion for the craft and flourish in various regional, national, and international film festivals, and some pursue degree programs in film.

For instance, Tzaddi Esguerra (*Kiss the Rain*), Jenriel Ponz Lagat (*Pangalawang Cubicle*), and Glenmark Doromal (*Sealed*) were offered scholarships for film at the De La Salle-College of St Benilde. Only Lagat and Doromal took advantage of the scholarship opportunity facilitated by Jag Garcia (NCC Executive Member and CSB faculty). Both Lagat and Doromal joined various national and international film festivals. Doromal's thesis, *The Infinite Sun (Ang Walay Kahumanang Adlaw)*, won major awards, including Best Picture at the 2013 Mindanao Film Festival. Lagat and Doromal now pursue careers in film and multimedia in Manila.

Female filmmakers, such as Jasmine Limas (*Carmen*, *Kunhod*, and *Ang Lihim ni Natividad*), Reena Bianca Dunque (*Super Nico* and *Ayo – Ayo*), Julianne Ann Ilagan (*Balot.Penoy.Asin.* and *Sikad*), and Kissza Campano (*Tutob*), made waves with narratives worthy of attention and have been featured at Cinema Rehiyon after Cinemagis.

Limas's *Carmen* was programmed at the Yerba Buena Film Festival in San Francisco, California, after her film was shown at the Cinema Rehiyon 4 in Bacolod City.

Dunque's *Ayo-Ayo* was featured in *Hidden Cinema: The Virtual Experience of Philippine Cinema's Centenary* at Ayala Museum, curated by Nick Deocampo. In 2017, *Ayo-ayo* was shown at the Cannes Film Festival – Short Film Corner, and in that same year, it was featured at the Diwa Filipino Film Festival in Seattle, USA.

Also, Ilagan, after *Balut.Penoy.Asin.* and *Sikad* directed a full-length feature titled *Kauyagan (Way of Life)* at the ToFarm Film Festival in 2018. Ilagan also received several Film Lab grants. Her short film, *Akong Pinalangga (My Beloved)*, was included in EKSENA Cinema Quarantine (ECQ), a feature-length omnibus project for the film community during the pandemic, with the theme "filmmakers' life under lockdown." Ilagan also initiated Cine Inday, a film screening series by female filmmakers in Cagayan de Oro City.

In 2013, after winning Best Short Film at Cinemagis, Kissza Campano's *Tutob* was named a finalist in the Short Film category of the Cinemalaya Independent Film Festival.

Filmmakers Joe Bacus (*Ika-3 Putahe*, *End of War*, and *Happy Fiesta*) and Edmund Telmo (*Grasya*, *Redempsyon*, and *3021*) continue to make big waves in the Philippine independent cinema. They, too, have won Best Short Film and Best Director awards in Cinemagis for their films.

Bacus has won major awards at the Mindanao Film Festival and Salamindanaw Asian Film Festival. In 2015, his film *Happy Fiesta* was featured at the 28th ExGround Film Festival (Wiesbaden, Germany). His films have also been featured and received awards at various national and international film festivals, including the Landshuter Kurzfilmfestival, the Cellulart Film Festival in Jena, Germany, the Guanajuato International Film Festival in Mexico, and FACINE in San Francisco, California, USA. Also, Bacus was granted a film production fund for his first full-length feature, *Markado: The Moon Devourer*. Bacus's *Markado* has been featured at major Philippine film festivals, including Cinema Rehiyon and QCinema International Film Festival in 2018. In 2019, the film had its international premiere at the Focus on Asia – Fukuoka International Film Festival (Japan). Bacus is also the founder of the Cine de Oro Film Festival, held every December and now in its fifth year.

Edmund Telmo has been featured and won awards at major film festivals in Mindanao: the Golden Durian Prize from the Salamindanaw Asian Film Festival in 2017, Best Screenplay at the 2017 Mindanao Film Festival, and a nomination at the 41st Gawad Urian Awards' short film category. Telmo's *3021* won the Jury Prize at Davao Ngilngig Festival in 2018; his film *A Sabbath on the Longest Day of the Year* won first prize at the 34th Gawad CCP Para sa Alternatibong Pelikula and competed in the 2021 Bangkok ASEAN Film Festival, Short Out Festival in Italy, and at the 2022 SeaShorts Film Festival in Malaysia.¹ In 2024, Telmo starred in a Cinemalaya film, *Kantil*, directed by Joshua Caesar Medroso.

Filmmakers Orpheus Nery, Kenneth Sabijon, Tat Soriano, Harold Villegas, Rosalie Escala Sharif, and Reyan Amacna continue creating films and presenting their works at various film festivals. They have pursued multimedia and videography businesses in their localities.

The achievements of these filmmakers are a testament to the energy and growth of Northern Mindanao cinema. They have invested and dedicated their time, effort, and resources to share their narratives and voices and elevate the filmmaking experience for the community. In turn, Cinemagis continues to scout for more potential filmmakers who can follow in the footsteps of its alums.

In 2014, Xavier University, through its achievements with Cinemagis, hosted Cinema Rehiyon 6, where almost 200 filmmakers from the regions came to Cagayan de Oro to celebrate the finest of regional cinema that year. The outgoing and incoming NCC executive members, like Miguel Rapatan, Teddy Co, Rez Cortez, Jag Garcia, Patrick Campos, and William Mayo, came over to witness the fruition and implementation of their committee-initiated project. Veteran film directors and celebrities, including Peque Gallaga, Maryo J. de los Reyes, Cherrie Gil, Leo Martinez, Maria Isabel Lopez, and Mara Lopez, came to celebrate with the regional filmmakers.

Turnabout pursuits

In 2019, Cinemagis was recognized by the FDCP as one of the luminaries of Philippine Cinema. This recognition was presented during the Philippine Cinema Centennial celebration at the New Frontier Theater in September 2019. Despite the recognition, we had to let go of the brand because I returned to work at the Liceo de Cagayan University in 2019, where my efforts in film appreciation began. After several meetings with our Liceo team, we decided to rebrand Cinemagis as the Northern Mindanao Film Festival in 2021.

We had two editions at Liceo in 2021 and 2022, but conducted them online due to the pandemic. We had a one-year hiatus in 2020, and the editions in 2021 and 2022 were counted as the 12th and 13th editions of the festival.

In August 2022, I returned to work at Xavier University. Hence, the possibility of bringing back the name Cinemagis. However, I served only as a faculty member and could not revive the festival on my own. So, we did not have one in 2023.

Fortunately, in August 2023, Xavier University President Fr. Mars P. Tan, SJ, reinstated me as the director of the Xavier Center for Culture and the Arts. With that, my XCCA team and I decided to put up Cinemagis again. Cinemagis is now 14 and will turn 15 in August 2025. In its 14th year, Cinemagis reached more than three thousand audiences.

Sustaining the harvest

When I started rereading Cinemagis's texts, I realized how small it was when it began. But it grew into what it is now: a festival that upholds its commitment to serve as a film network and collective, highlighting the rich and abundant harvest of Northern Mindanao students and professional filmmakers that instill cultural and artistic responsibility and awareness. The filmmakers are grounded with an in-depth understanding of the subjects and milieus in their films. They form, mirror, and shape society and tap stakeholders from the filmmaking community. Cinemagis elevates the level of film consciousness through film reviews, criticism, research,

documentation, archiving, capacity-building in filmmaking, and updating the database of filmmakers in the region.

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Endnotes

- 1 "Film by XU Alumnus, Professor, Wins First Prize at CCP Gawad Alternatibo," Xavier University – Ateneo de Cagayan, September 2, 2022, accessed August 15, 2024, www.xu.edu.ph/departments-cas/sociology-cas/194-news/xu-ate-neo-news-sy-2020-2023/5716-film-by-xu-alumnus-professor-wins-first-prize-at-ccp-gawad.

Balik ta'g Sinawal¹

(Let's Return to Sinawal):

Recollections and Reflections of the ATL Crew of *The Restless Heron*

Christian Ely F. Poot

This article examines the film *The Restless Heron* (2023) through the lens of the Above the Line (ATL) production company's crew. *The Restless Heron* is a period film based on the pre-American-occupation history of present-day Koronadal City. The place was formerly known to the Maguindanaons as Talik and was ruled by a sultan who governed the Moros and nearby indigenous communities. Volatile political circumstances led to the fall of the Maguindanaon polity and forced its inhabitants, including the war-injured sultan, to flee its former domain. To be clear, I am part of the ATL from pre-production (academic research) through post-production. Thus, the narration is a blend of collective recollection bound by autoethnographical involvement.

This article is composed of three parts. The first evaluates the rise of period shows in TV and film in cinema to show the patterns of represented periods and places, and the emerging trend similar to the inequity in Philippine history textbooks. This first part ends with an assessment of the viability of Mindanao-based shows or films funded by producers.

In the second part, I briefly discuss the status and nature of Mindanao regional cinema across urban centers and its trajectories as an entity promoting film. These centers are growing hubs of local stories of everyday life, the tragedy of human experiences, musings, and the long-forgotten histories recently exhumed from the literature.

The third part constitutes my conversation with the ATL crew. The actual discussion is categorized into three divisions: (1) *Paghinumdom* (Recollection) discusses memorable happenings during the pre- to production proper; (2) *Pamalandong* (Reflection) analyzes the former and identifies positions over matters that will prompt the production team for future film projects, and (3)

Paingon—Asa Sad? (Destination—Quo Vadis?) elaborates on the team's aspirations and the long-term game for the production's role in Mindanao regional cinema and in promoting local history and culture.

I group the ATL crew into three for convenience in the citation, especially in times of unified expressions: (1) the writing creatives (WC) composed by the scriptwriters and historians/history consultants; (2) the visual creatives (VC), which include the director, assistant director, and the director of photography; (3) the manager and executives (M&E), or the executive producers and production manager. In the *Paghinumdom*, the division of WC, VC, and M&E is apparent, while in the *Pamalandong*, I mix the overall sentiments of the entire crew. Lastly, at the *Paingon*, I recall significant turning points in the History Department and its partnership with Pioneer-Descendants regarding historical documentation.

In conclusion, I unify the sentiment of the ATL through another recollection of the talks from August 2022 to March 2023, along with the reflection of Asst. Prof. Cris Hannibal P. Non on the role of the production team and the History Department of MSU – General Santos in the future of film and history education in the locality, and the expanding network to fulfill such duty.

Philippine History and Culture in Broadcast Media and Cinema

David C. L. Lim (2012) asserts that films can be used as vehicles for creating and solidifying a national identity, spreading propaganda, or revisiting a controversial period of history to be settled or stirred that could cause disunity in the public.² Broadcast media have almost the same capabilities as film, but their content is significantly faster to create or release and is more wide-ranging. Their programming plays an important role in the consciousness, and later to be subsumed in the subconscious, of the masses on some issues promoted by the respective media conglomerate, from instilling new or reinforcing worldviews to following fads.³

To appreciate the patterns of soap opera or *teleserye* programming in Philippine broadcast media, one should start in the mid-1990s, several years after the Marcoses were exiled.⁴ The Filipinos making soap operas during that time devised an approach to the story to be more engaging to the public, such as, according to Louie Jon Sanchez, "interesting pairs called love teams, astounding manorial or feudalistic settings, and complex plots (and subplots) that keep audiences hooked for years on end." The trope was very effective for several years until the Hallyu (Korean wave) took over the Philippine primetime and forced the formula to be modified, applying measures from the latter to improve the former.⁵

Filipino soap opera productions were influenced by their foreign counterparts, namely Mexican- and Koreanovelas in the

1990s. From 2000 to the present, the shows have incorporated external elements and merged with the 1990s formula, producing 'permutations' of tropes.⁶ As Sanchez observes, one that emerged from the amalgamation was the *fantaserye*, a portmanteau of fantasy and teleserye, first embodied by *Marina* (2003), shown on ABS-CBN Channel 2. The succeeding teleseryes produced by GMA Channel 7 in this category featured historico-cultural elements to varying degrees. Notable fantaseryes include *Mulawin* (2004-5), *Encantadia* (2005), *Amaya* (2011), *Indio* (2013), *Katipunan* (2013), and *Ilustrado* (2014).⁷

The 2010s may arguably be considered the golden age of history-based shows, such as historical fiction, which borrows elements from the past to evoke a historical milieu and its ambiance and history portrayals based on actual events and/or personalities, but slightly modified for creative interpretation. In this decade, *Maria Clara at Ibarra* (2022) has stood out as a historical drama series aired on Philippine TV. The shows from *Amaya* to *Maria Clara at Ibarra* underwent consultations with several historians and professionals to ensure historico-cultural representations.⁸ The history-based shows made learning history and culture more engaging and memorable. Such shows might have prompted many high school and college students to read further about the nation's past, create stories under the same trope, and/or appreciate the intricacies of creating a teleserye on history.

Among history-related entities, Jose Rizal enjoys the most films dedicated to his life and works, with at least 15 films from 1912 to 1999.⁹ Some decades saw multiple Rizal films, especially the decade of the national centennial celebration of independence. Social pressures and obligations of the time are the reason for producing Rizaliana films.¹⁰ Nonetheless, other heroes, let alone events, remain confined in academic journals, correspondence, or books, waiting for the filmmakers to pore over.

The lucky heroes, events, or historically inspired personalities produced as films in the past decade are *Supremo* (2012), *El Presidente* (2012), *Bonifacio: Ang Unang Pangulo* (2014), *Heneral Luna* (2015), *Hele sa Hiwagang Hapis* (2016), *Honor: The Legacy of Jose Abad Santos* (2018), *Goyo: Ang Batang Heneral* (2018), *Quezon's Game* (2019), and *GomBurZa* (2023)¹¹. All these movies focus on personalities from Luzon and the important events that transpired on the island. Apart from *Honor* (2018), the subjects of these films are usually covered in introductory Philippine History courses across Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the country, as per the prospectus of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED).¹²

Since big producers tend to reside in the country's center and likely finance profitable films, historical films are rarely produced. They are challenging to market because of the perceived low investment return unless the story is familiar to the NCR audience. Such a situation makes it harder to film Mindanawon histories. If lesser-known histories of Luzon and Visayas have difficulty finding a

producer even for an independent-level production, how much more are the Mindanao histories? Suppose a movie about the Batangueño Apolinario Mabini has no producer from the Greater Manila Area, or the Ilonggo Graciano Lopez Jaena. In that case, the possibility of the Maguindanaon Datu Ali, a local hero from the South, being funded or considered for production is slim.

There is a pattern here: representations in mass media (both in quality and quantity), broadcast media, broadsheets, and film are greatly diminished the farther they are from Manila, the national center. This pattern is also reflected in history textbooks, as studied by Jamail Kamlian and Juvanni Caballero.¹³ The dearth of representation is prone to creating or reinforcing stereotypes that can be hurtful in shaping national sentiment and regional empathy toward other ethnolinguistic groups. Stereotypes cannot be easily undone, even with proper dissemination of knowledge. One should repackage information in a more appealing way—that is, through film. Such a situation poses a significant challenge to those attempting to create a historical non-documentary film from the South—a challenge that the ATL of *The Restless Heron* had accepted.

Mindanao Regional Cinema: Brief Status

Mindanao regional cinema produces films that express homegrown creatives' personal, collective, milieu-based (or a combination of the three) experiences in the languages spoken in Mindanao. Other films attempt to show facets of life in Mindanao for its inhabitants by making stories ranging from the mundane to the mystical.¹⁴ The works attempt to dispel long-standing stereotypes lingering in non-Mindanaoans' psyches due to their exposure to multimedia created by outsiders about Mindanawon culture and geography. Mangansakan emphasizes that "defining Mindanao Cinema, and by recognizing its vast manifestation in our film practices...is the only way we could position ourselves in the crafting of a genuine *National Cinema*."¹⁵

Defining the origins of Mindanao regional cinema can be difficult to pinpoint, given that preserving and archiving media from the pre-1990s has been a struggle, especially for independent filmmakers. However, for us to proceed, we have to start somewhere. Mangansakan identifies the short film *Yuta: Earth* by Jojo Sescon (1991), an Iliganon, as the "earliest Mindanao film...in the digital era." The film won several awards from different Philippine film critics. Nine years after that, the *House Under the Crescent Moon* (2000) by Mangansakan, a documentary film about the role of an evacuation center, the house of the director's grandfather, during the MILF-GRP conflict in Maguindanao in the early 2000s, won Best Documentary in the 2001 edition of Gawad CCP Para Sa Alternatibong Pelikula at Video.¹⁶ From then on, cinema in Mindanao grew as new filmmakers rose each year, and opportunities emerged to present their works and diverse stories in the country and abroad.

From the late 2000s to the present, Zamboanga City, Cagayan de Oro City, Nabunturan, Davao City, and General Santos City have become centers of Mindanao regional cinema, with varying levels of activity. These places host homegrown and other Mindanawon filmmakers annually at established, independent, and school-based film festivals.¹⁷

The manner of presentation differs from one place to another. For instance, the Nabunturan Independent Film Exhibition (NABIFILMEX) is known for its alternative “modes of viewership” through makeshift screening spaces that prioritize general audiences, while the Cinemagis of Xavier University – Ateneo de Cagayan houses indoor screenings in the school’s little theater, attracting mainly students and faculty.¹⁸ In General Santos City, the Salamindanaw Asian Film Festival, organized by Mangansakan, showcases movies from ASEAN countries. It also hosts seminars for Mindanao creatives, guiding them from film conception to execution.¹⁹ A recent addition to the growing efforts in Mindanao regional cinema happened in 2022. The 1st Pelikmata Film Festival by Cronasia Foundation College, Inc., under the supervision of Alan D. Filoteo, held its maiden edition, exclusively attended by their Bachelor of Multimedia Arts students. The 2nd edition would have been held by December 2023, but the festival had to be put on hold after a strong earthquake the month before. HEI students across South Cotabato and General Santos City had expressed their intentions to the organizer, but due to prior commitments, the 2nd edition will be pursued in the future.

Thus far, I have offered a short historical survey on Mindanao cinema and described the funding and exhibition prospects of Mindanao stories, historical or otherwise, which are the proper contexts of *The Restless Heron*, a product of chance and hope, pushing the boundaries of Mindanao regional cinema and popularization of history one step at a time.

Su Di Makapangintelen a Talik

Su Di Makapangintelen a Talik, or *The Restless Heron*, is a historical full-length fiction film based on the early history of the Sultanate of Talik, a breakaway polity from the Sultanate of Buayan (upstream Sultanate). The story is set in the 1890s, until the Sultanate of Talik’s untimely transfer of the seat of authority in the early 1900s due to a surprise attack by upstream Maguindanaons. To date, *The Restless Heron* is possibly the first non-documentary historical full-length film about Mindanao, narrating a series of events that transpired on the island. The movie runs for 83 minutes and 54 seconds, including a teaser for a prospective film project at the end. Directed by Alan D. Filoteo, the main cast are all Mindanawons: Hassanain Magarang (Marawi City) as Sultan Ngelen, as well as Jun Nayra and Rolando Inocencio, tracing their roots and affiliations to Cagayan de Oro City, who play Datu Ali of Kudarangan and Sultan sa Talik, respectively.

The Restless Heron production crew, with UP Diliman experts, conducted an evaluation after the film showing. Photo from Christian Ely F. Poot and UP – Departamento ng Kasaysayan, March 2023. All images are with permission



The film's history first came to academic attention in the mid-1970s, when the late local historian Dr. Domingo M. Non, Sr., was in his early years of teaching at Koronadal City (formerly Marbel). Non noticed a swivel cannon partially protruding above the ground as evidence of a Maguindanaon polity in the area several decades earlier. Due to other academic commitments, the topic remained dormant in his mind until the mid-2010s, before he passed. He had urged his son, Cris Hannibal P. Non, also a local historian and an assistant professor of history at MSU – General Santos City, to study the people and the events that took place.

Asst. Prof. Non and I conducted several research trips to Mindanao and Metro Manila HEIs and repositories from January to August 2022 to gather sources.²⁰ From August to October 2022, we wrote a focused history of the events, while the film's script was simultaneously written, revised, and finalized.²¹ Based on my suggestion, the writing creatives/scriptwriting team decided on the title. I thought of "restless" in light of the polity's stormy history and "heron" for its place's namesake, where many *talik* or visibly similar birds like egrets and storks are found in South Cotabato.²²

The Restless Heron had its first digital screening and formal critique, sponsored by the Departamento ng Kasaysayan of the University of the Philippines Diliman, on March 24, 2023. The film garnered constructive feedback and generally positive reviews from film and history experts, who praised its fresh approach and quality, making it well-suited for "teaching Southeast Asian culture."²³ In September 2023, the film won Best Feature Film Screenplay at the 6th Caorle Independent Film Festival in Italy.²⁴

Paghinumdom (Recollection)

Writing Creatives (WC). During filming, the associate scriptwriters—Alyanna Lumaguinding and Jann Ardis Limjap—were affiliated with the History Department of Mindanao State University – General Santos as senior students, while the head scriptwriter, Ivy



The Tres Marias of the scriptwriting department. From L-R, Ivy G. Masque (BA History, 2022), head scriptwriter, and Alyanna K. Lumaguinding and Jann Ardis Limjap (BA History, 2023), assistant scriptwriters. All of them graduated cum laude. Photo from Feona Boholst and Jeiel Manansala/*The Restless Heron* social media team, November 2022

Masque, was a recent graduate. The associates were identified as two of the best in their cohort. For their practicum, they were initially assigned clerical roles at an NGO affiliated with the department. However, when the prospect of making a movie gained momentum, they were reassigned to become associate scriptwriters. Funnily, Masque was selected after the other two had been identified. She was chosen as the head scriptwriter from a pool of recent candidates. Her experience as a news writer concurrent with her position as the editor-in-chief of the college paper, and her being one of the top students in her BA History class, made her the best person for the role, combined with her flexibility and ability.²⁵

The scriptwriters expected their work to be over once the script was finalized for script reading and production.²⁶ However, by the time of production, the scriptwriters had to serve as consistency checkers, owing to a lack of staffing for those roles. Also, because the scriptwriters were present during production, parts of the script were optimized to ensure smoother delivery of the lines. Asst. Prof. Non recalled that he did not expect much from the movie because it was an independent production, but he and the entire crew were astounded when the trailer was shown for the first time—the production team’s work paid off.²⁷

Rolando Inocencio, a veteran actor with extensive film experience, was a great help during filming. On the first night of shooting, he gathered the writers for an hour, along with the actors who had scheduled scenes with him, and mentored them on the flow of scriptwriting, the importance of body language, and the timing of delivering lines. As an observer, I glimpsed firsthand how a professional actor works in an environment where everyone has to learn the basics. I reflected that *The Restless Heron*, being a period film, Robin George Collingwood’s framework of history as

a "re-enact[ment] in a historian's mind,"²⁸ the execution of actors was a primary concern to achieve verisimilitude or approximate the equivalence of what happened—the emotions and actions encapsulated in the mise-en-scène.

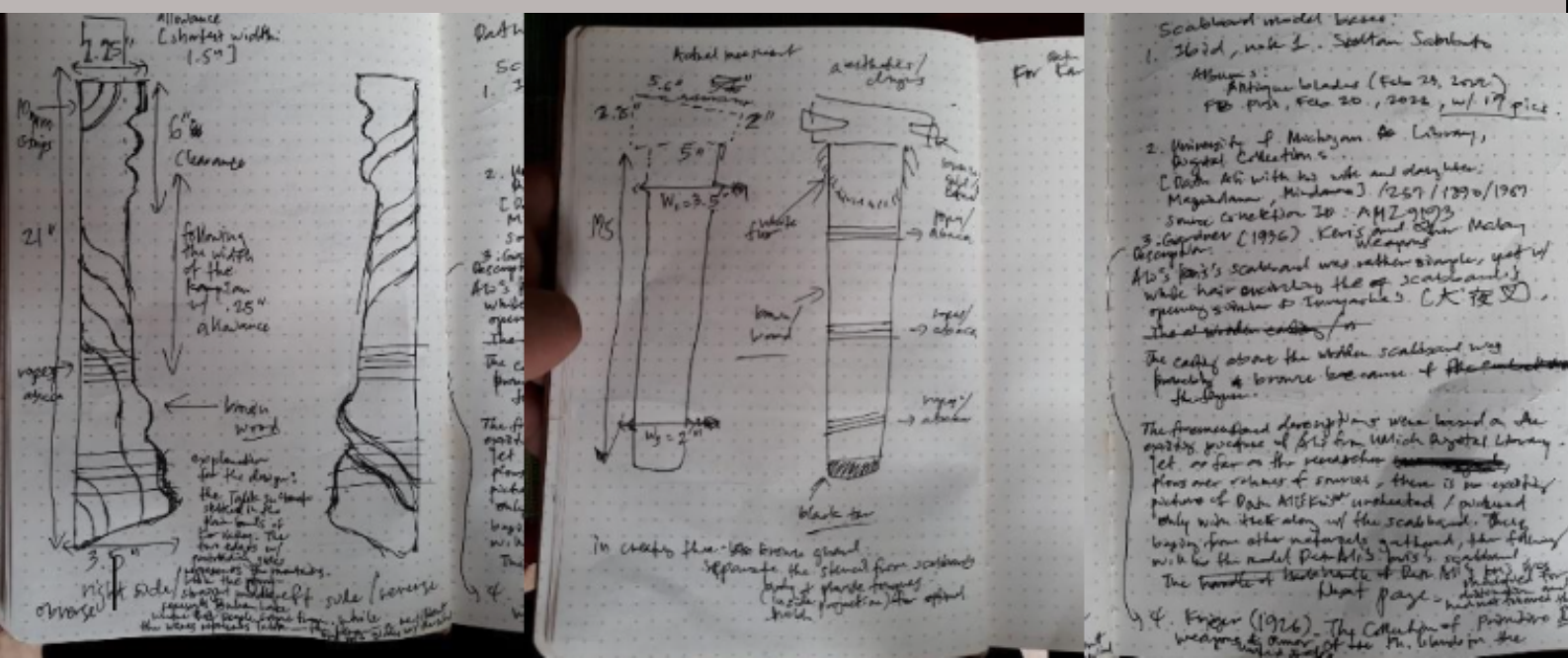
As the production continued, the scriptwriters realized their greatest foe was themselves. The work was much more than they could handle. The feeling of self-disappointment arose whenever their expected tasks were unmet. As a whole, they found it inspiring to strive harder. The scriptwriters doubled as the continuity personnel, so they stuck with the director until everything had been wrapped up, calling it a day, even if the shoot ended at three in the morning. Thus, aside from most of the crew sleeping very late, the technical and continuity teams were the most sleep-deprived, sometimes with only three to five hours of rest. Moments of short breaks became power nap sessions.

As a history consultant and weapon designer, I suggested using gun props for the film. I firmly believed these would enhance the story's cinematic effect, though the problem was how to hide the fake triggers without the camera revealing them. Asst. Prof. Non and I did not have enough time to create the gun prototype, so we decided not to use it and focused on sword replication and prototype making, later working on the spear and cannon.

The scriptwriters were also united in the opinion that the most challenging parts of their job were the most fun: interacting with many new people, multitasking even though they were inexperienced, and traveling around different places. At some point, especially for Limjap and Lumaguinding, their tasks gradually fulfilled a childhood dream to be involved in film production.

Visual Creatives (VC). The visual creatives also made a similar observation during production: because almost everyone was a first-timer (except the directors and the sound engineer), mistakes and delays were expected. Director Alan Filoteo headed the VC, while George Palileo and Yen Morales served as assistant director and

Some of my research notes and designs for the weapon prototypes of the characters. Photo by author, November 4, 2022



director of photography, respectively. The technical team and the VC were very patient in guiding the entire production team despite planning inconsistencies. For example, the set-up for a specific place should have been prepared hours before the shoot. So, the technical team and the actors had to help the production design team arrange the location, further delaying the shoot. Aside from the apparent lack of staffing, there were problems with signal loss and logistics: 90% of the shoot was held in the mountains of Sinawal; the locations where the scenes were set had very weak to no mobile signal. The production team considered purchasing a pair of two-way radios with a 10-km range to contact standby personnel at the city center, but the production manager remembered that a permit was required before they could be used. So, the plan did not materialize.

Palileo, an anime enthusiast, loved the moments when people gathered to discuss their interests and ideas, from American pop culture to ancient weaponry. These talks happened every breakfast time and after dinner when everybody seemed rested.²⁹



Dir. Alan D. Filoteo orienting the first batch of audition goers. Photo by author, October 2022

Morales recalled that when one of the hard disks containing raw shots refused to be read, he, Filoteo, and some technical personnel panicked. He resorted to an age-old trick to fix the thing: he slammed the hard drive on a hard surface three times, and voila! It worked perfectly again. He retrieved the files safely and enjoyed a well-deserved sikwate (hot chocolate) afterward.³⁰

Manager & Executives (M&E). The manager and executives (M&E) were Anika Cierene Dizon and Atty. Cyd Charisse Non-Dizon; the production manager was Assoc. Prof. Maria Luisa Non-Cabrera. In terms of reflection, the M&E had other thoughts: Ms. Dizon initially thought that the project would be small-scale, as was reflected in the early meetings, a short film. However, as production progressed, the

film grew from medium- to full-length. From then on, there was no turning back. Concerning contributing in a field beyond their own, Atty. Non-Dizon said, "I envisioned a project suitable for student filmmakers, never expecting it to be an award-winning movie." Assoc. Prof. Non-Cabrera expected the work to be exhausting, but not to the extent it had. Truly, the entire production team did not expect the final output. It was a humble attempt to create a meaningful project for the locality that would allow one to revisit one's past through an audiovisual presentation.

Atty. Non-Dizon recounted the difficulties the Cronasia Foundation College, Inc. students had gone through: the technical team was composed primarily of Bachelor of Multimedia Arts students, while those who played warriors were BS Criminology students. The primary concern at that time was the safety of the students because it was the rainy season, and the shooting took place in the mountains. The ATL crew, however, monitored their security.

As the production manager, Assoc. Prof. Non-Cabrera added that she constantly monitored the expenses. When the cash on hand was nearly depleted, she had to contact the executive producers to report the situation. Though she could ensure the requested budget, the problem was communication: she had to travel down the mountain to inform the office of the budget concern before proceeding.³¹ Atty. Non-Dizon, the executive producer, noted their most memorable experience during shooting:

The most exhilarating experience was inviting faculty and staff to be part of the wedding scene. The two-minute film exposure ended up taking two hours to shoot. It turned out that acting is quite challenging! After the experience, they collectively decided that being teachers aligns more with their comfort zone.³²

Director Alan D. Filoteo, seated, middle right, and Assistant Director George T. Palileo, right, instructing the BS Criminology and BA Islamic Studies students on the battle scene. Photo from Feona Boholst and Jeiel Manansala/*The Restless Heron* social media team, November 2022





In her speech, Atty. Cyd Charisse Non-Dizon spoke about the importance of appreciating local histories. Photo from Feona Boholst/*The Restless Heron* social media team, March 2023

Assoc. Prof. Non-Cabrera mused that her work stressed her, though the pre-production processes—like idea sharing, press conferences, and character casting—were her favorite moments throughout the production.³³

Pamalandong (Reflection)

The WC mentioned that creative writing, especially dialogue and story building, would be their priority for improvement when opportunities such as seminars and workshops are held in the locality. Masque added that the writers should be aware of the technical team's roles and functions to determine whether the scenes and actions they are writing are feasible to execute, given the circumstances and terrain of a particular scene. Lumaguinding and Masque mentioned that there should be enough people for the technical work, especially props making and set design, to avoid production delays.³⁴ Asst. Prof. Non emphasized that resourcefulness should be adapted, or practiced, during the production stage, when one should strive to make ends meet despite financial constraints—*taman sa makaya, kayanon* (as far as one can go, push through it).³⁵

The WC, especially Asst. Prof. Non, a practicing historian, shared the pain of having to select moments in reimagining historical events that would elicit emotions from the audience, vis-à-vis the time limitations.³⁶ An example is the planned ending of the movie *la Avengers*, as recalled by the descendants of the historical figures when we asked about the preventive measures taken by the sultanate when Datu Ali chased them down South.

Ample time should also be given for rehearsals and wardrobe-making to ensure minimal delays during the actual shooting. Palileo added that when ample time is given for the production, the scenes would be more “cohesive [and the story would have] fluid transitions.”

The problem was that we clumped shooting scenes because of budget constraints: from three to four scenes per day, we ended up with six to eight.

Asst. Prof. Non and I had to transport the swords, spears, torches, and other necessary props from the ground to the mountaintop. We also had to make several trips down per day, along with the actors' personal drivers, to buy items that were suddenly needed on the shoot. Aside from this, most of the ATL had to commit to several roles instead of one—like the scriptwriters serving as continuity personnel, the director of photography having to dabble in set design, and others.

What was also saddening was that during the shoot, some of the crew had to sleep in the makeshift prop house, with the roof riddled with holes to secure the props on the site. The production team only learned about this after the shoot. This would have been fixed had the team been informed earlier, but the students were shy, and the set design team missed this because they had to move from one set to another every time a new scene was shot.

Food supply was an issue: at times, food was abundant but not properly distributed; at other times, it was insufficient, and the technical team and students were prioritized. In the last half of the production days, food had to be fetched from the plains, so the history consultants had to travel up and down the mountains again.

Atty. Non-Dizon and Assoc. Prof. Non-Cabrera learned a great deal about making movies, especially handling people, budgets, and event schedules. Production manager Non-Cabrera emphasized that every individual should be hired based on their expertise to orchestrate collaborative work properly, thus "[doing their] best within their bounds."³⁷

As a collective, we reflected on such happenings —especially the bad ones —and, as a production team, we promised that these things would not happen again and, if they did, they would be addressed immediately.

Paingon—Asa Sad? (Direction—Quo Vadis?)

From the time the plan to conduct historical research on Talik became apparent in August 2022, we in the history consultation team often reflected on where this work would lead us. At that time, Carmen Sanchez Royeca, the secretary of Pioneer-Descendants of Koronadal and Ala Valley Settlements, was still alive. She was our partner in interviewing personalities relevant to our local history. As an

ever-active social advocate, she introduced Filoteo to us that month and relayed the story to him. Royeca and the late Dr. Domingo Non, Sr., advocated for the promotion of history education in General Santos City. They were responsible for reviving the group as an organization and promoting the tri-people culture and history. When Dr. Non passed away during the pandemic, Royeca invited Dr. Non's son, Asst. Prof. Cris Non, as a substitute for his father, in 2021. I was invited to join the team later, in January 2022.

2022 marked a lucky year for the History Department, Pioneer-Descendants, and the CFCI. It was in mid-August 2022 when Royeca brought Filoteo to the department to talk with Asst. Prof. Non and me about prospective stories for film. Filoteo was quite direct when he said that history should not be confined to books, theses, or any printed form—history should be seen and felt. I was stunned: a part of my mind thought this should be common sense. After all, I have been a long-time fan of the National Geographic, Discovery, and History Channel. Then there was this side of me that asked: Is there anyone in General Santos who does this in non-documentary form? Thus, whether there were or not, I thought it was time to do some historical work for our locality.

Fast forward: most of us, toward the end of shooting, said we would not make films again, even if there was an opportunity. However, later we realized we had blurted this out of exhaustion. The days passed, and our minds could not get over what we had achieved. Our creative minds craved that kind of simulation, and I think the art of making films has enchanted us. What we have done over the past two years would have made the pillars of our local history happy. Finally, in *One Piece's* introductory narration voice, the era of visualization of local history has begun.

From time to time, Asst. Prof. Non would say that the film was executed perfectly because everything and everyone fell in the right place and time, meaning—the following specialists had been gathered in the place by virtue of their mutual connections, following that these personalities had many complementary things to offer—financial support, cultural and academic expertise, and the vast network of people.³⁸ The film was destined to happen, and I agree with him. I would add that, despite these resources and people, those involved in the film project seemed to answer the call of time, beginning to create local history movies for people to appreciate and enjoy.

The cultural and geographical outsiders have long misunderstood Mindanao's situation, people, and history. Region 12, the part of Mindanao with the most diverse ethnic population to date, appears to have an ethnically "younger" population, as most settlers come from the Visayas and Luzon. Thus, shared oral histories for their groups began only in the 1940s, while some trace theirs back to as early as the 1910s or '20s. But how about the original inhabitants of the

land for several centuries? The tri-people histories of SOCKSARGEN have many events and personalities worthy of being visualized. Asst. Prof. Non and I thought that making films was an alternative way of resolving and knowing others humanely—seeing and feeling the history through vivid actions and kinesthesia—a visual anthropology.

Also, aside from that altruistic viewpoint, Asst. Prof. Non reflected that the production team should continue making films to harness the creative potential of students who are willing to learn the art of film—on our side, the students of BA History to have their skills in historical imagination applied in filmmaking by having history as the framework; the BMMA students of CFCI to practice their technical skills in using appropriate film equipment to achieve the highest quality of visuals as their ability permits.³⁹ Later, we hope that such opportunities afforded to our students will be extended to interested young people in the city and nearby provinces when our resources allow.

The production team now focuses on marketing. So far, the movie has been regularly shown in different HEIs in GenSan: the Decagon schools, of which CFCI is a part, and MSU – General Santos' History and English Departments. We already use *The Restless Heron* as supplementary material in teaching Readings in Philippine History to help students understand the context of Mindanao's geopolitics during the transition from Spanish colonization to American occupation. Asst. Prof. Non and I have been conducting lectures at MSU – IIT every year since 2024 on the historicity of the film.

As the new generation tends to be visual learners, we in the production team envision that through *The Restless Heron* and our future film projects, we would make learning history more fun and less like a chore. Admittedly, we want the young ones to initiate further readings right after watching to better understand their past, like what the film *GomBurZa* had done, to become a homage to our grandparents' *yutang ginsaad*⁴⁰ (promised land) and for the Moros, Lumads, and us who were born here, our *yutang kabilin* (ancestral land)—a Mindanao which delivers a promise to those who know their roots.

Acknowledgment

Sincere thanks to my former office, the History Department of MSU – General Santos, for encouraging me to share my academic and creative works and supporting such endeavors for the benefit of the public and academe. Utmost gratitude to the Non family for continuing the legacy of the late Domingo M. Non, Sr., and pursuing historico-cultural efforts for which I have been part of since 2022. And lastly, this work is dedicated to my parents, my mother, who never doubted my capabilities, and to my father, who would have been so proud of what I am achieving now.

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Endnotes

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- 20 I was a student of Asst. Prof. Non during my undergraduate days. The research trips were productive for we have gathered primary and secondary sources that are relevant to our terminal requirements. In one of the trips, we pored over the most sought 1979 draft of Datu Michael Mastura's "The Rulers of Magindanao in Modern History, 1515–1903" published last 2023 by Ateneo de Manila University Press. Several passages mentioned about the location and relevance of Talik in Sa-Raya (Upland) Maguindanao group. Statements found there further cemented

the historicity of the polity and the succeeding event which led to its untimely downfall.

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A Non-Moro's Reading of Silent History

Sarah Elizabeth N. Allen

Hérons, or *talik*, popularly known as *tulabong* in the Visayas and Mindanao, live simple lives. They are often seen in rural farms alongside cattle, carabaos, and horses. These are small, agile migratory birds with black feet and a yellow bill.

In the Philippines, they are commonly called the white heron. They feed on insects, frogs, and small lizards, these pesky creatures that frequently annoy the grazing animals. Oftentimes, herons operate in pairs or alone, but they do flock together in their chosen settlements.¹

Hérons have been considered sacred and pure in literature across different traditions and folklore. They represent elegance, grace, wisdom, and peacefulness. Interestingly, the ancient Egyptians, the Celts, and the Greeks considered herons vassals of the supernatural realm—'messengers of the gods and goddesses.' In Chinese and Japanese art, herons are common subjects in painting, poetry, and stories, and, given their graceful characteristics, they are often associated with good luck.² It is thus considered taboo for anyone to harm them.

With such rich symbolism, the film *Sa Di Makapangintelen a Talik* tells us a tale of a group of people with little-known history, the so-called people of Talik, identified as Maguindanaons who later resided around the area of Koronadal, South Cotabato—a quiet community tribe believed to be led by a Sultan Ngelen (played by Hassanain O. Magarang).

In the film, this people or group is known to shy away from troubling conflicts with the then-competitive sultans and rajahs, who are territorial and aggressive about conquests and territories. Yet, no matter their striving to build a safe community for themselves, the appearance of an imposing Datu Ali (played by Jun Nayra) from the Buayan tribe disrupts their established tranquil habitat.

Interestingly, this tale about the Sultanate of Talik is less known to many. As a non-Moro Mindanawon, I had to review several articles on our Bangsamoro history to understand the sultanates' plight better.

There are only a few accounts about the Talik in the history books I have read. This could be because the first sultan of Talik, Sultan Ngelen, preferred seclusion and sought solace away from the race for supremacy among the sultanates.

Datu Amir Baraguir (2017), in his paper entitled "An Introduction to the History and Genealogy of the Maguindanao Sultanate," cites Prince Clemens von Metternich, who once said, "Those who make history do not have the time to write it," suggesting that the Talik people do not have many documented stories about their local events.³

In a way, this film, titled *The Restless Heron* in English, opens a window for modern-day audiences to pay close attention to what may be missing from this forgotten piece of history.

To understand the conflict surrounding the people of Talik, we must first understand how the governance around the Bangsamoro operated.

Looking back, the Bangsamoro held fast and prevented the expansionist Spaniards, followed by the Americans, from overriding Mindanao. The Bangsamoro people were known as strong warriors, governed by their allied sultanates, all considered blood brothers bound by marriage and tribal affiliations. However, with the complexes introduced by varying forms of governance among the semi-independent sultanates of Mindanao and the presence of resident Lumads and Christians, the rise of conflicts among these local groups was not surprising.⁴

The film has a straightforward plot. It is simply about protecting the people of Talik and preventing outsiders from ravaging the community. If one introspects closely, it is easy to empathize if one comes from a community run by a sultanate. It is easy to understand if one knows the rigors of the underlying burdens and responsibilities within a sultanate government. However, for audiences outside the Bangsamoro, no matter how seemingly aligned a non-Moro Mindanawon's perspective may be with our Bangsamoro neighbors', there is a need to review our Bangsamoro's history to understand the landscape of the sultanate.

In this film, despite its straightforwardness, we witness several issues arising: first is a long history of strife and peace processes among sultanates. Often, conflicts are pacified through tribal marriage agreements. Second, each group leader had something to fight for. As seen in the film, the Sultan of Talik (played by Rolando Inocencio) tries his best to protect his community from invaders, while Datu Ali aggressively wards off Americans from interfering in their local tribal affairs. Third, the leaders have had varied agendas: some have had noble intentions to protect their home communities, others selfish ambitions, and thus compromised by forging alliances

with outsiders, while the rest might have hidden beneath the mask of 'dignity' but, in truth, were beguiled by their lust for power.

In the story's near-climax, a scene depicts both contending parties praying to Allah for blessings before facing off in battle. Man against man, strength against strength, yet only one victor would emerge in the end.

What is this to us *outsiders*?

Sa Di Makapangintelen a Talik, even devoid of its sultanate landscape, provides a clear glimpse of what man is like.

Regardless of religion or race, there is always the temptation to desire power over others, over the enemy, whenever the threat comes around—to overrule the other or intimidate the weak using power.

We all have a tendency to exploit others and cause collateral damage as a form of revenge because we have observed how we behave when bullied and tried to escape. Yet, when we stand our ground and fight, we are easily labeled rebellious.

The film brings us to the unifying concept of strife and war that is not exclusive to the sultanate. Moreover, it is probably from this concept that *The Restless Heron* was born, inspired by the quiet grace of this creature—a heron agitated in its natural habitat by the antagonism of others.

Thus, whether we belong to the Bangsamoro, Lumads, or Christians, we all identify with this restless heron. It is why we think of escaping or flying away when difficulties confront us—we always long for a secret haven where the surrounding quiet can blanket us. And yes, like the people of Talik, we desire to settle and have peace.

We are all restless herons, moving along in the currents of life while hoping to evade the restlessness stealthily creeping in on us from the shadows.

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Eroticizing the Past

Artchil C. Daug

It is perhaps because of the obscenities I learned from those I consider my masters that when I first heard the title of the movie *The Restless Heron*, it sounded to me like it was coming from the porn industry. I wanted to ask one of its makers about the title's meaning, but I let the movie explain it. And explain, it did.

From a technical standpoint, which I have no training in, the movie was limited by financial and time constraints. The makers admitted this during the recent movie showing at Mindanao State University - Iligan Institute of Technology.

This is not a movie made by tested movie makers and actors; with some exceptions, most were first timers driven merely by the passion to make it. The low budget shows in the costumes, weapons, and minor actors. The script appears torn between showcasing culture and history on the one hand and tightening a good narrative on the other.

The first third of the movie felt like it was made to fit into a historical documentary, with historians providing the mise-en-scene. While watching the movie, my amateur mind thought about other technicalities, but these did not ultimately concern me.

The safest thing I can say is that the dialogue and interactions between the two main actors (playing the Sultan of Talik and Datu Ali) held the entire movie together. As I mentioned to the creators (Christian Ely Poot and Cris Hannibal Non), the filmic space seemed to anchor on these actors in their respective scenes. This is a good movie navigating a tight budget and a dangerous local political environment.

As in any history, the present speaks to the past. Present values such as peace and diversity shape the portrayal of the past while limiting complete immersion into Mindanao's cultural and political violence.

What is highlighted are the proclaimed values of the Mindanao State University system in its struggle to reconcile differences, either

in its diachronic or synchronic form. This is not to say that violence is not portrayed in the movie. It is, but only within the fantasmatic structure of peace. I consider this the appropriate response to violence, in the style of Kenshin Himura, instead of the common disavowal that characterizes Western safe spaces and echo chambers. (In the first episode of the 2024 *Samurai X* anime remake, the main character Kenshin Himura acknowledges that the point of having a katana is to inflict violence, but he also admits not liking it and the need to have a peaceful resolution.)

The most remarkable thing about this movie is its portrayal of masculine ambition versus feminine stability—not to play with the conventional binary.

For Jacques Lacan (1975), the masculine is plagued by an ideal that, though escaping from the set of all men, remains inexplicably with all men.¹ Like an empty set, it is both there and not there. This, to me, was the symbolism in the film of Datu Ali, who positioned himself in precisely this spot (colloquially referred to by right-wing nutcases as “alpha male”).

As I mentioned to the creators, this is a kind of perversion. Datu Ali here is not acting as Datu Ali but as his objective ideal. To them, he saw himself as continuing the role of Sultan Kudarat as an agent of history.

Meanwhile, the appropriately named Sultan of Talik symbolizes the Lacanian feminine (nothing escapes the set of all women; thus, the Woman does not exist). He is sedentary, wants stability and peace, and, contrary to masculine ambition, wants to settle differences, issues, everything, as peacefully as possible.

If Datu Ali is, in the movie, the embodiment of the asymptotic movement of desire (unquenchable, almost inextinguishable), the Sultan of Talik is the embodiment of love—desire’s antithesis/synthesis—no longer wanting to move; he is at rest.

I asked the creators whether the Sultan was in love, since his role seemed feminine. They told me that, coincidentally, the actor playing the Sultan of Talik is indeed feminine in real life and must have brought his personality to his character. The movie revolves around two characters, like yin and yang, who are captured by inexplicable objects residing within their respective opposites.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2024) defines pornography² as (1) “the depiction of erotic behavior intended to cause sexual excitement”; (2) “material that depicts erotic behavior and is intended to cause sexual excitement”; and (3) “the depiction of acts in a

sensational manner to arouse a quick, intense emotional reaction." In the conventional sense, *The Restless Heron* is not pornographic, although I cannot say for those who may find a relation to the third definition.

However, as a student of Lacan, I cannot help but be tempted to recall the fact that because there is no such thing as sexual relations, everything is sexual relations.³

As Slavoj Žižek mentions in his lectures on *YouTube*, repetition eroticizes an act. Isn't a historical movie a repetition that eroticizes the past? Is eroticism not humanity's predisposition by way of language? In that conversation with the creators, there was an agreement that Datu Ali placed himself almost like a repetition of Sultan Kudarat. The genius of the movie lies in its paradoxical ending. "Talík" means heron, so when Datu Ali starts hating the Sultan of Talík, he starts talking about hating the herons. To some degree, I think the original meaning of the title is that the herons are restless because they cannot seem to settle in their land peacefully.

However, I ended up favoring the idea that the restless heron is Datu Ali himself, as he is driven by his desires. He may hate the herons, but it is he who finds himself restless. On another note, "talík" is just one syllable away from making love ("magtalík"); make love, not war, after all. Regardless, meanings in art are restless herons that may eventually settle in the head of any subject.

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Deconstructing Violence for Social Control and Peaceful Co-existence

Datu Mussolini Sinsuat Lidasan

I have little knowledge of the Sultanate of Talik and its people. However, the subject matter piqued my interest as it was about our local hero, Datu Ali of Sanungayan. Despite my lack of familiarity with the topic, my passion for learning about it was ignited, and I decided to set aside my hesitancy and take on the task of reviewing the film.

Before watching the movie about the Sultanate of Talik, I sought the expertise of a renowned scholar of Bangsamoro history, Nash Maulana, to provide a brief background. According to him, not much is known about the Sultanate of Talik except that it was ruled by Sultan Sa Didagen, whose proper name was Sultan Bangon Marajanun. He was the son of Sultan Maitum, the father of Datu Utto, and the uncle of Datu Ali sa Salunayan.

However, Sultan Sa Didagen had a rival—the Sultan of Talik. There are several versions of the reason why Rajah Muda Datu Ali killed the Sultan of Talik. According to some accounts, Datu Ali did not want a sultan to be anointed upstream (Buayan), which was traditionally ruled by a succession of Rajahs, based on the Adat of the Royalty of Maguindanao.

Another version suggests that Datu Ali did not want his uncle to rival him in his reign over the Buayan Sultanate. Some also believe that Datu Ali's father, Rajah Mudah Bayaw, was the imminent successor to his brother Sultan Bangon and that Bayaw wanted to assume the sultanate in another territory, namely Kudarangan.

In terms of genealogy, the sons of Sultan Maitum are said to have descended directly from the first Sultan of Maguindanao, Sultan Alimudin II, also known as Sultan Wata Alimudin. Sultan Wata Alimudin is said to have rivaled his sibling, Sultan Kibad Sahriyal, in Maguindanao proper and to have established the Sultanate of Maguindanao in Lakungan upstream, probably Kabalukan. Sultan Wata Alimudin married Bai Mayay, the sister of Sultan Sahabudin of Kabalukan, and together they begot Sultan Maitum, also known as Datu sa Telo a Inged.

Su Di Makapangintelen A Talik, directed by Alan Filoteo and released in 2023, is a film that explores the concept of strife and war that is not unique to the Sultanate. It draws inspiration from this idea and the graceful heron, which is now agitated by others antagonizing it.

Film set during the American Colonial Period

Set in the early 19th century, during the American Colonial Period in Mindanao, the film follows the journey of the father-and-son Sultanates of Talik. The film weaves together themes of politics, religion, and ecology against a backdrop of a period in our history marked by the building of a Bangsamoro epic and intricate power struggles.

The film's storyline revolves around the fascinating Maguindanao culture and traditions, portrayed with an artistic flair that, unfortunately, lacks attention to detail. The movie showcases the elegant rituals of Kalilang, the prayer or salah time, the battles on the field, and the rich genealogy of the Maguindanao and Buayan Sultanate. However, due to the lack of detailed depiction, the audience is left curious to learn more about the peoples of Mindanao and their cultures.

The film portrays a particular type of violence in Mindanao, often aimed at gaining control over different groups. This violence can be categorized into two types: horizontal control, directed at contending forces, and vertical control, which targets followers and potential followers. The violence in these regions is closely tied to local norms and practices that structure social order and appropriate behavior. Therefore, it should be viewed as a means of social control and domination rather than isolated incidents. Understanding the underlying dynamics of this violence is important in addressing the root causes and working toward a more peaceful and equitable society.

Datu Ali

Datu Ali's character, the antagonist, is not given sufficient background. He is mainly depicted as a "datu" hungry for power against the Americans. The film, at a certain point, sheds light on the fact that violence is not only a result of personal motives but also stems from social hierarchies based on status. It highlights that the members of the elite group hold the exclusive right to employ violent social control, thereby monopolizing a culturally legitimate force.

This kind of violence is an unacknowledged but crucial cornerstone of an order of "sanctified inequality" that grants the Datus, legitimized by descent, the sole right to rule. The insightful quote by Prince Clemens von Metternich, "Those who make history

do not have the time to write it,” provides a plausible explanation for the scarcity of films and historical narratives about the people of Mindanao.

Our ancestors were fervently involved in shaping significant historical events, and their focus rested on fulfilling their duties and responsibilities, leaving them with meager time or inclination to meticulously document their actions or ponder on the broader implications of their deeds. They were consumed with immediate decision-making and action rather than the recording of their actions for the benefit of future generations.

In essence, the film is a work that I would highly recommend to the younger Bangsamoro. It offers valuable lessons on themes and values paramount for personal and societal growth. Moreover, it emphasizes the pivotal role of present-day historians in shaping our understanding of the past and guiding our interpretation of its significance.

Datu Mussolini Sinsuat Lidasan (JD) is a direct descendant of Mindanao Hero Sultan Kudarat. He is the founding director of the Al Qalam Institute of Islamic Identities and Dialogue in Southeast Asia, based at Ateneo de Davao University. He was Commissioner of the Expanded Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC), which drafted the Bangsamoro Basic Law, which eventually became the Bangsamoro Organic Law.



Why the herons are restless

Elio Garcia

The story of *Su Di Makapangintelen a Talik* (2023)¹ centers on two main characters, the Sultan of Talik and his relative Datu Ali, who comes from another political unit, the Sultanate of Buayan, during the late 19th century in Maguindanao. The Sultan sa Talik wants peace and autonomy for his people, but Datu Ali wants to disturb that peace by encroaching on the Sultanate's territory and collecting a debt owed by the Sultan's in-law. Datu Ali, who hates the Americans for disrupting his business, has fallen into an economic crisis and takes an interest in the rich resources of the Sultanate. In the film, Datu Ali is a violent and greedy leader.

War and Violence

Datu Mussolini Sinsuat Lidasan of the Ateneo de Davao University provides an excellent genealogy of the actual historical figures who are the bases for the main characters in *Su Di Makapangintelen a Talik*. More importantly, his explanation of the violence taking place among the Sultans and Datus in the film offers a nuanced take on the necessity of power domination of one group over another: existing rivalries in the bloodline, exercising order and control over one's followers, and maintaining autonomy against outsiders who threaten the influence and organization of their group.

However, a gripping, more immense force further complicates these pockets of wars—the American colonization of Mindanao. Set in the late 19th century toward the early 20th century, *Su Di Makapangintelen a Talik* creates an absent-present influence of the American occupation as a disruptor of the power dynamics existing among the Sultanates. We recall that the wholesale transaction that took place through the Treaty of Paris in 1898 ceded the Philippine Islands from Spain to the United States, including Mindanao, which was largely unconquered—politically, religiously, and culturally—by the Spaniards. The turn of the 19th century paralleled the transition from one colonizer to the next.

The occupation of the Americans in Mindanao, which is only alluded to in the film, created pressure on the local political units and changed the power geometry among leaders in the region. According to Lidasan:

The violence in these regions is closely tied to local norms and practices that structure social order and appropriate behavior. Therefore, it should be viewed as a means of social control and domination rather than isolated incidents. It is important to understand the underlying dynamics of this violence to address the root causes and work toward creating a more peaceful and equitable society.

This insight significantly changes the way Datu Ali's character can be viewed: from a power-hungry leader to one who exerts influence and violence to maintain his position in the changing power ecosystem, while taking into strong consideration that his actions are primarily a consequence of American interference in Mindanao's political life.

Sarah Elizabeth Allen suggests that this expansive contextualization be sought out since we need to acknowledge the tense position of the Bangsamoro leaders in resisting colonization from the Spaniards. And when it is time to hold their position firmly against the coming of the Americans, the volatility of peace and order and the impulsiveness of the leaders become symptoms of prolonged stress and the corresponding mechanisms for remaining free. Staying in this grammar, the restlessness of the herons, aptly suggested by the film's title, does not only symbolize the decades-long struggle of the Sultanate of Talik to live in autonomy and peace but also of the volatility of peace in the Mindanao island in relation to the effects of the continuous onslaught of colonization from the Spaniards and the Americans.

Thus, the film creates an opportunity for the audience to glimpse the anatomy of power networks in 19th-century Mindanao—not only among its local leaders but also on how the political units governed by these leaders interacted with colonial powers. This analysis can shed light on the deep-seated peace and order problems Mindanao faced in that century and the century after. The film does not present the Sultans and Datus as all kind and noble but shows how some are motivated by personal interests and greed. I find it important to avoid an easy binary between the local leaders and the American forces and bring out the characters' individuality as human beings. With Mindanao falling into the stereotype as a war-torn land in film and popular media for a long time, another war film that does not offer nuance to the conflict situation is the last thing it needs.

Luckily, *Su Di Makapangintelen a Talik* is not that kind of film.

Aesthetics and Political Economy

The scenes are heavily reliant on dialogue, so we see characters conversing and frequently blocked in a tableau for a long duration. Occasionally, we feel that some tightening is necessary in how minor characters deliver their lines and execute their business. The

script generally secures the flow of the narrative with clarity; even in the ellipses, intertitles are utilized to ensure the audience can follow. Despite these, the two main actors, Rolando Inocencio, who plays The Sultan of Talik, and Jun Nayra, who plays Datu Ali, have a strong presence and command on screen, successfully conveying their internal and external tensions and the positions of power they represent. Wardrobe and set design are of particular issue since the responsibility to convey the late 19th-century Mindanao is paramount. We understand why it is necessary to code the warriors on both sides by color (black and red, black and white), but their clothing designs are too contemporary and they look like they need a break-in. Bodily movements of minor actors, primarily warriors, must be more convincing.

Scenes that used the Maguindanaon language rather than Tagalog shone with more authenticity and texture. They are great to listen to and would have been an opportunity to promote languages from Mindanao in Philippine cinema, especially since English subtitles are provided. The outdoor shots are gorgeous, especially images of flora, fauna, and landscapes, which seem to give breathing moments between sequences; they almost emerge as metaphors. However, what might be thought of as the film's lack or limitations can be understood by looking into the political economy behind the film.

Examining the political economy of the film, especially if it is independent and regional, can yield helpful insights regarding its production, distribution, and consumption process. Funded by Cronasia Foundation College, Inc., *Su Di Makapangintelen a Talik*'s main historical basis is the research of the late historian and teacher, Dr. Domingo M. Non, of Koronadal City. After his passing, his research was continued by his son Cris Hannibal Non, professor and historian at MSU-General Santos, who worked with Christian Ely Poot, also a history professor.

The script was developed by two undergraduate students of AB History, Alyanna Lumaguinding and Jann Ardis Limjap, who assisted the main screenwriter, a recent AB History graduate, Ivy Masque. The team would fulfill multiple roles in the production due to a lack of workforce. Theater actors would come in and teach the nonprofessional actors among the cast. The AB Multimedia Arts students of Cronasia Foundation College, Inc. comprised the technical team, and criminology students played the role of warriors. The entire crew experienced problems with location, weather, scheduling, workforce, communication, budget, and others, which are a result of being unevenly initiated in terms of production and management work in filmmaking.

Su Di Makapangintelen a Talik saw its first screening and critiquing session at the University of the Philippines Diliman, sponsored by the Department of History, on March 24, 2023.² It won

Best Feature Film Screenplay at the 6th Caorle Independent Film Festival in Italy in September 2023 and has been making the rounds of viewings and talkbacks in some parts of Mindanao.

Filming the Indigenous

The challenge for non-Indigenous filmmakers in filming indigeneity is to interrogate it in more nuanced and sensitive ways, self-problematizing and aware of the ongoing conversations around subject position, commodification, stereotyping, and Indigenous agency.

Since indigeneity is constructed and mediated, the synthesis of the body of films that define indigeneity can yield rich conversations not only on how the films interrogate Indigenous issues and situations but also on how they strategize setting up Indigenous aesthetics that are directly critical of the aesthetics conditioned by capitalism in mainstream cinema.

If the screen is a contested site of representation, spectatorial imagination is as well a battlefield of signification that can determine our attitudes toward alterity, otherness, race, privilege, and power. Indigeneity has many forms and expressions, and we are far better instructed when we call for and triangulate responsibly created images of Indigenous peoples—the images they create about themselves and the images that non-Indigenous filmmakers create about them.

Su Di Makapangintelen a Talik, a collaboration of Indigenous and non-Indigenous filmmakers, is not a film made for entertainment—it fulfills a much more important function, which is to serve history through a mode and medium that deeply impact the present generation of highly visual learners. It opens conversations about distant historical events and informs us of the sensitive web of power relations among Indigenous polities in Mindanao in its experience with colonization. Rather than being seen as lacking, any shortcoming in its look must also be thought of as symptoms of the difficult collaborations and struggles behind its production that are not uncommon to independent filmmakers and storytellers in the periphery—a different war we continue to wage until today.

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Endnotes

- 1 Su Di Makapangintelen a Talik (The Restless Heron), directed by Alan Filoteo (performances by Rolando Inocencio, Jun Nayra; Cronasia Foundation College Inc. and FILCOR Multimedia Studio, 2023).
- 2 Anna Regidor, "UPD Screens The Restless Heron," Diliman Information Office, April 11, 2023, upd.edu.ph/upd-screens-the-restless-heron/.



The Regional Queer in Mindanao Cinema: Notes on Contradictions and Fluidities

Alessandro Kennz Nioda

To say that Mindanao is so complex an island would be an understatement. Here lies, in the second-largest parameters in the entire Philippine archipelago, the diversity of overlapping cultural backgrounds and identities: the result of a tremendously long history of empire and emporia, colonial subjugation and anticolonial resistance, indigeneity and settlement, peace as well as war. The reality of diversity can be seen in the artistic expression of Filipinos, of which cinema is one example. It can be said that the medium yields power to the person who uses it, especially when it is a foreign object brought to native soil, built with endless prospects. But the past reminds us every time that the medium bestows nary a power: the author has it within themselves all along. This is why “orientalist and colonialist gazes”¹ toward Mindanao were prevalent in the early days of Philippine cinema: unfaithful to the situation on the ground, the full contexts were made partial. Though the “reductive and simplistic interpretation”² of the country’s southern region persists through the decades because of its outsiders, the positive side that the art form brings warrants more attention. Indeed, with the plethora of Mindanaons taking up the camera at present, we as peoples of Mindanao now have a cinema to declare as our own.

Of Mindanao-born filmmakers and their array of narratives, film critic Jay Rosas writes that they “have chosen to tell stories of cultural and sociopolitical importance that are experienced by Mindanao as a whole, reflecting a consciousness developed by the realities of their origins and the experience of living in Mindanao.”³ He adds, “The stories, though told in the point of view of fictional characters, reflect the conditions and aspirations of the marginalized sectors of Mindanao, the Moro population and the Lumads—the indigenous peoples of Mindanao—who have long been affected by the increasing development aggression in the region.”⁴ These insights are also present in the writings of another critic, Jay Quintos,⁵ and filmmaker Gutierrez Mangansakan II,⁶ as they historicize the emergence of regional cinema in the island-region, including the events of the last decade, where new-wave filmmakers were at their most productive.

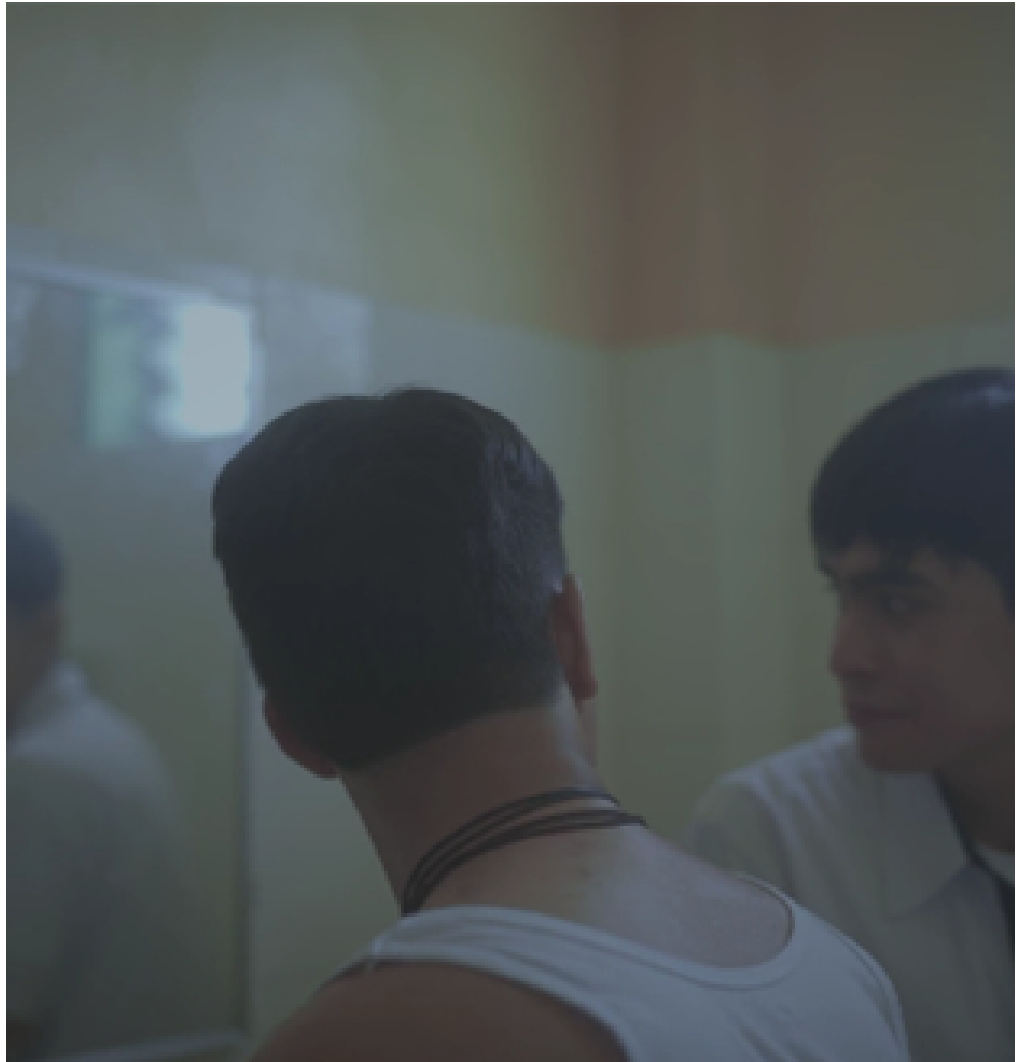
Inspired by the filmic texts they scrutinize, the critics, much like the artists, sought to shed light on issues pertinent to the peoples of Mindanao—unique problems and dilemmas that continue to plague the island to this day. These kinds of essays are as valid as they should be: who, of course, with a moral obligation, would carelessly set aside the terribly uncertain scenario of our subaltern groups? Yet while focusing on the bigger picture is surely nothing problematic, a hierarchy of importance comes to the fore, in which the smaller, or rather the “other,” things are left to be desired, if not by art—since I believe there are countless films out there that touch on these subjects—then by criticism. I do not think at all that the motives of priority equate with those of exclusion; but this would beg the question of generalization: whether Mindanao cinema and Mindanao as an island-region are really *just* about *this* and *not that*.

Among these “other” things, it seems to me, are matters that are stubbornly mundane, incredibly personal, and/or circumstantially “urban.” Regrettably, I cannot find any extensive piece by any writer, although Mangansakan has attempted to detail, among other topics, the queer experience in the Philippine regions, as reflected in cinema.⁷ He considers this, alongside the much graver armed conflicts, as an issue “of geo-cultural importance.”⁸ He further argues that it “is a subject of cinematic and anthropological significance given the diversity of queer expressions in the vast Philippine islands as well as attitudes that local communities exhibit toward their queer population.”⁹ However, what only follows in his works are mere citations of the films, short summaries, and paragraphs with little analysis—elements that make up a critical survey. What is more, these cursory glances are still so broad, leaving no room for specificity or a much deeper investigation and understanding of our cinema.

This essay is my attempt to address the aforementioned gaps; I aim to provide more insights into regional and even queer cinemas. This can be achieved through an exploration of the regional queer, particularly in the urban setting. By doing this, especially the latter, the subject matters that are seldom discussed or elaborated in regional film criticism will be emphasized and thus given equal importance to the “bigger” issues. Since “short films ... consist of the bulk of regional film production” and are yet “to be examined in terms of their thematic resonances and visual articulations of Mindanao,” I look into this exact form, an analysis of which is, as proclaimed by Rosas, long “overdue.”¹⁰ For this essay, I consider *i get so sad sometimes* (2021)¹¹ by Trishtan Perez, a filmmaker from Pagadian City.

The film, set in prom season, probes into the on- and offline relationships of Jake (JC Santiago), a high-school student: on one hand are his alienating “real-life” connections with his mother (Janice Sukanob) and small circle of friends (Jhon Mark Tumimpad,

Figure 1. While washing his stained polo in school, Jake (JC Santiago) asks Marco (Mark Louie Caminade) what he is looking at. All stills courtesy of Project 8 Projects and Blackout Studios



Bensuccor Engcong), one of which is Marco (Karl Louie Caminade), who appears to send signals of fixation toward him [Fig. 1]. On the other is his alluring virtual link with a mature stranger from Cagayan de Oro (Russ Ligtas) who has yet to reveal his face. An important thing to note is that the latter, anonymous relationship, which is more of a transaction, is also sexual and, given the stranger's knowledge of the highschooler's age, predatory, ergo, exploitative. The former's strange, elusive character in their captalesque or business-like dalliance should already give us an idea of the film's outcome.

Whenever we watch particular films like this, films that are not so very far removed from reality, we think about sectors and groups that have carried the brunt of oppression. As individuals who were once treated with dignity¹² but now have to bear the consequences of colonialism, the queer community is one of those sectors. Throughout the centuries, they have always been everywhere; it is only in recent times that their presence is all the more felt by cisheteropatriarchal¹³ society, in an act to reclaim language, space, and rights. Cinema, being a medium, remains one of the most influential forces that make queer people visible and not invisible, represented and not unrepresented.¹⁴



In *i get so sad sometimes*, we can see the differing portrayals of queer male lives. There are people like Marco who are comfortable enough with their sexuality and are okay to act upon it, and people like Jake and his online mate who seem to have accepted who they are but would prefer not to show it publicly. Distinct as these men are, one thing they have in common is their locale: despite living in the city, they nevertheless live in the regions. And what I can argue about the regions is that they are sites of contradictions.

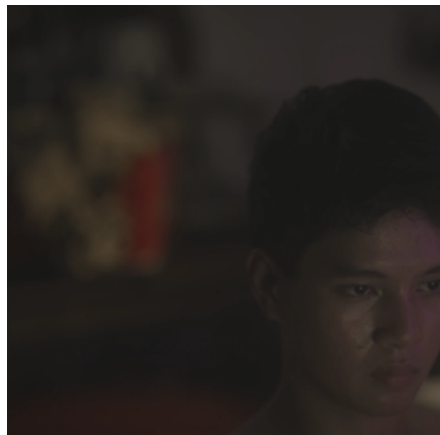
Figure 2. The fields of Pagadian

Consider, for starters, the film's main setting. While it is technically considered a city among other Philippine cities, in *i get so sad sometimes*, Pagadian is portrayed by shots of nature [Fig. 2]. Greenery is all around the school campus; trees and plants surround Jake's concrete house. Verdant plains occupy much of the place and on the screen. There is also a scene that happens by a stream. The supposedly rural visibility of Pagadian as a city contrasts with the urbanity—and, with it, the modernity—of Jake's room, espoused by its interior design; among all objects, the most important is the computer, which he uses to communicate with the stranger.

My initial objection to the film's mise-en-scène came from the computer's significance: why the computer instead of the smartphone? A smaller, more compact invention, the smartphone, based on my informal observations, is more useful and convenient than the computer—it is easier to carry around and can do everything the computer does at a fingertip. One can thus surmise that the computer would be insignificant, since Jake can communicate with the stranger through his smartphone as easily as with his friends, particularly Marco. Nevertheless, I began to reconsider that using different devices is a signification of separating his public and private lives. As much as Jake is one body and flesh, he has his two distinct sides. Nobody can ever know about his secrets, his cybersexual acts [Fig. 3], the online friend himself. From all of these, we can generally see the impact of modernity and globalization on the regions as they undergo numerous changes.

According to the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, “modernity is decisively at large, irregularly self-conscious, and unevenly experienced.”¹⁵ Despite what Western social scientists have theorized on such a concept, including the so-called “modern moment” which distinguishes tradition and modernity, past and present, the situation is different everywhere—i.e., the modernity experience of the West is not universal. Thus, there is no point in categorizing societies as modern or traditional, or even pitting the categories against each other as a binary opposition (modern vs. traditional). In adherence to this manner, there is also no point of “urban or/vs. rural,” which *i get so sad* sometimes reinforces: the depicted “rurality” of Pagadian perpetuates the small-town image ascribed to the place, more so when at, one point in their conversations, the stranger tells Jake that there is nothing good in his hometown [Fig. 4].

Figure 3. Jake becomes upset after yet another meaningless cybersex with the stranger



Surely urbanization has occurred in this first-class component city and regional center of the Zamboanga Peninsula?¹⁶ In the film, we see the boys surrounded by all green, dancing in front of a recording smartphone [Fig. 5]. Personally, this jarring image does not look totally rural to me. And what then of Cagayan de Oro, portrayed as the highly urbanized city and the regional center of Northern Mindanao that it is? As one writer notes, “In some places, the City feels like Pasay”¹⁷; but that is all there is: just some. And of its population, I say this as a Kagay-anon myself: can a city of about 730,000 people (as of 2020) be considered “big” if you know that at any second you might bump into people you know? Oh, but CDO is a small town, too, if we beg to imagine it.¹⁸ The point is that tradition and modernity, rurality and urbanity, can coexist in such hybrid places as these two regional cities.

Figure 4. Rurality and urbanity, public and private life

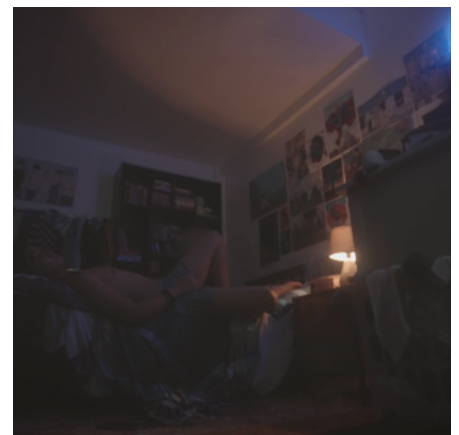




Figure 5. The intermingling of the urban and the rural

Turning to globalization, which refers to “the growing interdependence of the world’s economies, cultures, and populations,”¹⁹ Appadurai takes note of the new global cultural economy and argues that it “has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, and disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing ... models.”²⁰ This is a departure from the modern or binary way of thinking put forth by the social sciences in the West. With this, the author introduces a framework of five dimensions of cultural flows to examine the multilateral and multifaceted influence of different cultures: ethnoscaples, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes. While these dimensions coexist simultaneously, all but financescapes are remarkable in the film.²¹

The manifestation of technoscapes has already been cited above, with the computer and the smartphone proving that “the global configuration, also ever fluid, of technology and the fact that technology, both high and low, both mechanical and informational, now moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries,”²² causing an unparalleled kind of communication. Such advancements paved the way for technology to be utilized by whom Nina Wakeford calls “cyberqueer” users to “subvert the norms of heterosexuality.”²³ An example of a cyberqueer space is the alterverse, which Jake and the stranger are clearly a part of, under the guise of alter accounts communicating across local or regional boundaries. Although they do not appear on X (formerly Twitter), its most popular platform, the tenets of anonymity and alterity prevail. One might wonder why the two can meet and sustain their mutual link. Is it the diction, since their identities are

hidden? Is it the libido, since alter accounts are not without sex? Or is it their basic desire to connect with other queers that seems impractical to realize in the real world? Maybe it is all of the above.

Mediascapes are mostly reflected implicitly. Just before the credits roll, Jake recalls his conversations with the stranger. The latter once admits that he wishes to take Jake to Cagayan de Oro, insisting he is serious about it. He also suggests that Jake go to college in said city, saying that Jake can stay in his home and be taken care of, something he has "never wanted anything more badly in [his] life." Back in the present, Jake looks at the wall behind him, on which is pasted a poster of the Tokyo Tower surrounded by a bustling urban area. Through this image, we can safely assume he has been informed and conditioned all these years that there is a much better life "out there." This is amplified by his relationship with the mature man, who has (not)²⁴ had his way with the world. With the power of mass and new media, imaginaries and changes can develop within societies and among individuals like Jake, who yearns for a new path. This is simply not fantasy, which can be fleeting, but imagination, a "fuel" and "staging ground for action, and not only for escape."²⁵

The domestic background of queerness, according to the scholar J. Neil Garcia, is the result of "homosexuality [as] obviously a more recent development, an 'implantation' of the American-sponsored *biomedicalization* of local cultures in the Philippines."²⁶ Over the decades, through the mediascapes as well, or "the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information,"²⁷ which perpetuates homosexuality as conceived by the West, there has occurred a change of identities and a growing preference for "gay" rather than "*bakla*," a word laden with classist and anti-hyperfeminine undertones.²⁸ It is unknown in the short film what or how the characters identify themselves, but we can assume that their labels no longer reflect the local discourse of the past that embraced traditional identities. Another scholar, Mikee Inton-Campbell, highlights this point in her study of Philippine independent cinema as she asserts:

[T]he masculinization of the bakla in these films is not merely a way to disassociate the urban, middle-class, masculine bakla from the stereotypes associated with *kabaklaan*, proliferated through the films of Dolphy, but also as a way for the image of gay globality to emerge and be reinforced in cinema. This masculinization also allows for the bakla spectator to engage in processes of ego identification and the objectification of the male body—both that of the heterosexual macho *lalake*, and the homosexual masculine bakla. [T]he macho-ness of the *lalake* [is] the unattainable object of bakla desire, and ... this desire is then shifted to a new model of bakla-bakla relationships built not on one party's financial assistance of the other (as in the traditional bakla-lalake relationships), but on ideas of and the practice of reciprocal sexuality and economic parity.²⁹

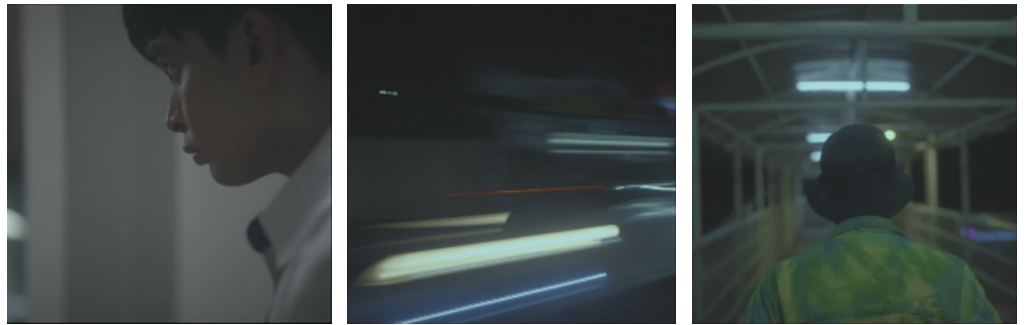
Like mediascapes, ideoscapes, writes Appadurai, “are also concatenations of images, but they are often directly political”; they are “composed of elements of the Enlightenment worldview, which consists of a chain of ideas, terms, and images, including *freedom, welfare, rights, sovereignty, representation*, and the master term *democracy*.”³⁰ Relating the ideoscapes with the technoscapes, we can say of Jake and the stranger, even though the alterverse they are in is not overt onscreen, that their

alter accounts—and cyberqueer practices in general—are situated within the operations of communicative capitalism, “a form of late capitalism in which values heralded as central to democracy take material form in networked communications technologies. [Jodi Dean] Among these democratic values that are closely linked and understood to be germane to cyberqueer practices are the freedom to express one’s self, the freedom to create and sustain one’s own identity, and the freedom to be a part of a community. These values that are typically upheld, and asserted for, in identity politics are given shape in, and through, the technological interventions of new media, and are thus appropriated to function as digital content that circulates via the technological infrastructures of capitalism.”³¹

Lastly, ethnoscapes are “the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live.”³² Jake is an example of such a person. For one thing, he is an outcast, someone who feels trapped and isolated in his environment. It is as if his life represents the region itself as an exile, its culture being displaced “from the official culture established in and by the center,” as noted by film critic Tito Valiente.³³ Because of the “virtues of instability, marginality, absence, and outsidersness,”³⁴ Jake seeks to go elsewhere, temporarily. From exile, he becomes a refugee to a “center” that may validate him.³⁵ If, however, we heed Appadurai’s challenge to recalibrate our cognition—to forego the binary mindset from the West—the circumstance would be different. In place of the center/margins opposition, we would then think of “the exile ... not [as] a de facto unit of defeat”³⁶ and imagine the regions as *their own centers* instead, capable of influencing each other.

Thus, as we notice the static shots of Pagadian, then (in the most important sequence) the shaky, hazy camerawork for Jake’s bus travel marks a transition, and finally, the more stable but now dynamic images as Jake breathes in the spirit of Cagayan de Oro, we see transregionalism³⁷ at work [Fig. 6]. The protagonist becomes more aware of what it is like beyond his own locality, in a city where the urban appears more striking on film than the rural, its dynamics at once exhilarating yet life-draining. No wonder the stranger mentions his stress from work whenever they talk, for Jake, too, may have felt tired in a place where late capitalism is more perceptible.

Figure 6. Marco visits Jake's house, only to find he is gone. Jake travels by bus to Cagayan de Oro, where his now ex-fling lives



Migration, asserts Appadurai, "seems [s] to impel (and sometimes compel) the work of the imagination" and "create[s] specific irregularities"³⁸ along with the media. It is therefore true, to quote and appropriate Valiente's words, that "the region is but a huge portal, beyond which can be located sites of interpretation, reinterpretations, and reassessment."³⁹ With everything he has gathered for himself, it is up to the protagonist to decide on what to do: to imbibe his fresh awakenings and move for good, to mix the new with the old, or to stay and be faithful to what he has been living with for as long as he can remember.

In the film, the delusional Jake does not and will never see the stranger's face [Fig. 7]. The fearful latter does not live up to his promise, for he ghosts Jake, blocking him after ignoring his messages.⁴⁰ This deepens the protagonist's already existing alienation, as he constantly thinks that no one understands him. Discontented, he runs away to a different world. The escape can be treated as a rite of passage; his story, a bildungsroman of exploitation and trauma. Yet the journey was of no use; escape was not the answer. Jake did not need to go far away: for himself, he already has someone who has been near to him all the time since childhood, someone he can confide in and be fully vulnerable to instead of feeling bad about being his own person, someone to consummate a relationship with in a way that cyberspace cannot provide. Of course, I am referring to Marco [Fig. 8].⁴¹

Figure 7. The stranger (Russ Ligas) who disappears from Jake's life

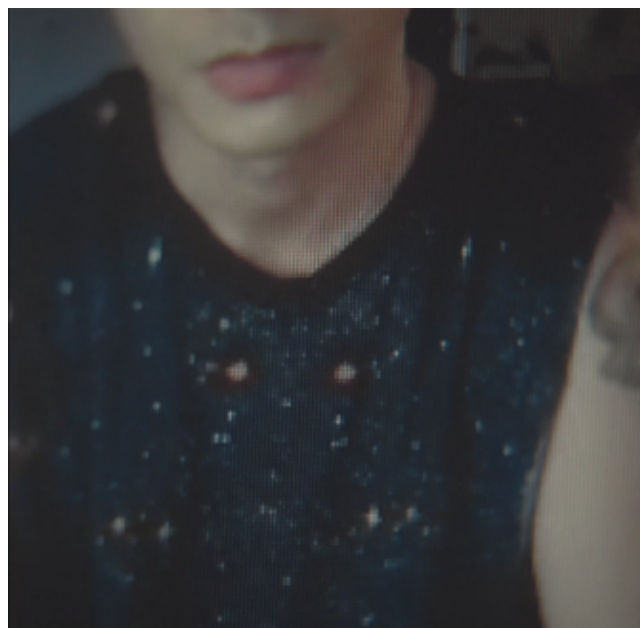




Figure 8. Marco comforts Jake after the latter returns to Pagadian from his brief trip

Whether one lives in a rural or an urban area, living in the regions is entirely different from living in the nation-center, especially if one is a queer person. In a country like the Philippines, where the center/margin binary is felt in virtually every aspect of life, the queer experience across the islands is not as equal as it seems: there always has to be a scale of varying degrees of oppression. The regional context of Mindanao, specifically, as mentioned by advocates Hamilcar Chanjueco (a fellow Kagay-anon) and Hans Madanguit, even provides our regional queers a set of “extra struggles”:

Diverse ethnic backgrounds, cultural differences, and religious beliefs ... contribute to the perpetuation of problems and violence. These manifest through hate crimes, human rights violations, stigma, and discrimination. Rigid gender stereotypes and gender norms are more apparent in the communities as Mindanao is predominantly rural.⁴²

In the Philippine regions, a more palpable tension exists. The regional queer folk are hence more prone to prejudice and harm.⁴³ Yet there is more to the situation. It is not the whole picture, for while the queer in the regions lives and is grounded in the place where they are from, they also share experiences that the queer in the nation-center goes through. This explains why much of this essay is focused on the similarities that the regional queer absorbs from metropolitan culture.

Of course, this does not mean that the regional context is entirely nonexistent, with all the binary oppositions that control our lives, whether or not it has something to do with queerness. For one thing, our local government units remain reliant, funding-wise, on the national government—and this includes the cities and municipalities of the “center,” Metro Manila, a region in itself.⁴⁴ However, I also still recognize the limitations of the center/margins standpoint, which give us a reason to break away from it: an act that,

among other fields, regional cinema has thankfully done through various film festivals across the country.

Perhaps this schizophrenic or, to borrow the theorist Homi Bhabha's words, ambivalent character of perception is precisely the postcolonial present in Mindanao. Perhaps our realities and imaginaries are both culturally homogeneous and culturally heterogeneous, always in "tension," always in dispute.⁴⁵ This would very much explain the variances of things—why, for example, the objects of desire, *lalaki* or *bakla*, vary depending on a queer man's identity but are not restricted to one area; why we seem to negotiate between the nativist discourse on queer people (*bakla*, an encompassing identity that needs no compartmentalization of its "parts") or the "universalist" discourse (gay or transgender, identities borne out of the distinction between gender and sexuality);⁴⁶ why we see tradition and modernity, the rural and the urban, wherever we go, while we see and project more migrants moving to cities in pursuit of "greener pastures"; why the regions are as decentralized as they are under a single authority; why the regional queers have the same and different experiences as the queers in the nation-center. Simply put, the queer in the regions, much like the place they live in, lives a life of incongruity. It is encouraged to keep an open mind with this perspective: to see our lives, which are undeniably postcolonial and regional, as full of *contradictions*.

It is no surprise that in recent times we have been "think[ing] ourselves beyond the nation."⁴⁷ We have thought of nationhood as inadequate and obsolete in articulating our archipelagic lives. The governing narrative, which is essential to our nationhood and shown through our national history, entails the fame of one group and the erasure of the rest. Our sense of patriotism only (re) surfaces when the integrity of our territory is threatened. And as for the rest of our Filipino existence? We exercise a nationalism that is misguided by our electoral "choices" or aggressive as though the Philippines is a celebrity to protect and we are its terrible fan club. Or that nationalism has been long gone, the civic lessons left behind, because we are too preoccupied with existing, not living. But the second we are reminded of the Filipino nation-state—and we should admit this, despite this postmodern world—we do not think of it as it used to be. We think of it not as the heraldic pomp and circumstance, but as the people themselves, Filipinos we have met and will probably never meet, indeed an "imagined community," in the words of the scholar Benedict Anderson, with a preferential awareness of the marginalized. We see this in our reassessment of Philippine (or Filipino) cinema, where it is no more rigid: "Rather than a territorial national cinema, [we imagine] national cinema as a fluidity of scales converging and enfolding in particular moments and places, which, in turn, continuously reshape it."⁴⁸ As a nation of and in fragments, we are finally having enough with the grandiosity that the national and the modern are infamously known for.

All this talk of incongruity—proof that abstractions, concepts, constructs, and labels are called into question—brings to mind queer theory, a fitting way to end this essay on a queer film. In their seminal book *Gender Trouble* (1999 [1990]), the philosopher Judith Butler writes of their most pivotal concept, gender performativity. They argue that:

the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed.... There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results.⁴⁹

Performativity is not automatically a performance: influenced by fellow philosopher J.L. Austin's notion of "performative utterance," Butler propounds that the ascription of categories and labels to a person instills certain norms that define what a category/label is. The problem with norms is that we confuse them as expectations, i.e., what a category/label should be. Relating this to gender, the norms/expectations form a heteronormative ideology, ranging from being masculine or feminine, depending on what is ascribed to you at birth and marriage, to being attracted to your "opposite." But these actions are made to be enacted in repetition, which proves that gender performativity is not solely a language matter; as a result, "gender is reinforced, layer by layer, until it seems inescapable."⁵⁰ This is where queerness comes in: if we question, then defy these norms, our creation and redefinition of gender is opened up to other possibilities beyond what is imposed on us. The layers of the labels are rightly challenged, as fluidity and variety start to establish their relevance. Queer theory shows us this radical move: "to test the established and stable categories of identity."⁵¹

As mentioned, if we observe the dialogue in *i get so sad sometimes*, not one label is plainly expressed by the characters. Their queer deeds illustrate their defiance of society's norms. Yet as with the real world, we can feel the underlying power of heteronormativity that aims to box people in, to keep them in their respective "places." The idea of boundaries that gender and queer theorists seek to break can, interestingly enough, also be seen not only in queer cinema but also in what and how we think of regional, particularly Mindanao, cinema. There seems to be a nagging obsession with discovering the essential qualities of a thing, that we disregard the other side of the coin, which argues for a rather loose usage of the word. Through our scholarship on regional cinema, which has claimed legitimacy for our own cinema apart from the nation-state's industry, we can say that, in some ways, we have reclaimed the term "region," just as queer people reclaimed

the word “queer” and other slurs. Does that mean we have to define what they are concretely?

Some say that queer theory, as well as queerness, “should not be defined too early (or at all) because of the possibility of it becoming too limited.”⁵² Others make do with language despite its constraints. For this one, Garcia cites the empowering use of “bakla” by the University of the Philippines (UP) Babaylan, the longest-running queer student organization in Asia. What its members had achieved was “a powerful reversal of the stigma, precisely because the students who comprised the organization didn’t avoid or replace it”: everyone, regardless of category, used the word as “a rallying cry around which a coalition among the identities it imperfectly denominates can form.”⁵³

We cannot afford to regress by retaining the status quo we should transgress. Perhaps we can learn a thing or two from queer people, from the characters in the Mindanao short film: a lesson not of fixity but of *fluidity*. Like “queer” and UP Babaylan’s “bakla,” both of which are mere signs of gender variance and sexual dissidence, “region” and “Mindanao” can also mean many things. Though we are rural, of course, we are more than rurality. Though we have our own share of issues, we are more than the receivers of development aggression, the site of armed conflicts, the images and representations of the problems we want to solve. Once we recognize the boundless constancy of change in place of monolithic views, what follows will be a starting point in our revitalized discourse on regional and Mindanao cinemas.

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Endnotes

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- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Jay Rosas, “Mapping Milestones in the Contemporary Film Scene in Mindanao,” *Pelikula: A Journal of Philippine Cinema and Moving Image* 4 (2019): 49.
- 4 Ibid, 51.
- 5 “Mindanao and Sulu Cinema.” Cited above, it is the first of three installments, the rest of which can be read in *Mindanews*.
- 6 See “A Decade in Mindanao Cinema,” *New Durian Cinema*.
- 7 Both articles can be found in *New Durian Cinema*. One of them is titled “The Changing Landscape of Queer Cinema in the Philippines.” The other is cited below.
- 8 Gutierrez Mangansakan II, “From Bayot to Mareng: Queer Expressions in the Films from the Philippine Regions,” *New Durian Cinema*, June 30, 2020, www.newduriancinema.org/2020/06/from-bayot-to-mareng-queer-expressions.html.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Rosas, “Mapping Milestones,” 52.
- 11 Official selection in several film festivals, including the 2021 QCinema International Film Festival and the CDO-based 2022 Cine de Oro Film Festival, where it won Best Film in both.
- 12 J. Neil C. Garcia, “Nativism or Universalism: Situating LGBT Discourse in the Philippines,” *Kritika Kultura* 20 (2013): 52–53. “Male” gender-crossers, who also served as “spiritual intermediaries” (babaylan), were considered centuries ago as “revered figures of authority in their respective communities.”

- 13 The Gender and Sexuality Campus Center of Michigan State University defines it as: "A socio-political system in which cisgender heterosexual men have authority over everyone else. Also, the way we describe society as being fundamentally based on heterosexism, cissexism, sexism, and male dominance. Here, all actors are presumed to be heterosexual, cisgender, and operate in alignment with strict gender binary roles. Patriarchy is reliant upon ideologies of domination and the exploitation of all things related to the feminine, queerness, and transness." For more terms, see "Glossary," The Gender and Sexuality Campus Center, Michigan State University.
- 14 Scholars have studied Filipino films that feature queer characters. For studies of bakla characters, see Mikee Inton-Campbell, "The Bakla and the Silver Screen: Queer Cinema in the Philippines," unpublished PhD dissertation, cited down below. For studies of bisexual characters, including those who are male, see Joel David, "Di/Visibility: Marks of Bisexuality in Philippine Cinema," *Journal of Bisexuality*. I cite these two studies for the purpose of this article; of course, there are more studies focusing on other LGBTQIA+ characters.
- 15 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3.
- 16 In that one scene at the stream, two of Jake's friends talk of an upcoming mall in Pagadian, debating whether it is going to be a Robinsons or an SM.
- 17 Arnold Alamon, "Anti-Nostalgia," *SunStar*, April 19, 2013, www.sunstar.com.ph/more-articles/anti-nostalgia.
- 18 Setting aside population size (Pagadian has about 210,000 people), the difference between the land areas of Pagadian (378.80 km²) and CDO (412.80 km²) is not that large.
- 19 Melina Kolb, "What Is Globalization?" Peterson Institute for International Economics, October 29, 2018, www.piie.com/microsites/globalization/what-is-globalization.
- 20 Appadurai, 32.
- 21 This does not ignore the critique that the financescapes are on a higher level apart from the rest of the dimensions. See Josiah Heyman and Howard Campbell, "The Anthropology of Global Flows: A Critical Reading of Appadurai's 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,'" *Anthropological Theory*.
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- 23 Nina Wakeford, "Cyberqueer," in *The Cybercultures Reader*, ed. David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy (New York & London: Routledge, 2000), 403–415.
- 24 In one of their conversations, the stranger tells Jake that he is scared of parties and does not know how to talk to people: a sign of his cowardness in real life as online.
- 25 Appadurai, 7.
- 26 Garcia, "Nativism or Universalism," 52. Original emphasis.
- 27 Appadurai, 35.
- 28 Michael L. Tan, "From Bakla to Gay: Shifting Gender Identities and Sexual Behaviors in the Philippines," in *Conceiving Sexuality: Approaches to Sex Research in a Postmodern World*, eds. Richard G. Parker and John H. Gagnon (Routledge, 1995), 85–96.
- 29 Mikee Inton-Campbell, "The Bakla and the Silver Screen: Queer Cinema in the Philippines" (PhD diss., Lingnan University, 2016), 115–16.
- 30 Appadurai, 36. Original emphases.
- 31 Laurence Marvin S. Castillo, "Cyberqueer, Alter Accounts, and Communicative Capitalism," in *Hindi Nangyari Dahil sa Social Media: Interogasyon ng Kulturang New Media sa Pilipinas*, eds. Rolando B. Tolentino, Vladimeir B. Gonzales, and Laurence Marvin S. Castillo (Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2021), 189.
- 32 Appadurai, 33.
- 33 Tito Genova Valiente, "Notes on Criticism in the Spaces of the Regions and Other Peripheries," *New Durian Cinema*, November 17, 2022, www.newduriancinema.org/2022/11/notes-on-criticism-in-spaces-of-regions.html.
- 34 Eva Hoffman, "The New Exiles," *The Yale Review* 86, no. 4 (1998): 47.
- 35 In an online correspondence, the filmmaker Perez has actually shared that, for him and his family, CDO was their Metro Manila.
- 36 Valiente, "Notes."
- 37 Notwithstanding studies from other disciplines, I am using this term quite liberally, with an emphasis to the prefix that signifies change—a theme that will be more especially relevant in the later parts of this essay.
- 38 Appadurai, 4.
- 39 Valiente, "Notes."
- 40 Which is ironic because when the two are about to turn their cameras on for the first time, it is the stranger at first who "expects" to be blocked.
- 41 The ending is not happy, though: Jake is still hung up on his affair with the stranger, decides not to show up to prom, and, like the stranger, ghosts Marco, who is waiting for him and left doubting their now-rekindled bond. But that is beside the point.
- 42 Hamilcar Chanjueco and Hans Madanguit, "[OPINION] The Extra Struggles of the LGBTQ+ Community in Mindanao," *Rappler*, June 28, 2018, www.rappler.com/voices/imho/205984-struggles-lgbtq-community-mindanao/.
- 43 The regional queers in the Philippines are not alone in this struggle. See Rachel M. Schmitz and Jennifer Tabler, "Here and Queer in Rural America," Ms. for United States context, and also Asha Couch, "Queer Advocacy Groups Call for More LGBTQIA+ Health and Wellbeing Services in Regional Areas," *ABC News* for Australian context. See also Vikas Pandey, "What It Means to Be Gay in Rural India," *BBC News* for Indian context.
- 44 For latest news on allotment of funds, see Louise Maureen Simeon, "LGU Budget Rises to P1.2 Trillion in 2026," *The Philippine Star*.
- 45 Appadurai, 32.
- 46 Garcia introduces a "moderate nativist" stance on LGBT discourse in the country, in which it "makes no such 'purist' or mystical claims, and instead proposes that Western conceptions of sexuality may be demonstrated to be present among Filipinos only to a degree (meaning, only in mixed, translated, or syncretic forms), and only along some distinct lines (socioeconomic, for instance) of a kind of 'cultural divide.'" For explanations, see Garcia, "Nativism or Universalism," *Kritika Kultura*, as cited above.
- 47 Appadurai, 158.
- 48 Patrick Campos, "Topologies of Regional Cinema: Philippine, Mindanao, and Southeast Asian Films" (PhD diss., University of Westminster, 2023), 31.
- 49 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, 1999 [1990]), 33.
- 50 Anna Szorenyi, "Judith Butler: Their Philosophy of Gender Explained," *The Conversation*, October 19, 2022, theconversation.com/judith-butler-their-philosophy-of-gender-explained-192166.
- 51 "Queer Theory: Background," *LibGuides at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*, last modified October 9, 2023, guides.library.illinois.edu/queertheory/background.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Garcia, "Nativism or Universalism," 62.



In Search of Children in the Region

Elmina Rayah Dizon-Maniago

The boys carry sacks of 45-kilo cement, probably heavier than their weight, at Pulauan Port in Dapitan. Each boy is estimated to carry about 250 sacks in one and a half days, unloading them from the Ana Cristina boat's basement. With poor working conditions, such as inhaling cement dust without masks, carrying loads too heavy for their small bodies, no lunch breaks, and no benefits, the children work as if in an assembly line alongside adult laborers. Ditsi Carolino and Sadhana Buxani's *Minsan Lang Sila Bata* (They Can Only Be Children Once, 1996) is one of the early social documentaries that feature the plight of laboring children in Mindanao.¹

Their salary of about a hundred pesos per boat is given to their parents. The mothers usually give their share of five to ten pesos.² Despite their everyday struggles, we see their innocence shine through as they play tumbang preso, swim, and sing their hearts out with friends. One dreams of becoming a sweeper on the ship, and another wants to become a lawyer.

Minsan Lang Sila Bata is a gut-wrenching reality that has catalyzed discussion among agencies promoting children's rights. Upon completion of production, the film was shown in various parts of the country, including Mindanao schools such as Ateneo de Davao University and Notre Dame of Marbel University, in the late 1990s, to raise awareness among young audiences about child labor.

Carolino and Buxani explicitly identify the places and people in their documentary using a soft-spoken voice.³ The subjects are introduced and given close-up shots, giving validity to their existence. First-person narration presents the point of view of the storyteller. All these make it easier for the audience to empathize with the plight of the children who did not go to school and instead earn a living in the worst conditions.

Two decades after the film was produced, I wonder what has happened in Cotabato's social landscape regarding children.

Daguluan's Children

In 2012, *The Obscured Histories and Silent Longings of Daguluan's Children*, directed by Gutierrez Mangansakan II, was

released. Like *Minsan Lang Sila Bata*, this quasi-documentary shares the same backdrop of poverty, where children with limited opportunities yearn for better lives. Amid impending war, flooding, and a lack of economic activity in the community, a wife convinces her husband to settle in the city; a pregnant mother wishes to work abroad; and men discuss their lottery betting strategies. Boys find rural life boring and eagerly want to work in urban malls, even as janitors, when the opportunity arises. Young girls are recruited to become domestic helpers overseas. Their narratives are anchored on the articulation of local sensibilities and common knowledge.

Mangansakan shares, “The topic and milieu were organic to me. I lived in Paidu Pulangi in 1999, so I knew the stories of the people there. I saw the departures and arrivals, as well as those who chose to stay.”⁴ There are spaces in the film intended to show provincial life with communal laundry around a water source, the sound of a lone motorcycle passing by, and naturally bent coconut trees. The footage of people and rural scenery in a fishing village in Paidu Pulangi, Pikit, Cotabato, is the hometown of Mangansakan’s father.

Pikit is a Maguindanaoan word for “connected hills.” The Maguindanaon comprise 85 percent of the population.⁵ Like its neighboring communities, Maguindanaoans have had intimate intersubjectivity with the Cebuanos—both the people and the language. Pikit was founded in 1913 as a colony for Cebuanos who migrated to Mindanao during the American period. A resettlement program was then carried out for farmers from Luzon and the Visayas before World War II. “It is the first Cebuano colony in Central Mindanao. Even the Maguindanaoans spoke Cebuano, and there are intercultural marriages, too,” Gutierrez relates.⁶

Pikit is a multi-cultural municipality in the landlocked province of Cotabato. The exact location is not mentioned in the film, nor are the subjects introduced. Such an intention not to reveal specifics makes it easier for the audience in nearby provinces to relate to similar socio-cultural and economic conditions. The barangays are populated by people of varying ethnic and religious backgrounds, such as Maguindanaoans (Muslims), Bisaya and Ilocanos (Christians), and Manobos (Lumads). In the film, local languages are used in conversation, specifically Maguindanaoan and Cebuano. Tagalog was the language used for radio news and commentary.

Director’s sensibilities

It took over three years to complete the 96-minute *Obscured Histories and Silent Longings of Daguluan’s Children*. Mangansakan started shooting in 2008, and the film premiered at the Cinema Digital Seoul Film Festival (CinDi) in 2012. Another Mindanawon filmmaker, Sherad Anthony Sanchez, is credited as producer, while Mangansakan is credited as director and editor, who spent his own money. He shares, “It was just friends chipping in.”⁷ He adds, “When

we shot the film, the actors also dabbled in production work.”⁸ In the same year, it won the Cinemania Digital Lokal Lino Brocka Award, and Mangansakan won Best Director. Apart from local festivals, it was also officially selected by the Jogja-NETPAC Asian Film Festival in 2012 and the Edinburgh International Film Festival in 2013.

The film employs a documentary style. Transitional cuts depict sceneries and whereabouts in the village, such as a shiny sun sink, an entertaining cracker plant (*Ruellia tuberosa*), and a heartwarming sunset. The film is a lyrical contemplation that examines lives in transition. Like the flowing river, each character unfolds as they cope with everyday hustles. Mangansakan weaves cinematic plots, interlacing night and day, children and adults, personal problems, and socio-political concerns. Mangansakan avers, “This film cemented my aesthetics and theme. It is my second most traveled film, after *Limbunan*, in the festival circuit.”⁹

The frequency of long shots during conversation in Mangansakan’s film is noteworthy: children sitting among the mango trees while observing cloud formations, boys talking among boulders and while climbing trees, and teen girls exchanging viewpoints on the riverbank. All these wide spaces enable us to get a bigger picture of rural life, where one can almost smell the grasses and hear the river flow, while creating emotional restraint in the characters. Mangansakan’s long takes and long shots provide a close-up glimpse into the lives of Pikit residents. In mainstream cinema, we are used to having close-ups and reaction shots during conversations, usually to empathize with a character. Jay Jomar Quintos observes, “By skimming through the list of Mindanaw and Sulu films produced from 2006 up to 2017, most of them arguably harbor the style of documentary filmmaking. This approach, along with long takes and slow cinema, is probably innate in the island-region’s cinematic aesthetics.”¹⁰

Mangansakan recalls, “One of the great things about shooting on tape then was you could shoot for an extended period of time since I employed the aesthetics of the long take here. Usually, with a DSLR, you can only shoot for ten minutes. When I did the film, I wanted to observe provincial life as honestly and truthfully as possible—languidly paced life, a respectful distance from the camera. There was no conscious, deliberate effort to create something ‘regional.’ It just is.”¹¹

Using bookend shots, the film starts and ends with the same little girl lying on the riverbank. In one of the narratives, she disappears for days in the forest, claiming that she is just playing. Mangansakan explains:

Fatalism and deep spirituality, not necessarily religiosity, are key to my people’s lives. They surrender everything to the will of the Almighty but are also rooted in their indigenous

faith traditions that invoke *tonongs* or ancestral spirits and *diwatas*. At times, they ask these spirits to show the winning numbers of the illegal number games in their dreams. In the film's title, I alluded to the element of water, as the film is set in a fishing village. Daguluan is the chief water deity in pre-Islamic Maguindanaoan faith tradition. Because the elements of magic realism and fiction are immense, and having discovered that for the Maguindanaoan, there is only a thin line that separates myth and reality, what started as a potential straight documentary became a narrative film on the silent and obscured lives of my people.¹²

The film was initially intended to be a documentary, but realist elements were dramatized in a storytelling style. Specific sequences involving the spirits were shot in Matanao, Davao del Sur.

Obscured Histories and Silent Longings of Daguluan's Children observes the little moments of everyday life, with no heroes and villains, neither convincing nor therapeutic. It is simply witnessing children in the web of life. However, such awareness can become overwhelming over time. A decade after it was produced, we still have the nameless minors who are construction workers, farm tillers, and nannies.

In 2022, the number of working children aged 5 to 17 was estimated at 1.48 million. Among the Philippine regions, the top three with the highest numbers of working children are found on the island of Mindanao. Region 12 (SOCCSARGEN) posted the highest share of working children at 12.3 percent. This was followed by Region 10 (Northern Mindanao) at 8.6 percent and Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) at 7.3 percent. Among the total number of working children in 2022, those engaged in child labor were estimated at 828 thousand.¹³



Director Jarell Serencio and team on set. Photo from Jarell Serencio. All images with permission

Longing and call

In 2018, Jarell Serencio directed *Siyudad sa Bulawan* (City of Gold)¹⁴, winning Best Short Film at the 2019 Filipino Academy of Movie Arts and Sciences Awards (FAMAS). It is the story of ordinary lives in

Mt. Diwalwal, Davao de Oro, one of the largest sources of gold in the Philippines since the 1980s. It is estimated that US\$1.8 billion worth of gold remains in the ground, according to The Blacksmith Institute¹⁵ that monitors mining worldwide. Apart from large companies that extract gold, small-scale miners abound in the *minahang bayan* (people's mining areas), a 1,800-acre government-designated reserve where miners with either no or simple machinery are permitted to operate.

Sitting atop the golden mountain, impoverished families receive low wages and lack sustainable livelihoods, so children are either expected or pushed to work to ease the burden of everyday expenses. The International Labor Organization (ILO) Minimum Wage Convention and the Worst Form of Child Labor Convention define work underground, underwater, and with hazardous substances as hazardous and, therefore, the worst kind of labor.¹⁶ Child miners are in extreme danger for various reasons, including tunnel collapse, landslides, floodwaters, toxic fumes, malfunctioning of compressors, neurological disorders, skeletal and muscular dysfunction, skin diseases, and unsafe mining practices.

Serencio shared that the film's idea started after hearing the news regarding the death toll of miners in Mt. Diwalwal:

Back in 2016, may isang tunnel doon na nagcollapse and then, unfortunately, wala talagang narecover na bodies. Natabunan sila doon at namatay lahat, including children, 'yong mga nagmimina sa loob. It's a midscale tunnel so n'ong narining ko 'yong balita na 'yon, it struck me too much kasi nagkataon din, by that time, I was still mourning my dad's passing. Paano kaya 'yong pamilya o kamag-anak or even kids na naiwan, namatayan ng tatay o kapatid, na hindi nila nakita 'yong katawan o bangkay?¹⁷

Serencio's first attempt was supposed to be a documentary. However, roads were inaccessible, permits were difficult to obtain, and perspectives from different stakeholders were hard to get. It was not achievable at the time, so a narrative shift was made, although the treatment remains documentary in style. *Siyudad sa Bulawan's* was shot at a temporarily closed tunnel in Mt. Diwalwal. The main cast members, Yoyong (aged 10) and Darwin (14), are real-life miners and brothers, while Abet (12) lives in the same community.¹⁸ The dialogue is in local Cebuano. Part of the opening scene is a choreography practice featuring the first verse of Joey Ayala's song, "Agila"¹⁹:

Nais kong lumipad tulad ng agila,
At lumutang-lutang sa hangin,
Magkaroon ng pugad sa puso ng kagubatan,
Ngunit ito ay panaginip lang,
At maaaring di matupad

The song is a lyrical metaphor for *Siyudad sa Bulawan's* narrative. Both express the aspiration to be free and to have one's own safe place, but caution that it may not turn into reality. Tragically, in the film's closing scene, miners rush out toward the mouth of the tunnel from a seeming accident. While the adults are in panic, brothers Abet and Darwin can be heard asking for help in the vernacular, "Tabang! Tabang!"

The 15-minute short film is straightforward and packed, offering viewers a sense of life in Davao de Oro and other mining areas in the country. In the Philippines, artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) is practiced in more than 30 provinces across the country, employs around 300,000 to 500,000 miners, and supports the livelihood of another two million people nationwide. Compressed and concise, Serencio drops scenes that serve as points for discussion on the lack of health care facilities, riots by opposing mining groups over unregulated tunnel digging, environmental concerns, child labor, poverty, education, and culture.



Yoyong overhears an adult conversation about a possible riot over unregulated tunnel digging. Photo from Jarell Serencio

During his community immersion, Serencio found out that:

It's part of their culture na parang andali na lang. Parang tanggap na nila na once lumaki ka doon, puwedeng ang mangyari sa iyo, tumanda ka nang minero at mamamatay ka dahil sa pagiging minero or mamamatay kang bata pa lang, or cut short 'yong life mo dahil sa pagmimina mo. 'Pag natabunan ka doon, hindi ka narecover, aware na sila na, okey, babayaran lang kami ng company para doon sa bangkay or para doon sa kamag-anak namin o mahal sa buhay.²⁰

After an adult miner comes out badly injured, Yoyong tries to convince his older brothers that they should go home for safety. However, needing to earn more, Darwin and Abet insist they return to the tunnel to get high-grade mines. Serencio's low-angle shot of Yoyong is powerful in this scene, portraying the child's helplessness and limited choices. In the end, Yoyong's instinct is proven right.



Yoyong convinces his older brothers Darwin and Abet to go home after an adult miner broke his foot. Photo from Jarell Serencio

The three films call to stop the distorted reality in which adults capacitate minors to work for the survival of the family, interfering with education and undermining the welfare of children. In *Minsan Lang Sila Bata*, the supervisor explains that the children are hired to carry heavy loads of cement so they can earn money rather than be a burden on society. In *Obscured Histories and Silent Longings of Daguluan's Children*, minor girls are taught how to lie about their age when getting birth certificates so they can comply with the requirements to work overseas. In *Syudad sa Bulawan*, the attendance checker casually allows the children to work inside the tunnel.

Before *Minsan Lang Sila Bata* fades into a black screen, Carolino and Buxani flash photographs of child laborers and explicitly tell us:

Ang child labor ay siya ring nagpapairal sa pananagutan ng mga negosyante at asyenderong umuupa sa mga lakas ng batang manggagawa. Ganun din ang mga magulang nila at gobyerno na dapat magpaaral ng libre at mangalaga sa mga karapatan nila bilang bata. Pero maski tayo, may pananagutan din. Maski ako, na karaniwang photographer lamang, utang ko ito sa kanila. Dahil habang walang nababahala sa kalagayan nila o nanghihinayang sa kinabukasan nilang unti-unting nawawala ay mananatili sila rito at dadami pa.²¹

Ultimately, these three regional films are platforms for sentiments to stop complacency and to create a new narrative. Carolino and Buxani reflected, "You can't film these children's lives without looking deep into your own and the line of responsibility that links us all. In the end, we found ourselves becoming more than just documentarists; we had turned advocates. We became part of a network of NGOs working against child labor."²²

As the advocacy continues, Serencio feels grateful to the community of miners in Mt. Diwalwal for accommodating him in their humble abode for several nights during the shooting, opening their hearts, and giving their time. Six years after Syudad sa Bulawan was released, Serencio is now directing another film that follows child miners as they enter their teen years. Directors Carolino, Mangansakan, and Serencio have continued to exhibit a strong social orientation and concern for community welfare, as evidenced in their filmography. Despite the unpopular choice of topic and the difficult production setbacks, the vulnerable members of the region are given a voice to be heard. These longings among the marginalized sector of our society are a resounding call to be heard and included in the national discourse.

Rayah Dizon-Maniago is a Mindanawon artist whose short entitled “Kimochi” (My Fave Rice Cake) won the Docomo Tokai Visual contest in Japan (2003). Her book illustration “Dako Nga Yahong sang Batchoy” (Big Bowl of Batchoy) bagged the Mindanao and ASEAN Children’s Literary Book Festival Awards (2021). She curated the Cielo Museum in General Santos City (2024). Rayah took up AB Communication Arts at Ateneo de Davao University and completed her Master of Arts in Contemporary Society at Aichi Shukutoku University, Japan.

Endnotes

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Unifying and Colonizing Tools of the Region: Representations of Mindanao in the Films of Gutierrez Mangansakan II and Arnel Mardoquio

Yasmin Thabet

Man, in his divine right to question, has pierced into the silent longings of the mountains of Mindanao. The land, bearing witness to cycles of political violence and ethnic conflict, inaudibly inquires into the bones buried within. Birds inquire with their gentle chirping against the deafening sounds of gunshots. Clouds inquiringly wash the blood-soaked earth to return it to its green innocence, where we could, once again, put forth our questions in the most human of ways.

We, alone, can turn what is inarticulable to nature into the surface of speech, of images. There is an immense privilege in our ability to ask questions correctly and truthfully, and this has been used to express our dignity, freedom, and adversities. Cinema is an advanced manifestation of our ability to articulate questions and desires on the social surface. In moving images, we are able to see, hear, and understand the colors of flowers, the swaying of trees, the motion of water, and above all, the history of men.

For the Philippines and perhaps the world, the Mindanaoan history is the history of war. Thus, regional cinema finds itself technologizing time and collecting stories of war as its core subject. Mindanao cinema becomes an agent of rebellion and wishes to be an inspiration for true solidarity. We seek to transform our history into the history of the progressive realization of the ideal Mindanao, purified of clan feuds, armed conflicts, political elites, and their sponsored violence. We strive to realize Mindanao as a collective. But such collectivity can mean different things for cinema as a political technology and cinema as an art form.

Regional cinema, according to Paul Grant in *Cinema Becoming Regional, Unbecoming Cinema*, remains historically and materially insufficient to provide a concrete definition of what qualifies

as regional cultural production.¹ Then there is the challenge of overcoming or maneuvering around government censorship and the issue of cultural appropriation. These limitations, whether we recognize them or not as legitimate, affect the development of a fully and uniquely regional cinematic expression.²

From this instability or lack of definition in the region's formal constitution comes the burden of molding Mindanaoan cinema into a fixed, unified narrative and form. Through this synthetic fixity and unity, will emerge the kind of "authenticity" that the national community expects of regional filmmaking to be recognized as *Mindanaoan*. Regional filmmakers must now bear the duties of defining regional cinema, confronting the micropolitics of their places, and manufacturing certain realities in moving images. The desire for social production through film is mostly celebrated and encouraged, which creates a demand for regional filmmakers to participate in ideological struggle and use cinema as a means of representation.

And what is representation if not another exercise of our privilege to question?

Regional filmmaking primarily operates through cinema's representational dimension, visualizing history and constructing social roles and identities in filmic images. It is easily observable in film festivals featuring works from Mindanaoan filmmakers that there exists a great desire from the region to portray and propagate certain recurring concepts that are generally taken to be characteristic of Mindanao.

Issues of military conflict, clan wars, religious and cultural differences between indigenous groups, and land grabbing become components that contour common representational symbols in regional filmmaking. Local filmmakers have adopted the function of communicating both the unique and collective experiences of their region's constituents. While it is a function that bears the capacity to assist us in having a meaningful encounter with the region, the methods involved in creating a regional representational symbol, to this day, remain largely unquestioned.

What are the implications of this unchallenged function? How do we determine the cultural validity of a representational symbol? Are there any limits to the authority of the filmmaker to use and manipulate his subject material in order to achieve an ideal image of representation? This paper has no promise of a clear answer. Instead, it peeks under the unstable ground on which regional cinema grows, and brings to light questions that are yet to be asked, at least *truthfully*.

I examine the use of representation in regional films through the works of Arnel Mardoquio and Gutierrez Mangansakan II. These

two prominent filmmakers have significantly influenced the region's perceived image at the national level through representational strategies of "concealing and revealing" regional cultural features in their films. A combination of Heideggerian and Deleuzian analysis is employed to interrogate how images of the region are produced, ordered, and made to signify, and to explore how the role of representation can enrich or obstruct an authentic experience of our history and environment.³ These philosophical concerns are further articulated through Jean-Luc Godard's notion of a cinema of presentation, which resists the closure of meaning and sustains the interval between memory and perception.⁴

Through this threefold framework—Heidegger, Deleuze, and Godard—this paper approaches the films of Mardoquio and Mangansakan not as opposing political positions but as contrasting cinematic methods.

The Crisis of Representation According to Heidegger and Deleuze

Before I discuss the role of representation in Mindanao cinema, I provide here an interpretive summary of Heidegger's and Deleuze's theories on representation. I show how the two thinkers' diagnoses of modern representation can be compatible when applied in the investigation of the function of representational symbols in regional cinema.

Martin Heidegger is one of the most influential and challenging philosophers in contemporary western philosophy. His treatment of representational thought has been widely discussed and appropriated to better comprehend the technological domination of culture in which we currently find ourselves.

Heidegger probes the question of Being (*Dasein*) and attempts to recover its true meaning, which he believes has been forgotten. Being can emerge from art or from technology, bringing it forth onto a common ground where humanity can come together to embrace the radical otherness of the world. Technology, in this sense, reveals truth that belongs to a particular people existing at a particular time. This is why our relationship to technology and how we use it to reveal or unveil truth can determine whether techne will advance us to a higher level of existence or threaten our dignity and freedom.⁵

In the modern world, where technology has become a means to an end, and man has forgotten the essence of things in favor of symbols, technology poses a danger that reduces our authentic existence to experimentation or abstraction.⁶ When technology is applied purely as a tool for the domination and domestication of nature, we adopt a "technological revealing," in which we understand the world through appearances or symbols of representation.

Technological revealing arrives at a representational symbol by calculating and objectifying the subject, after which the method of concealing the undesirable parts and revealing the ideal parts takes place.⁷

A careless application of technology obstructs us from operating directly with the essence of an entity, and we risk losing the ground that enables us to perform a more authentic way of questioning. For we cannot come to truly understand technology or *anything*, for that matter, without knowing its essence.

Heidegger puts great importance on understanding the essence of technology. His antagonism is not towards technology itself, but to the forgetting of its essence. When we are blind to the essence, we cannot have a true revelation, and the comprehension of our experiential life will be mediated by representations hollowed out of their meaning.⁸

This is where the real danger of representation starts. If we exist in a world where we do not recognize our own essence, we become a "standing reserve." A standing reserve is something that can be easily manipulated and dominated. It is deprived of its integrity so it can acquire practical use.

The growing reliance of modern culture and cinema on representation pushes us to transform nature into a standing reserve for the benefit of technological production. We are made to use emptied symbols as a mirror, and we develop what Heidegger described as the final delusion of man: a state where man encounters only himself, everywhere and at all times.⁹

This speaks to the modern individual's almost pathological desire to be represented in media. We live in an age where representation is placed above essence. This generates the postmodern demand to caricature, reduce, or replace the distinct features of a group of people to appease the (arguably) superficial need to catch even the faintest reflection of themselves.

Heidegger believed that we should be able to preserve essential features of our independent existence before we are rendered powerless against the dominion of representational technologies.¹⁰ Now, we have reached a point where any kind of representation in cinema has taken on the unchallenged role of serving a positive impact, no matter how productive or impotent it actually is.

To Rescue or to Create?

Gilles Deleuze, in his *Cinema 2: Time-Image*, partly borrows from Heidegger's theories on thinking (in relation to the revealing of Being) to define what he calls "cinema-thinking."¹¹ Both philosophers

argue that thinking is a political activity that permits us to uncover and reflect on the essence of things and discloses to us other forms of questioning that are made inaccessible by representational thought. However, while Heidegger's idea is mainly interested in the rescuing of Being and the forgotten modes of thinking, Deleuze is concerned with the creation of new possibilities of thinking. The latter continues to depart when he disagrees with the former's claim that thinking in the modern world is a problem that belongs exclusively to philosophers.

This is where Heidegger and Deleuze ultimately diverge. Heidegger holds an aristocratic view of thinking, while Deleuze seeks to democratize it. For Deleuze, cinema is "the art of the masses" because it allows thinking to happen in other realms outside philosophy. Cinema has the capacity to create a "nation of thinkers" that will, in turn, democratize thought. Cinema-thinking unfolds a new image of thought that can express a deeper meaning than its material content. It is a thought that transforms, mutates, and gives rise to new forms of thinking.¹²

Now that cinema has made thinking available to the masses, how does this change our experience? Deleuze moves further from the problem of representation to show stupidity as a serious danger. For him, stupidity is a "form of thought",¹³ one that is inseparable from every age, and routinely disseminated by tyrants so that they can take up the profession of the thinker who thinks for the people.

Deleuze's democratic overcoming of Heidegger's thinking, when mobilized by stupidity, ends up exactly at the gates of colonization. There is a solution, according to him, and that is to resist the influence of the imbecile who enslaves us with their false questions and false answers.¹⁴ He encourages the masses to interrogate concepts and ideas, especially those that present themselves as truth or representation, so we can discern what is stupid, cruel, and cowardly, and learn to rise above them. In the language of Heidegger, we should resist becoming a standing reserve.

"We only have the truths we deserve as function of the sense of what we conceive, of the value of what we believe,"¹⁵ Deleuze asserts.

There's no denying that cinema has become an important technology for revealing truths about our time. By attaching images to thought, cinema deposits glimpses of revelations into the world. It is when our access is limited to ahistorical truths expressed by personalized representations that we risk being alienated from our very own essence and history.¹⁶

Despite their political disagreements, we can say that Deleuze and Heidegger both prescribe a form of reflective and creative thinking that can free us from the threats posed by groundless

representations. Their projects provide us with intellectual tools to differentiate between stupidity and knowledge, between truth and experimentation.

The Representability of Mindanao in the Films of Mangansakan and Mardoquio

As Heidegger declared, modernity is the age of representation.¹⁷ And for an underrepresented region such as Mindanao, the aspiration to be represented in our totality is stronger than ever.

More films are coming from General Santos, Davao City, and Cagayan de Oro each year, mostly narrating and documenting stories that the land itself repeats. Indigenous peoples and the socio-political issues they face are of particular interest to regional cinema. Their culture, traditions, and peace and conflict situations are prominently featured in both independent and mainstream Filipino films.

Regional cinema's reliance on the technization of history, encouraged by modern culture, entails that it becomes embedded with the risks of technology. While it is true that filmmakers are put in a position where they must draw on nature and history as a standing reserve, it is nonetheless appropriate to examine and question how local filmmakers control and manipulate the region's historical resources to represent certain features of Mindanao.

Heidegger, in his analysis of modernity, describes a technological mode of revealing that transforms Being and nature into practical tools, enabling us to understand the world in terms of its representation. This indicates the importance of determining the manner of calculation and the idealizations involved in constructing a representational symbol. Technological revealing makes a similar case in the cinematic context due to the representational function of regional films, precisely in their role in communicating and shaping the constitution and peoples of Mindanao.

The representability of Mindanao in cinema relies on a method of concealing and revealing certain aspects of a subject to capture its ideal image. The filmmaker assumes the authority to represent cultural-historical features of a region or people by reimagining and unifying their subject material into an image. This technological method, when carried out properly, has the potential to open up new, enriching possibilities of experience.

The calculating aspect of representation affords the filmmaker to objectify their subject in whatever way they see fit. The filmmaker can impose personal demands on their material, and it is when these demands become unreasonable that the subject is turned into an objectified, non-living tool (by "tool," I refer to Heidegger's concept

of the standing reserve, where beings are reduced to resources for use rather than encountered in their integrity). Once objectified, the subject loses its original place in the world, and its meaning is replaced by symbols cloaked in falsely established terms.¹⁸

Along these lines, what is generally problematized as an issue of underrepresentation in regional cinema shifts to the issue of false representation. The question is no longer whether Mindanao can be represented, but how representation operates upon its history and people.

To pursue this question, this paper turns to two distinct cinematic practices that embody opposing tendencies within Mindanaoan cinema. The films of Mardoquio and Mangansakan are not treated here as equal variations of the same representational project, but as contrasting responses to the philosophical problem of cinema as thought.

Mardoquio's films are approached first because they exemplify the crisis of representation discussed in the preceding theoretical framework. His cinema assumes the burden of speaking for Mindanao through narrative clarity, political urgency, and symbolic resolution. In doing so, it risks converting actual history into a coherent image that demands recognition rather than reflection. These films illustrate how technological revealing may turn memory into ideological merchandise and transform complex social realities into rigid cinematic meanings.

Mangansakan's films are discussed thereafter not as mere counterpoints but as an alternative cinematic practice that gestures toward what, following Irmgard Emmelhainz, Jean-Luc Godard describes as a cinema of presentation.¹⁹ Where Mardoquio's films organize history into legible statements, Mangansakan's films remain with duration and relational encounters. They do not resolve the question of Mindanao but open it to further thought.

This structural movement follows the philosophical trajectory from representation toward cinema-thinking. The films of Mardoquio embody the limitations of representation as a technological method, while Mangansakan's illustrate the possibility of a cinema that resists closure and preserves the interval between memory and perception.

Arnel Mardoquio's Representational Politics

As regional cinema continues to function as a representational tool, we investigate how it can go *against* human experience through the methods of capturing, revealing, and depriving the region of its cultural and political features to achieve an image of the represented.²⁰

Another prominent regional filmmaker who employs these webs of manipulations is Davao-born director Arnel Mardoquio.

Mardoquio's esteemed reputation as an award-winning filmmaker and peace advocate has made him a figure of Mindanao war drama, especially in the film capital, Manila. His films on the Lumads' struggles against state violence and discrimination are well cited in discussions about the region's representability in cinema.

Mardoquio's critically acclaimed 2012 film, *Ang Paglalakbay ng mga Bituin Sa Gabing Madilim*, follows a Tausug boy (Faidal) who suddenly finds himself orphaned after his parents, both Moro freedom fighters, were killed in a military encounter. The story evolves into an intense, yet hushed, struggle to escape the consequences of his parents' involvement in a kidnapping for ransom. He is joined in his escape to safety by his aunt (Amrayda) and her friend (Fatima), both oblivious to the ransom money inside the boy's backpack. Together, they navigate the forests of Sulu, where the military trails them with drones and shotguns like prey. Mardoquio's cinematic bravura is undeniable as he extracts the enormity of the conflict from empty and quiet shots to emphasize the vastness and anarchy of the jungle against the helpless protagonists.

The first half of the movie features minimal dialogue, forcing viewers to focus on the film's visual language. Impeccable use of long takes and tracking shots positions us as an accomplice to the group, prompting us to sympathize with Faidal's grief and root for his future. The precariousness of the protagonist's journey effectively conveys a harsh tale of innocent Tausug children caught in the middle of a war.

Mardoquio's artistic restraint gives his film a quality distinct from the exaggerated gunfights and oversentimental plotlines typical of action flicks. However, this restraint begins to crumble during the film's dialogue-driven sections, exposing the director's objectifying gaze and his fundamental disconnect with his characters' backgrounds.

In the penultimate scene, while Faidal is having a leisurely swim, Amrayda and Fatima suddenly share a kiss, burdened by the uncertainty of the future and resentment toward a culture that forbids their romantic freedom. When Fatima is left alone with Faidal, she proceeds to proselytize her idea of a free and happy world to the boy: "The world will not be happy without queer people."

In the final scene, Amrayda reveals the hidden indignation she has been holding back. Her tearful confession about her taboo feelings towards Fatima positions her as a double victim, first of the state, and then of the Muslim community. She tells her uncle that she 'wants nothing to do with the Moro revolution' and removes her hijab as an act of liberation. What was previously established in the film, Faidal's battle amid war, precipitously ends as a battle of gender politics. Mardoquio reduces the complexities of the Moro rebellion to the problem of gender identity.

I feel it is necessary here to clarify that this conclusion in no way attempts to defend whatever dogmatism the film is criticizing. The point is, Mardoquio's MacGuffin puts Faidal and the Tausug children he is trying to represent to a level where they are burdened with the demand to either resist or submit to the colonizing threat of the state and the objectifying gaze of the film author.

Mardoquio utilizes representation as a political tool to dominate and tame the beliefs of the Moro people. He supplies the viewer with the "right" opinions to be accepted in order to access freedom and morality.

By allowing this false function of representation to operate and inform our understanding of Mindanao, we also get a false sense of motion, an empty revolution against injustice. But *Ang Paglalakbay ng mga Bituin Sa Gabing Madilim* and all the other films that pretend to have already realized the solutions to the region's problems, and whose only goal is to "enlighten" us on the political role we should take, do not grant the living people of Mindanao their lost freedom.

For Deleuze, "What is opposed to fiction is not the real: it is not the truth which is always that of masters and colonizers: it is the story-telling function of the poor, insofar as it gives the false power which makes it into a memory, a legend, a monster."²¹

Where do a film author's ideals come from? How are they formed? Are we not essentially conforming to a ruling system the moment we let our representation of Mindanao be influenced by the aesthetic-political expectations of one coming from a dominant community?

What is at stake here is whether we can truthfully and adequately capture the Mindanaoan people as humans, not as objects the viewer can accept or reject. This "injurious neglect", as Heidegger calls it, of the integrity of the represented as independently existing is the crisis of modern representation.

Sheika (2013), one of Mardoquio's most well-received films, is another example that draws from the historical resources of Mindanaoans. The film tells the story of Sheika, a Muslim teacher from the province of Sulu, who flees her remote village due to military violence. Bringing her two sons with her, she moves to the city of Davao and promptly makes the decision to hide her identity as a Moro. She removes her hijab (again, this symbolic gesture hints at freedom) and instructs her sons to refrain from praying and using their native language in strongman Duterte's territory.

Davao, a major city in Mindanao with a substantial Muslim population, immediately becomes a harsher environment for Sheika and her sons. The family accidentally trespasses on the home of a relative's ex-girlfriend, named Gigi. They beg Gigi to let them stay

in exchange for managing the tiny house and earning money for the group's sustenance. In no time, Gigi encourages Shie to set up a business and brings her to a ruthless money lender, stating, "Moslems here borrow capital from him."

They search for the money lender in a business center selling pirated DVDs and find him assaulting a Muslim woman for not paying her debts on time. In this scene, Mardoquio attempts to depict islamophobia by having the money lender forcefully remove the Muslim vendor's hijab and scream to her face, "You goddamn Moslem" in front of a crowd of onlookers.

Normally, such islamophobic attack would provoke other Muslims in the vicinity to protect the hijabi. But in Mardoquio's world, the existence and shared qualities of the Moro people become an abstracted symbol of his politics. Their religion and culture are quickly smothered by the hint of danger, their morals and dignity are disposed of for the promise of bread, and the mosque and everything it holds is just a barren backdrop for Mardoquio to contrast his obsessive deviancies against.

Throughout the two-hour film, Shie nearly gets raped by the money lender, her youngest son gets molested by a gay man, and her oldest becomes involved in drugs, leading to him and his brother getting shot by Duterte's vigilante Davao Death Squad. This incident drives the once helpless protagonist to initiate herself in the ways of violence, and soon enough, she orchestrates a plan to torture and kill the suspects in her sons' deaths.

All her grief and failure in avenging her sons sinks Sheika down into a life of darkness and insanity. She ends up in a psych ward, and without realizing it, she becomes the muse of an infatuated janitor who keeps her company when no one's looking.

The janitor, a Manilenyo named Gary, is tasked by the hospital to locate Shie's family in Davao's urban slum to have them support her treatment. His interest in Shie deepens, and he starts to sneak into the patient room by night to violate her sleeping body. It is during one of these nights that Gary finds Shie's diary, which, for whatever strange reason, is written in Tagalog, allowing him to conveniently read the Tausug woman's most private stories.

It is through his perverted visits that we get to learn the protagonist's character and past as her story unfolds page by page. Moved by his feelings for Shie, Gary seeks the murderer of her sons to take justice into his own hands. To give this bitter story a truly unforgettable ending, he impregnates the mentally unwell Sheika as his final act of charity. She becomes cured. Now, she has something else to think of other than her grief: the gift of a rapist.

Sheika is as conflicting as it is tragic. It appeals to the selfless love of a mother and tries to reflect Mindanao, the motherland. A film reviewer on cinefilipinas.blogspot.com writes, "Just like Shie, Davao City and the rest of Mindanao can still recover from a traumatic past. Twisted loving care from a friend helped Shie to get well." Does Mindanao need to be raped to overcome her past? Mardoquio and the 2010 Cinemalaya and Gawad Urian committee thought so.

It was later revealed that the film is based on the real-life story of Clarita Alia, a mother who lost her four sons to Duterte's drug war. The average person would say, "One could only imagine her pain." However, with *Sheika*, her pain not only becomes imaginable but also insufficient. Her loss alone doesn't stand. She needs to be a Muslim, she needs to be insane, she needs to be raped.

Mardoquio's historical-fiction hybrid experiments with the lives and histories of real people to create the ideal victim. Deleuze's warning remains forgotten:

The cinema author finds himself before a people which, from the point of view of culture, is doubly colonized: colonized by stories that have come from elsewhere, but also their own myths become impersonal entities at the service of the colonizer. The author must not, then, make himself into the ethnologist of his people, nor himself invent a fiction which would be one more private story.

Deleuze warns of the desire to simultaneously assume the roles of ethnologist and fictionist in Third World cinema.²² This desire, although innocent in its motivation to preserve history in a form that can be handed down through generations, becomes a colonizing threat when the film author measures and refines the life of a people through calculated idealizations. This strategy of calculation and prefiguration is a testament to the author's hubris in the gaze.

To question the role of representation in regional cinema is not to deny its significance, nor to dislodge the inherently political component of the celluloid. Rather, it is to inspect its deployment as a potentially unifying or colonizing power.

This does not argue that filmmakers ought to abandon their political commitments, nor does it suggest that an apolitical cinema is either possible or desirable. Cinema is necessarily entangled with politics insofar as it participates in the shaping of meaning and perception.

The distinction is therefore not between political and non-political cinema, but between different modes of political representation. The question is not what political position a film takes, but how that position is rendered through image, narrative, and character. A political stance may either open itself to the complexity of

experience or reduce its subjects to prefigured ideological images. The critique here concerns the representational method through which that orientation is communicated. The danger in the films discussed lies in substituting lived realities for explanatory images that claim to resolve conflict rather than dwell within it.

The question of representational validity came up during one of our talks in Pelikula Places. "How could we determine the validity of a representational image? Who gets to decide this validity?" The burden of these questions might lead one to believe that this validity is imposed from above, rather than emerging from the historical and ongoing existence of Mindanaoans. This includes filmmakers and critics themselves, our people's enduring freedom and individuality, our unraveling in time.

Challenging the validity of representational practices in depicting Mindanao does not deny filmmakers, critics, and authors the freedom to articulate their interpretations. Rather, it insists that such articulation carries an ethical responsibility: representation must begin by truly listening to an already resonant field of voices in this land.

Representation, at times, is used as a badge to espouse the title of being the voice of the voiceless. But contrary to assumptions of the Lumads' voicelessness, Mindanao is not a mute place.

When a representational symbol arises from the filmmaker's utilitarian and careless manipulations, we sever meaning from form, and representation becomes an agent of dehumanization. Hence, it is necessary for the film author to acknowledge their own limits and positionality.

Heidegger notes: "The closer we come to the danger, the more brightly do the ways into the saving power begin to shine and the more questioning we become. For questioning is the piety of thought."²³

Gutierrez Mangansakan II's Cinema of Presentation

Perhaps the most notable Maguindanaon filmmaker in the country, Gutierrez Mangansakan II, has permanently influenced the landscape of regional filmmaking. Having directed 15 films over the span of his career, Sine Sandaan named him one of the luminaries of Philippine cinema in 2019. His films and documentaries often highlight the Moro people's social and military issues, earning Mangansakan numerous awards nationally and internationally.

Mangansakan aims to advance General Santos City's film movement through the Salamindanaw Asian Film Festival. The festival declares its "commitment to the intersection of the arts" and organizes labs, screenings, and live performances with participants

and mentors from all over the world. These initiatives will hopefully produce a new generation of filmmakers in General Santos and bolster cultural exchange in the city and across Southeast Asia.

Mangansakan's 2010 film, *Limbunan*, is centered around the Moro tradition of arranged marriage and shares a nuanced view of the rituals that surround the bride, 16-year-old Ayesah, as she passively enters a new life with her strange groom. Mangansakan's straightforward storytelling invites us to reflect through the lens of the unwilling child bride and her unwedded aunt on their experiences of the Muslim patriarchal household.

Although the men are barely physically present in the movie, their grip on the lives of their female family members overwhelmingly controls the flow of their day and night. A patriarchy so deeply ingrained that it has ecologically extinguished the agency out of the mother and the sister, down to their daughters. Oppression is disguised as fate and duty, and the walls of comfort become sweeter than the vast plains of autonomy.

Mangansakan's debut feature is far from perfect. The film's merit mainly stems from its equitable treatment of its characters, which, at times, regrettably falls flat as uninspired and lackluster. The cinematography also fails to elevate the plot, making it hard to draw out each character's intended metaphors. Despite *Limbunan's* flaws, it importantly sets the tone for an unobstructed audience interpretation of the themes it tackles.

What this means for the viewer is that, by allowing them to form their perception based on a more direct image of the time and space Mangansakan represents, they gain the capacity for cinema-thinking in place of passive observation.

Mangansakan's short film *Under a Canopy of Light* (2013), is a personal recollection of his boyhood in the province of Cotabato, and how his family and community were destabilized not by the fabled monsters that inhabit the forests, but by the petty hatred of men. Soon enough, the canopy of his childhood with all the singing orioles and stories of monsters was replaced by real horror, such as *rido* or clan feuds.

Mangansakan's films embody a mode of revealing that suspends ideological closure and preserves the openness of historical experience. He preserves the instrumental relation of cultural features to the living age and recognizes their integrity as independent activities. This allows his audience to directly engage with the essence within its historical context, after which the individual experience can organically form.

Deleuze believes that the filmmaker can even conquer the essence of their material by filtering it through the objective

perception of the mobile camera. This gives rise to images that become a world in their own right, extending our cognition beyond the constraints of structuralist representation. Our temporal experience of the subject matter then becomes intersubjective instead of merely informative, a precondition for the creation of new meanings.²⁴

In Search of a Radical Representation

The need to address the limits of the representability of the region leads us to Jean-Luc Godard in *Histoire(s) du Cinema*: "It is not a kind of thought that forms but quite exactly, a form that thinks." Together with the Dziga Vertov Group, Godard dared to eliminate the restraint of representation.²⁵

Godard's reflections on cinema provide the conceptual bridge between Mardoquio and Mangansakan's distinct practices. His insistence that cinema must not explain the world but allow it to appear aligns with Heidegger's critique of technological revealing and operationalizes Deleuze's cinema-thinking by refusing representational closure and making the conditions of seeing visible.

Through Godard, Mangansakan's films can be understood not simply as more ethical representations, but as attempts at a radical mode of cinematic thought, one that does not impose meaning upon Mindanao, but encounters it.

By placing self-reflexivity at the core of Godard's political films, we can break free from the ideology of the cinematic apparatus and arrive at "self-knowledge." This way, it stops being a matter of representing or imparting a thought in movement and becomes "thinking through movement." Cinema becomes an act of creation rather than an isolation of images.

When cinema is treated as a medium for creation and invention rather than a representational image, the subject is freed from the "gaze" and gains the capacity to continually differentiate. It acts not as a concrete object but as a "hidden image of thought that unfolds, branches out, mutates, and inspires a need to keep on creating new concepts, not through any external determinism but through a becoming that carries the problems themselves along with it."²⁶

Godard proposed a cinema of *presentation* in which issues of totalitarianism, abstraction, and realism arising from representation become irrelevant.²⁷ This does not abandon representation but transforms the function of cinema into a site where questions are held open and ever-differentiating.

His cinema of presentation resonates with Heidegger's warning against technological revealing, which reduces beings to

resources. Presentation, in this sense, does not replace reality with abstraction but allows perception and memory to coexist without prescribed resolutions. It is not reflexivity alone that is at stake, but the refusal of narrative closure as ideological certainty.

This is where Mangansakan succeeds, and Mardoquio fails. *Ang Paglalakbay ng mga Bituin Sa Gabing Madilim* and *Sheika* assume the role of the thinker for their viewer and risk narrowing the horizon of possible interpretations. We only understand Mindanao in terms of how it is controlled inside the film. *Limbunan* and *Under a Canopy of Light* do not assume an answer and invite new forms of comprehension. The creative discipline of constructing images that sustain questioning creates a space for thought in which criticism and reflection remain possible.

The people of Mindanao do not have to fall captive within the confines of representation. The challenge is to conceive of a regional cinema that transcends fabrication or reinforcement of social roles, and to unburden the subject from judgment and expectations of a totalizing force behind the camera.

As long as regional cinema exists in a time of war, our people will be the image of a man dying a thousand deaths before a thousand more pitying eyes. But pity does not set the colonized free. Freedom is set upon the path where we are revealed. So, inquire high above or down below, do not let our essence be a mystery.

Yasmin Thabet writes, directs, and scores films under the name Yahshiyya. She combines diverse sources, such as mysticism, romanticism, and her Moro background, in her mythopoetics. Her experimental works with Corner House Productions have screened in various film festivals in the regions. Her latest project was developed in the iNDIEGENIUS 2 lab, where it was selected as a finalist.

Endnotes

- 1 Paul Grant, *Cinema Becoming Regional, Unbecoming Cinema* (La Furia Umana, 2015).
- 2 Grant, *Cinema Becoming Regional, Unbecoming Cinema*.
- 3 Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 12-14; Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 280.
- 4 Irmgard Emmelhainz, *Jean-Luc Godard's Political Filmmaking* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 52-58.
- 5 Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 13-14.
- 6 Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 12-14.
- 7 Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 21-22.
- 8 Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 26-28.
- 9 Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 28.
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- 11 Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 165-168.
- 12 Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 164-168.
- 13 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 150-152.
- 14 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 158-161.
- 15 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 154-155.
- 16 Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 150-155.
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- 20 Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 17-19.
- 21 Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 150.
- 22 Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 222.
- 23 Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, xxxix.
- 24 Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 81-83.
- 25 Heidegger, "The Turning," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 48.
- 26 Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 168-173.
- 27 Emmelhainz, *Jean-Luc Godard's Political Filmmaking*, 36-38.

