Pelikula Pilipino: Locating the Filipino Story Through the Evolution of Philippine Cinema

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Declaration of Originality

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfillment of the examination for the BA (Honours) Animation. It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

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Abstract

Have you seen Filipino films? What is Philippine cinema? — Philippine cinema has distinguished itself from the global cinematic landscape due to its unique characteristics. The films that have garnered international acclaim demonstrate that they possess the potential to make a significant impact on the global stage, akin to the influence of other cinematic industries. This thesis provides a fundamental examination of the history and evolution of Philippine cinema alongside an exploration of prominent Filipino directors. This thesis seeks to demonstrate how these directors have redefined the narratives of the Filipino story on screen and decode the reasons behind the significance of Philippine cinema, both within its home country and beyond its borders. All the while, this thesis also hopes to contribute to the larger discourse that surrounds Philippine cinema in hopes of shedding light on the complex subject that is the national identity of Philippine cinema.

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Introduction

"Philippine cinema is dead" — as one filmmaker puts it, and another — sometimes directly, sometimes implied, and sometimes in hindsight. This sentiment continues to echo among Filipino filmmakers to this day. This enduring discourse reflects the perplexing concerns within Philippine cinema, which, to date, remained unanswered.

I can vividly recall the old Filipino movies I watched during my childhood. I spent time at my grandfather's home in a small barrio in South Cotabato, a province in the southernmost part of the Philippines. It was about an hour away by public bus from the nearest cinema. My mother had left me there while she went abroad for work. My grandfather often enjoyed watching movies on cable television, and I found myself sitting through them until his viewing time ended, allowing me to finally watch my beloved cartoon shows. Some of the films I remember watching include Fernando Poe Jr.'s *Ang Panday* (The Blacksmith), a 1980 superhero action-fantasy film based on a comic of the same title by Carlo J. Caparas, Peque Gallaga's 1996 fantasy adventure *Magic Temple*, and Ishmael Bernal's 1982 landmark masterpiece *Himala* (Miracle). In between them, the occasional slapstick comedies starring the comedy duo Redford White (Cipriano M. Cermeño II) and Babalu (Pablo Martin Sarmiento) or films featuring Dolphy (Rodolfo Vera Quizon Sr.), dubbed as the "King of Comedy", the *Shake, Rattle, and Roll* series of horror films, along with the frequented action-crime films starring Fernando Poe Jr. and Paquito Diaz, which my grandfather enjoyed the most. In my experience, the gamut of Filipino films available on cable television before were classic films spanning from the 70s to the 90s, belonging to major studios at the time, like Viva Films, Regal Entertainment, and Star Cinema. Depending on the channel, contemporary Filipino films were also broadcast on television. Still, the bulk of these films were teen romantic

comedies and family dramas, which, I suppose, are films that appeal to a wide audience, boosting viewer ratings and, hence, mainstream equals profit.

The entirety of my exposure to Filipino films during my childhood came from television, as the local cinema would be Hollywood-centric. On certain occasions, there are only about two to three Filipino movies screened at the cinema, and they're the widely loved commercial films starring famous actor, comedian, and television personality Vice Ganda (Jose Marie Borja Viceral), who happens to have an entry every year to the annual Metro Manila Film Festival (MMFF). The rest of the lineup would be films belonging to Hollywood or Korean productions. Sometimes, a movie would be screened in two different screening rooms, depending on its popularity. This also seems to be the case regarding the films broadcast on television during that time. Box office hits, popular and highly marketed films, and some Philippine cinema classics appear to create a blueprint for the landscape of Philippine cinema for the next ten years or so. From my perspective, cinema in the Philippines is prioritized for profit by also giving what the people want and love most; it's a cinema for the people and, by the people, a win-win situation. However, contemporary Filipino filmmakers and critics appear to have differing opinions concerning the current state of Philippine cinema, but why is such the case?

This thesis aims to present a comprehensive introduction to the often-overlooked facet of the global film landscape — Philippine cinema. This thesis will analyze the evolution of Philippine cinema through an extensive examination of its colonial history and outline its development across various colonial phases. Additionally, the thesis will introduce periods in Philippine cinema while discussing a prominent director and their significant contributions during their respective eras, tracing the emergence of the Filipino story. Furthermore, this thesis aspires to contribute to a larger discourse concerning the current state of Philippine cinema, particularly in relation to its struggle for "national identity" and its place in the world. Although a complex subject to address, the thesis hopes to shed light on the enduring questions that remain unresolved to this day.

The contents of this thesis will be organized into two main chapters, with the second chapter divided into three sub-chapters. Chapter One will provide a thorough examination of the history of Philippine cinema, tracing its development through the country's colonial past. This examination will be crucial for a fundamental understanding of Philippine history and the evolution of its film industry.

The centuries of colonialism have resulted in significant evolution within the Philippine film industry throughout its history. Chapter Two will outline various eras in Philippine cinema, providing insights into the prevailing socio-political conditions of each period. The three sub-chapters will introduce key directors representative of each era discussed. This section will elaborate on each director's background and cinematic career, illustrating how their contributions have profoundly shaped the Philippine cinema landscape and facilitated its development. All the while examining Philippine cinema, we may derive opinions or answers concerning the complex issues and unanswered questions surrounding Philippine cinema.

Chapter 1

"Three hundred years in a convent, fifty years in Hollywood": A brief history of Philippine cinema

Three hundred years in a convent, fifty years in Hollywood – this is how Filipina author, journalist, and historian Carmen "Chitang" Guerrero Nakpil would describe the summary of the Philippines' history. Unbeknownst to her, her remark would echo among Filipinos to précis the century's worth of Philippine history while also mirroring the country's ever-evolving cinematic landscape. Filipinos have long been recognized for their resilience. In a country characterized by a turbulent history and vulnerability to natural disasters, the Filipino story is one of struggle, perseverance, and hope. These experiences have inspired Filipinos to frame their stories in a different light to introduce them into the world.

Cinema holds a revered place as an art form in the Philippines, boasting a rich historical legacy that has evolved from its inception to the present day. The pioneers and masters of Filipino filmmaking have played a crucial role in capturing the diverse narratives of the Filipino story that shape the nation's identity. However, this art form has faced its share of challenges. While cinema has found refuge in the Philippines, it has not been immune to the constraints of colonialism. Factors such as censorship, limited resources, and insufficient government support have hindered its development as a thriving art form over the course of the country's history. Nonetheless, the essence of the Filipino story vividly manifested in the works, which stood not only as a medium of artistic expression and entertainment but also as a means of resistance, revolt, and reclamation of cultural identity.

By examining the history of the Philippines, we can trace the roots of Filipino storytelling back to the Spanish colonization era. As the first foreign nation to occupy the Philippines, Spain left a lasting influence on the country for over three centuries. Thus, the Spanish mindset has become

profoundly ingrained into the Filipino psyche. As a result, this led to the adaptations of the many Spanish art forms. Several of these art forms have been adapted and localized, blending the rich indigenous culture and traditions. An example of this localized art form is *sarsuwela*[1] or *sarswela*, the Filipinized version of *zarzuela*, which is a traditional musical theatre that incorporates songs, dances and spoken dialogue that often tells stories with historical, social, and political themes. (Fernandez and Aquino, 1994) In fact, stage entertainment was prevalent in the country even before the arrival of cinema. These performances showcase a range of genres that narrate the diverse cultural heritage of the Filipino people, including supernatural folklore rooted in indigenous traditions and dramatizations of pivotal events in the country's history. Theatre became an integral part of the Filipino community. It served as a means of cultural preservation, resistance, and subtle protests against colonizers despite being in the face of adversity. When cinema emerged in the country in the coming years, the Filipino story found its way onto the silver screens.

At the turn of the 19th century, cinema was introduced in the Philippines when a Spaniard named Francisco Pertierra presented the first films of his movie screening show at Salon de Pertierra, established in March of 1896, in one of the famous and oldest streets in Manila, the Escolta. The Salon de Pertierra became known as the first movie theatre house in the Philippines. The movie house was built to prepare for Pertierra's first movie show titled *Espetaculo Cientifico de Pertierra* (Pertierra's Scientific Spectacle) in Manila in the coming Christmas season of 1896. However, for reasons unknown, Pertierra's spectacle was postponed and delayed until the New Year. Finally, on the 1st of January 1897, the first four films were shown using the 1896 60mm Demeny Chronophotograph. These films were of French origin and were short-format travelogues or short documentary-like films that showcase landscapes, culture, people, and experiences of different countries, often made for the purpose of education. The lineup featured *Les Boxers* (The Boxers), *La Place de L' Opera* (The Place L' Opera), *Une scene de danse Japonaise* (Scene from a Japanese Dance),

[1] Even before it acquired the name, the Spanish *zarzuela* was a fact of Spanish theater. Defined as a "type of Spanish musical theater, both spoken and sung" (Fernandez, 1993, p. 320)

and *Un Homme au Chapeau* (Man with a Hat). Although these movies were brief and were necessarily more of an exhibition of the new technology, it was incapable of replacing the prevalent stage entertainment at the time. However, Pertierra's screenings marked the inception of cinema in the Philippines, sparking interest in the new medium. (Bautista, n.d.; Yeatter, 2007, pp. 5–6)

Figure 1. Escolta in the early 20th Century.

In the year that followed, foreign nationals in the Philippines, particularly from the West, recognized the potential of the newfound medium for capitalization through organized screenings, specifically in the country's capital, Manila. This interest resulted in developing Manila into a business hub and a center for cultural and commercial exchange as the rise of cinematic activities in the capital was witnessed. Following Pertierra's example, film exhibitions were held on the same trendy streets of Escolta. These film screenings were followed by two Swiss businessmen, Leibman and Peritz, who screened the first film titles projected through the famous Lumiére Cinematograph, considered the first true cinema camera at the time of its invention. The cinematograph was acquired through Antonio Ramos, a Spanish soldier stationed in the country to suppress the ongoing Philippine Revolution. Ramos happened to import the cinematograph

from Paris together with 30 film titles for screening. Ramos received financial support from the two Swiss businessmen, thus acquiring the cinematograph to establish an Escolta cinema business. (Sotto, 1994; Yeatter, 2007, pp. 5–6)

By the end of the 19th century, the Philippines saw the end of Spanish rule and transitioned under new colonial rule. With its Hispanic roots, the Filipino story further developed after Spain handed sovereignty of the Philippines to the United States; in exchange, Spain received 20 million dollars from the U.S. upon signing the Treaty of Paris in 1898. (Severino, 2012, p. 297; van Dijk, 2015, p. 393) The treaty was to conclude the Spanish-American war. Consequently, the ongoing Philippine Revolution against Spain shifted its resistance towards the Americans, sparking the Philippine-American war. Despite the heavy resistance of the Filipinos against the new colonial rule, the American influence became widespread. The cultural influence was evident, in the same fashion as the Spanish influence; the American influence made its way into the Filipino mindset. As such, the dominant stage entertainment favored by the Filipino community was introduced to *bodabil*[2], or the Filipinized vaudeville, a variety show comprising comedic sketches, magical acts, and musical performances. These shows, together with *sarsuwelas*, were the primary forms of entertainment that the Filipino community frequented before cinema.

As pioneers of the global film industry, the country saw the emergence of movie houses. Film screenings and productions were more frequent, completely transforming and impacting the whole country into a new era; new technologies were introduced, and new filmmaking conventions were discovered with the introduction of Hollywood films. However, it was not until the 20th century that cinema finally came into the Filipino consciousness, and the opportunity for expression in the new medium catered to the culture and beliefs of the Filipino people was seen. This consciousness

[2] Vaudeville is derived from French vaudeville and was adapted into American theater. It entered the Philippines during the American colonial era. (Fernandez and Chua, 2018 [first published in 1994])

brought Jose Nepomuceno into the picture and made him one of the monumental figures of the development of Philippine cinema.

In the year 1919, Nepomuceno came to direct what is known in history as the first Filipino-produced and directed feature-length film, *Dalagang Bukid* (Country Maiden)[3], which was adapted from a renowned *sarsuwela* of the same title written by the great Filipino playwright Hermogenes Ilagan. It starred celebrated Filipino stage actress Honorata "Atang" de la Rama[4]. In the coming years, Nepomuceno continued to produce more Filipino film titles under his 1917 established production house, Malayan Movies. His films featured the Filipino story, showcasing Filipino culture, values, and identity. After his first film, *Dalagang Bukid*, in 1919, it was followed by titles such as *La Venganza de Don Silvestre* (The Vengeance of Don Silvestre), the 1920 sequel to his first film, *Ang Tatlong Hambog* (The Three Humbugs), a 1926 silent romantic comedy film, said to be controversial as it was the first film in Philippine cinema to feature an on-screen kissing scene and *Punyal na Ginto* (The Golden Dagger) in 1933, credited as the first Filipino talkie film or the first Filipino film to have synchronized sound. Nepomuceno also adapted tales from Philippine folklore and mythology into his films, namely, *Ang Lihim ni Bathala* (The Secret Pagan God) in 1931, which depicts the legend of a divine being worshipped by ancient Filipino tribes named *Bathala*, and *Ang Manananggal* (The Witches), a 1927 silent film which was known to be the first Filipino horror film, featuring the infamous *Manananggal*[5] or winged vampiric beings that can split their bodies into two. (Tofighian, 2008)

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[3] *Dalagang Bukid* was the most popular Tagalog *sarswela* of its time, having been performed nearly a thousand times in Manila and in the provinces before World War II. (Fernandez, 1994)

[4] The "First Star of Philippine Cinema," Atang De la Rama (Lirio, 2022), was frequently asked to sing the songs and recite the dialogue along with the rest of the cast behind the screen while the film was played. (Fernandez, 1994)

[5] The *manananggal* is an older, beautiful woman capable of severing its upper torso in order to fly into the night with huge bat wings to prey on unsuspecting pregnant women in their homes, using an elongated proboscis-like tongue that sucks the hearts of fetuses or blood of unsuspecting victims. (Nadeau, 2011, pp. 256–257)

Figure 2. Atang de la Rama with Marcellano Ilagan in a scene from *Dalagang Bukid*, the first Filipino feature-length film.

The Philippines was an American colony during his formative years. Growing up with his family near Teatro Oriente, a prominent theatre in Manila, he was exposed to Spanish dramas (*zarzuela*) in his adolescence and later experienced European films. (Tofighian, 2008) Nepomuceno's upbringing greatly influenced his ability to portray the Filipino story onto the silver screen. However, his filmography remains largely unknown as the majority of his work was lost due to the onslaught of the Second World War. Even before the war, his production house, Malayan Movies, which had housed highly flammable nitrate films, has experienced significant losses due to fires, having been burned down twice in 1921 and 1923. (Tofighian, 2006, pp. 3–4) Undoubtedly, one can surmise that his films follow the Hollywood conventions of filmmaking but putting a uniquely Filipino spirit into it. With his pioneering efforts, Jose Nepomuceno laid the foundations for the representation of the Filipino story in cinema, marking the advent of Filipino filmmaking and the emergence of Philippine cinema. Therefore, he is regarded as the Father of Philippine Movies today.

The third and final foreign candidate to have come to occupy the Philippine soil was the Japanese. As the Second World War intensified throughout Europe, the Pacific theatre was also engulfed by the flames of war. During the course of the war, Japan had already displaced European colonial powers throughout Asia by capturing territories from the Dutch, British, and French. (Yeatter, 2007, p. 43) Being a Western colony, the Philippines was undoubtedly not immune to the Japanese advances. The invasion of the Philippines shortly began after the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. On the following day, shortly after noon on December 8, 1941, Japanese aircraft approached and raided Clark Air Base located in central Luzon, where America's aerial fleet in the Pacific was stationed. This significantly crippled America's air superiority over the Pacific, thereby dragging the Philippines into the war that America declared against Japan. (Yeatter, 2007, p. 42) From that moment forward, the Philippines faced yet another formidable foreign power eager for control. In comparison, the abuse and trauma of the past two colonial experiences were far more severe due to the intensity of their brutality and the magnitude of their oppression. (Deocampo, 2016) In all dimensions, both physical and cultural, the state of the emerging Philippine cinema was adversely affected and brought to a standstill as the Japanese utilized film as a weapon in their war efforts.

Understanding why the Japanese used film as a tool for warfare brings us to the concept of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, a new order proposed by the Japanese Empire that appears only favorable in theory. The Greater East Asia sought to cover the Japanese Empire, Manchuria (now Northeast China), China Proper, the Philippines, the Netherland Indies, French Indo-China, Thailand, British Malaya, and Burma. The new order was also meant to expand beyond the East Asian borders; it was also to include the Soviet Far East, India, Australia, and New Zealand in the sphere. (Grajdanzev, 1943, p. 311) In October 1940, Foreign Minister Matsuoka Yosuke announced in "A Statement to the United States concerning the Three-Power Alliance" (Germany, Italy, and Japan) that:

> "The construction of a new order in East Asia means the construction of a new order *(sic)* under which Japan establishes the relationship of common existence and mutual prosperity with the peoples of each and every land in Greater East Asia, that is East Asia including the South Seas. In a position of equality with every other country, Japan may freely carry on enterprises, trade, and emigration in and to each and every land in Greater East Asia and thereby be enabled to solve its population problem." (Matsuoka, 1940 quoted in Fisher, 1950, p. 179)

Fundamentally, the concept aimed to bring an "end to the era of western colonization.…[that offered] hope for a new beginning," a "return to one's Asian roots," the attainment of "native" identity, and "freedom." (Deocampo, 2016) but the concept amounts to nothing more than a false promise. In practice, however, the promise was just merely a ploy of one colonial power to displace another, of an "Oriental" power eager to displace a Western rival for the same chance to dominate a territory. Thus, cinema became a weapon of warfare in the context of power struggles and colonial conflicts. (Deocampo, 2016)

Propaganda assumes a crucial role in enforcing the Greater East Asia doctrine, hence establishing the Japanese Propaganda Corps. The events stemming from the attack on Clark Air Base resulted in General Douglas MacArthur declaring Manila an "open city" just before Christmas on December 24, 1941, prompting both him and the current president of the Commonwealth of the Philippines, Manuel Quezon, to retreat to Corregidor Island. This allowed the Japanese forces to take over Manila and seize the city swiftly. The Japanese were appalled by how Westernized the Filipinos had become. As their duty dictated by the Greater East Asia order, the Filipino society's transformation into "[weaning out] the people of such American ideals…and to reinstate a sense of Asian nationalism" was immediate. (Yeatter, 2007, p. 43) The Japanese Propaganda Corps was at the forefront of remolding such societies to rid them of Western ideals. The Corps' first few tasks were to:

> "Gain control of newspaper publishing houses and reopen them as soon as possible, capture the radio stations and fix broadcast equipment to return to the air as quickly as possible, and reopen theatres and movie houses." (Candelaria, 2021; Terami-Wada, 1990)

The Japanese gave particular attention to the press, radio, and film, viewing Filipinos as "cultured people with little reading." They noted that Filipinos mainly consumed newspapers and magazines, preferring radio and movies, "swallowing whatever entered the eyes and ears." (Terami-Wada, 1990)

The Philippines experienced censorship and suppression in its emerging film industry as Hollywood dominated the local entertainment scene. Meanwhile, the Japanese seized all existing cinema and film resources in the Philippines, including filmmakers who were compelled to collaborate. By taking control of the local film industry, the Japanese aimed to exploit these resources for their own advantage, producing propaganda films that aligned with their imperial agenda.

In Nick Deocampo's book *EIGA: Cinema in the Philippines During World War II*, he explains that:

> In the concept of *eigasen*, film was seen as a war weapon. The Japanese government imposed on its local film industry a "ready-for-war" attitude which put motion pictures in the service of the impending conflict. (Deocampo, 2016)

Therefore, the first film produced in the Philippines during the Japanese Occupation was *Liwayway ng Kalayaan* (Dawn of Freedom), directed by noted Japanese director Abe Yutaka alongside Filipino filmmaker Gerardo de Leon. The film premiered in Tokyo on February 5, 1944, under the title *Ano Hatta o Utte* (Tear Down the Stars and Stripes) and in Manila on March 7, 1944. *Dawn of Freedom* served as a propaganda tool to expose the Americans as the real enemies and diminish their influence on the Filipino people. It sought to highlight Japan's position as the leader within the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and to reclaim the authentic Asian identity that

Filipinos had forfeited after centuries of Western colonization. (Pareja, 1994) That same year, Gerardo de Leon co-directed another Japanese-authorized film, *Tatlong Maria* (Three Marys). Japanese director Sawamura Tsutomu adapted the film for the screen based on Jose Esperanza Cruz's novel of the same name. (Sotto, 1994) However, *Tatlong Maria* was viewed not as propaganda but more considered as a typical de Leon film due to its lyricism, artistic detail, and overarching theme. (Santiago, 1993, p. 57)

Towards the end of the war, Manila was left devastated during the Battle of Manila in 1945, which destroyed movie theatres and, more importantly, studios. As a result, only a few films survived during this period. The Philippines sought to rebuild itself from the ruins of war. The existing film industry would contribute to the restoration of normalcy and peace. The movie theatres and studios would rise from the ashes, and the return of filmmakers and film artists would mark an important stage in the development of Philippine cinema. (Sotto, 1994) The outcome of Japan's three-year war would significantly transform the cinematic landscape of the Philippines. When the Philippines gained independence from the United States in 1946, the post-war era saw the rise of anti-war films highlighting the sufferings and heroic feats of the Filipinos against their oppressors. This ongoing evolution in cinema ushered in the "Golden Ages" of Philippine cinema, greatly enhancing its development.

For centuries, every colonial era in Philippine history has left a significant mark that shaped the Filipino story: During the Spanish colonial period, Filipinos first brought their stories to the stage, a trend that would continue and become integral to the Filipino experience. This evolution led to the revolutionary emergence of film and cinema, thanks to Señor Pertierra. Amid the Philippine-American War and the country's shift towards Americanization, Jose Nepomuceno played a pivotal role in forming a "national consciousness." By utilizing conventions of Hollywood filmmaking, Nepomuceno was able to translate the Filipino story from stage to screen, laying the groundwork for an industry of Philippine cinema and introducing the concept of a previously

nonexistent "Filipino identity" through film. Ultimately, the Japanese occupation significantly challenged the developing state of Philippine cinema. It faced censorship and exploitation of film resources for propaganda, which, in turn, reinforced themes of Filipino resistance, contributing to the emergence of the anti-war genre in the post-war era. Although struggling to find its distinctly Filipino identity, Philippine cinema found itself liberated from the constraints of colonialism, and it will only continue to evolve for many years to come. In a certain way, one might express that cinema, as an art form, also struggled under the grip of colonialism; yet, due to the Filipino spirit of resilience and perseverance, it fought for its independence and gradually evolved until it became free — finally a free cinema.

Chapter 2

Three phases, three faces: Philippine cinema through the ages

The history of Philippine cinema is characterized by its distinct cinematic phases. Following through these phases, we can gain insight into the country's state and artistic developments defined by the figures of Philippine cinema. This chapter examines three significant phases of Philippine cinema while highlighting influential directors of their respective eras. The examination aims to deepen our understanding of the Filipino cinematic landscape against the backdrop of the country's prevailing socio-political realities while introducing leading directors from each era and discussing their contributions to Philippine cinema.

The Filipino story's state of becoming and the question of national identity have long been realized since the early years of Philippine cinema. In fact, this lifelong question has existed since the Spanish colonial period. This raises a few questions: Was Philippine cinema truly "Filipino" if it entered local culture through the hands of Spain? What is the basis of being "Filipino"? What about the other cultures, such as *sarsuwela* and *bodabil*? When did such nontraditional culture become traditional? Similar questions are asked in Nick Deocampo's book, *Cine: Spanish Influences on Early Cinema in the Philippines*. In the book, Deocampo addresses questions on identity by stating that "[cinema became Filipino] when the medium came into the hands of native Filipinos." However, he also argues that "Filipino" is a problematic term as it is mixed in the colonial history past. (Deocampo, 2017) In the case of *Dalagang Bukid* (Country Maiden), the first truly Filipino film by Jose Nepomuceno, the notion of being Filipino is embodied in the film's representation of the rural landscape (as the title suggests). Moreover, the film can delve into the realities surrounding its narrative. In *Dalagang Bukid*, the rural setting can address the class struggles between the urban and the rural or, furthermore, the rich versus the poor. Thus, it encapsulates a Filipino story:

> The many-layered ambivalence of *Dalagang Bukid* prefigures those later films that partake of the ethical predisposition of the pastoral, the drive to picture the rural space as a counterpoint to colonial legacies, and the need to invest in the idea of the rural as a symbol of the nation. (Campos, 2016, pp. 71–72)

The portrayals of the rural landscape in Philippine cinema are recurring; thus, the rural landscape and its stories became the national imagery. The rural landscape has become an integral part of the Filipino story, serving as a witness to the marginalized stories of the Filipino people. It appears as though the rural landscape has transformed into a sacred space for Philippine cinema. In the years of Philippine cinema's evolution, one can observe the many ways in which the Filipino story has been told by directors who frame their stories through their unique lenses. Thus, this chapter will take a quantum leap to the period when Philippine cinema became an established industry with a full grasp of the Filipino story.

The post-war years of the 1940s to the late 1950s were transformative for the Philippines. The three-year war brought by the Japanese to the islands concluded after their unconditional surrender in 1945. A year later, the Philippines was finally granted independence from American sovereignty upon signing the Treaty of Manila in 1946, marking the country's Third Philippine Republic. The Philippines went through a rebuilding phase as the country transitioned into a sovereign nation. In the cinematic world, this was also reflected. The Filipino film industry resurfaced, aided by the return of Filipino filmmakers and the lasting influence of Hollywood. After its seizure by the Japanese Propaganda Corps and the destructive consequences of the Second World War, this resurgence gave birth to the production of war films that centered around the themes of resistance and patriotism. These films highlight the heroic struggles of the Filipino guerilla during the war. From 1946 onward, the war film emerged as a genre, contextualizing the recently concluded war that illustrated the horrifying realities of the Filipinos during the war. (Campoamor, 2009, pp. 80–81)

Chapter 2.1

The First Golden Age of Philippine Cinema

Entering the 1950s led to the establishment of major production studios, namely LVN Pictures, Sampaguita Pictures, Premier Productions, and Lebran International, collectively referred to as the "Big Four"[6] which is the earliest Philippine studio system that produced the many stars, icons, and classics of Philippine cinema. At the time, the Filipino film industry was at its peak and was one of the booming film industries across Asia. (Leavold, 2014, pp. 134–139; Palis, 2008, pp. 88–91; Valerio, 2024, p. 41) Free from the constraints of the recently concluded war, the horizons of Filipino filmmaking expanded as filmmakers finally had free reign over cinema, exploring the unseen realities of the Filipino story and daring to share it not only locally but also into the world. The First Golden Age of Philippine cinema is defined by directors who help shape the foundations of traditional Filipino filmmaking. It was a time of great honor for directors and their "obra maestra" to attain remarkable feats for their innovations in cinematic techniques and artistic brilliance. They began to receive international acclaim for the first time and were proudly introduced to the world. (Palis, 2008, p. 89; Santiago, 1993, pp. 57–60)

This section chooses Gerardo De Leon as the protagonist of the First Golden Age. Gerardo "Gerry" De Leon belonged to the Ilagan clan, a family known for its film and stage legacy. Notably, he was the son of Filipino stage director, actor, and playwright Hermogenes Ilagan, and singer-actor Casiana de Leon. In his adolescence, he played the piano at Cine Moderno in Quiapo, Manila, accompanying silent films. Mesmerized by the movie magic, this became his chief influence and served as his film school. Despite a life steeped in the arts, he became a doctor after studying at the University of Santo Tomas (UST), but his passion for film won him over. De Leon was much like his father; he also acted and wrote for the stage. Before becoming a director, he acted

[6] often only regarded as the "Big Three", excluding Lebran International.

in several films. While still in university, he played a minor role in *Mga Pusong Dakila* (Noble Hearts) in 1937 and took on more roles in 1938 in titles such as *Ruben, Ang Pagbabalik* (The Return), *Mga Sugat ng Puso* (Wounds of the Heart), and *Bukang Liwayway* (Dawn), making himself considered to be one of the best character actors in the industry at the time. (Holcomb, 2012; *Sagisag Kultura TV*, 2021; Sotto and Pareja, n.d.) In the same year, he finally made his directorial debut with *Bahay Kubo* (Nipa Hut), a musical about a country girl who becomes an opera singer in the city. (Campos, 2016, p. 76)

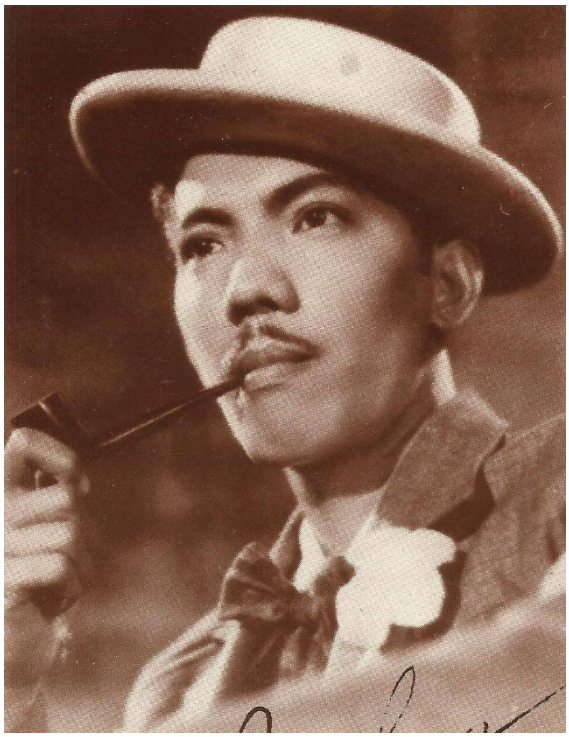

Figure 3. Gerardo de Leon.

In a more controversial side of his career, de Leon was a known collaborator to the occupying Japanese forces. Amid the onslaught of World War II, he directed for the stage and was soon commissioned by the Japanese to make two films to propagate the Greater East Asia agenda. (Holcomb, 2012; Sotto and Pareja, n.d.) As the Japanese seized the existing Filipino film industry, filmmakers were left with no choice but to comply with the new set of film policies the Japanese enforced in the country. Seeing the local industry heavily influenced by Hollywood, filmmakers and film artists alike faced difficulties in continuing their careers under strict Japanese laws as their

efforts were redirected towards the Greater East Asia cause. Among the films he produced under the Japanese occupation was the propaganda film *Liwayway ng Kalayaan* (Dawn of Freedom) in 1944, a co-direction between de Leon and Japanese director Abe Yutaka. De Leon also co-directed *Tatlong Maria* (Three Marys) with Sawamura Tsutomu in the same year.

Figure 4. Gerardo de Leon and Abe Yutaka's *Liwayway ng Kalayaan*, 1944.

Apart from his 1938 musical, *Bahay Kubo*, he also adapted the revolutionary novels authored by the Philippine national hero, Jose Rizal. These adaptations include *Noli Me Tangere* (Touch Me Not) in 1961 and its sequel, *El Filibusterismo* (The Subversive), released in 1962. (Holcomb, 2012; Sotto and Pareja, n.d.) Through his cinematic adaptations of Rizal's novels, he has achieved the same significance as the author of the source material. He successfully visually translated the most important literary works in Philippine history. Consequently, de Leon won five awards from the Filipino Academy of Movie Arts and Sciences (FAMAS) for his film *Noli Me Tangere* alone, including Best Picture and Best Director awards, a remarkable achievement that had never been accomplished before. In fact, he was the first recipient of the Best Director award from the same

awarding body for his 1952 film *Bagong Umaga* (New Morning). De Leon earned six additional FAMAS awards for Best Director for his films: *Hanggang sa Dulo ng Daigdig* (To the Ends of the Earth), 1958, *Huwag Mo Akong Limutin* (Never Forget Me), 1960, *El Filibusterismo* (The Subversion), 1962, *Ang Daigdig ng mga Api* (The World of the Oppressed), 1965, and *Lilet*, 1971. As a result, he was elevated into the FAMAS Hall of Fame after winning over five Best Director awards. (Sotto and Pareja, n.d.) De Leon was conferred as National Artist for Film in 1982 by the Order of National Artists of the Philippines shortly after his death in 1981.

Figure 5. Pancho Magalona in Gerardo de Leon's *El Filibusterismo*, 1962.

Other notable directors from the First Golden Age also accomplished feats comparable to de Leon's. Among them is Manuel Conde, whose 1952 film *Genghis Khan* became the first Filipino film acclaimed at the Venice International Film Festival. Additionally, Lamberto Avellana garnered awards from FAMAS, including the International Prestige Award for four of his films and

international awards at film festivals in Hong Kong, Tokyo, and Spain. (Maniquis and Pareja, n.d.; Palis, 2008, p. 89) The outstanding directors of the First Golden Age and their works provided the foundation for the next wave of filmmakers, ushering in another Golden Age for Philippine cinema in the years that followed.

Chapter 2.2

The Second Golden Age of Philippine Cinema

Spanning from the 1970s to the 1990s, following the First Golden Age is the Second Golden Age, which is set against the backdrop of once again the darkest period in Philippine history. Infamously, during the Marcos dictatorship, particularly when Ferdinand Marcos, the tenth president of the Republic of the Philippines, went to declare the country under martial law[7] in 1972. It was a period of initial economic success and infrastructure developments, and notoriously for Marcos' eventual fall marked by economic debt, world-class corruption, and human rights violations. (Palis, 2008, pp. 95–99; Santiago, 1993, p. 6; Sicat, 2011) In this age, cinema was the most daring — a fearless cinema was born in which films exposed the true nature of the Philippine society and films that authentically portray the raw humanity of the Filipino story. Furthermore, it was a period of artistic and political innovation during which filmmakers challenged the boundaries of conventional filmmaking, exploring new storytelling techniques and themes that reflect the current state of the country — a groundbreaking social realism despite rigorous government censorship and political unrest. Undoubtedly, the works of the Second Golden Age filmmakers ultimately garnered international acclaim for their artistic significance and critical engagement with contemporary struggles. To the world, they were shown the different side of the Filipino story,

[7] On September 21, 1972, President Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law as a defense against the rising unrest caused by violent student demonstrations, alleged threats of communist insurgency, and dangers from a Muslim movement revolting in the Southern Philippines. (Fuentecilla, 2013)

but for Filipinos and the filmmakers themselves, it was more than just artistic expression. Their films stood as their response against the injustices; they stood as the voices of the voiceless, and they stood as means of resistance brought about by oppressive regimes. The names that shaped this very age were Lino Brocka, who challenged a regime through his mastery of social realism and political cinema; Ishmael Bernal, hailed as "The Genius of Philippine Cinema" by critics; Mike de Leon, a master of psychological films; and Marilou Diaz-Abaya, a pioneering director of Filipino feminist cinema.

This section turns its attention to Lino Brocka, a key figure in the Second Golden Age and one of the most historically significant and influential directors in the history of Philippine cinema. Born Catalino Ortiz Brocka on April 3, 1939, in Pilar, Sorsogon, Brocka was raised poor and would have experienced hardships early in his life. He was son to Regino Brocka and Pilar Ortiz. His father, Regino, greatly influenced his childhood by providing basic education in subjects like literacy, mathematics, and natural sciences, alongside nurturing his talents in song, dance, and poetry. However, Regino was a politically active man and tragically fell victim to what appeared to be a political murder. Following his father's death, the young Brocka moved in with his mother, Pilar, in her hometown of Nueva Ecija, where he grew up most of his life. (Palmes and Demeterio III, 2015, p. 107; Santiago, 1993, pp. 108–111; *Signed: Lino Brocka*, 1987)

Despite his poor upbringing, the young Brocka excelled in his studies thanks to his father's influence. He thrived in debate, oration, and performance activities, holding poetry sessions and leading a community theatre group that provided workshops in the barrios. Outside of school, he sought refuge in the cinema. The movies fascinated him and served as his escape from the reality of life. (Santiago, 1993, p. 109; *Signed: Lino Brocka*, 1987) Although school life proved to be difficult, his academic excellence earned him a college scholarship at the University of the Philippines, the country's leading academic institute. Initially enrolled in the pre-law course, he soon dropped out to study literature instead. While in the university, he joined the Dramatic Club but couldn't get a

role as he was judged due to his rural accent and short stature. Nonetheless, he would still be active within the club but only as a volunteer for stage management and lighting design. Brocka would leave for Hawaii after dropping out of university to be a Mormon missionary, dedicating himself to missionary work in a leper colony in Molokai. He then traveled to San Francisco, working odd jobs just to make ends meet, and soon was offered American citizenship, but he refused. Upon returning to Manila due to homesickness, he joined the Philippine Educational Theatre Association (PETA), where he met Cecile Guidote, the association's founder. His success in theater would lead to an opportunity in film and television, and from that point onward, his career as filmmaker began. (Pareja and Beltran, n.d.; Santiago, 1993, pp. 108–111)

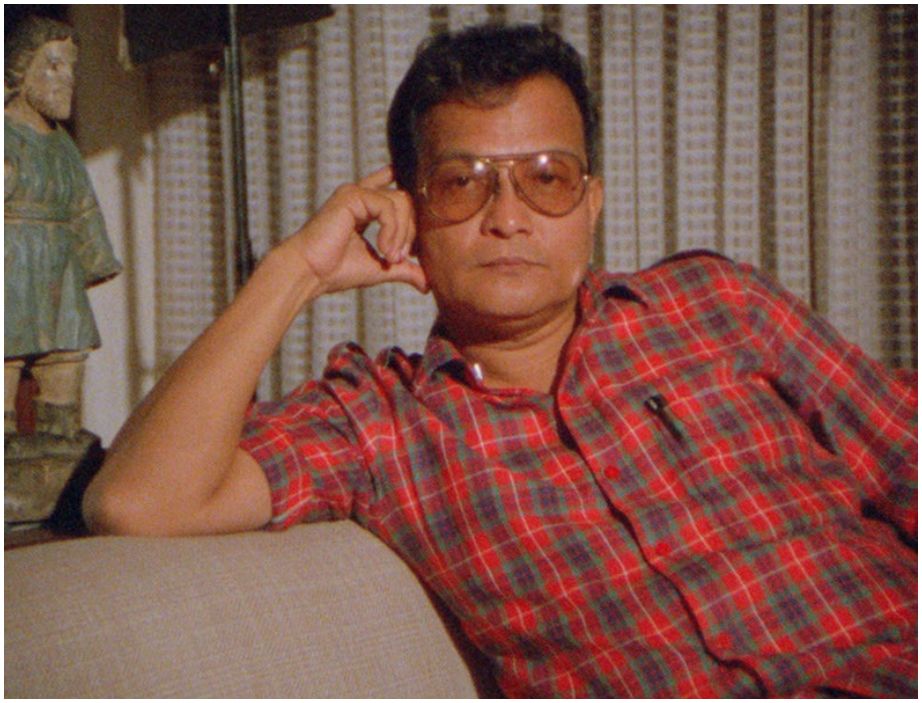

Figure 6. Lino Brocka in *Signed: Lino Brocka*, 1987, a documentary about the filmmaker.

In 1970, Brocka directed his first film, *Wanted: Perfect Mother*, which depicts the difficulties of a governess for a group of motherless children. It became successful both artistically and commercially. This was followed by *Santiago*, a war epic starring Fernando Poe Jr. and Hilda Koronel, which made Koronel win her first FAMAS award as Best Supporting Actress. In the same year, Brocka directed his third film, Tubog sa Ginto (Dipped in Gold), which was his first

attempt at touching controversial subjects. (Pareja and Beltran, n.d.; Santiago, 1993, pp. 123–124) The film stars Eddie Garcia, who was steered away from his usual villain roles to portray a queer protagonist. *Tubog sa Ginto* allowed Brocka to win his first FAMAS award for Best Director and Eddie Garcia to bag his second Best Actor award in the same awarding institution in 1971. (Anarcon, 2019) *Tubog sa Ginto* was considered to be one of the first Filipino films to seriously depict homosexuality when it was born at a time when the topic of homosexuality was controversial. Brocka, as an openly gay director, sheds light on homosexuality in a time where queerness is caricatured and treated as figures of entertainment only. Brocka came to direct more mainstream titles through 1971 and 1972 under Lea Productions.

Figure 7. Eddie Garcia and Mario O'Hara in Lino Brocka's *Tubog sa Ginto*, 1970.

The year 1972 was a turbulent time for the Philippines, while Brocka was gaining prominence in his filmmaking career. As an outspoken critic of the Marcoses, Brocka was soon embedded in politics, activism, and controversy as the country fell under Ferdinand Marcos's iron grip upon declaring martial law. With the country reeling from the Marcos regime, concerned individuals like Brocka turned to activism. He was a proponent of many: the oppressed, the poor, women, and

gays. (Naficy and Brocka, 1992, p. 133) He fought for freedom of expression against government censorship, hence came the Concerned Artists of the Philippines, an organization headed by Brocka to resist censorship. Brocka's experience as an activist set the stage for him to create politically charged and neorealist films. (Santiago, 1993, p. 98)

In 1974, Brocka came to produce and direct his critically acclaimed film, *Tinimbang Ka Ngunit Kulang* (Weighed But Found Wanting). *Tinimbang* sheds light on the social hypocrisy of a small, tight-knit Filipino community, exposing its prejudices and cruelty. The film is inspired by Brocka's experiences in his hometown of San Jose, Nueva Ecija. It is one of Brocka's socially realistic films, distinct by its raw and personal delivery of the narrative; hence, *Tinimbang* is marked as one of Brocka's most important films in the history of Philippine cinema. The following year gave Brocka another chance to direct another landmark film, *Maynila: sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag* (Manila: in the Claws of Light) in 1975. *Maynila* is recognized among the best Filipino films of all time and one of Brocka's greats, and its importance is manifested through the film's social realism. Set against the backdrop of Marcos-era Philippines, the film, at best, is a disguised socio-political commentary on the harsh realities and the growing repression of the lower social classes in a Marcos-dominated society. *Maynila* resurfaces aspects of the Philippine society that many people bury under the veil of ignorance. In a country promised by its current administration to a reformed government, a "New Society" which "promised benefits of political stability, economic growth, or social reform." But instead, "there was increasing instability, persistent poverty, and more violence than there had been." (Rosenberg quoted in Santiago, 1993, pp. 88–89) Brocka's 1976 film *Insiang* is also one of his critically acclaimed works. It portrays realist depictions of urban poverty (still under the Marcos regime) and how individuals transform against their ruling environment. *Insiang* made its significance not only because of its realist attributes but also because it represented the Filipino film to an audience outside its own country when it was invited to be screened at the Cannes Film Festival in France. Other Brocka films that attended Cannes include *Jaguar* (1979),

which was selected for the festival's main competition in 1980, and Bona (1980), shown in 1981. (Pareja and Beltran, n.d.; Santiago, 1993, p. 125)

Figure 8. Bembol Roco in Lino Brocka's *Maynila: sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag*, 1975.

Brocka lived a harsh life, marked by poverty and the struggles of a Filipino in his country. He was driven to present these experiences, which deeply influenced his vision as a filmmaker. He framed the realities from his early life and, later, the lives of those around him. His films became his own voice, his own commentary of the current society and the country — the Philippines of what it has become, shedding light on the neglected and overlooked areas of society, subjects that remained untouched by other directors, especially during the Marcos regime. Thus, ahead of him is cinematic prowess that would allow him and his works to rise into prominence and, soon, into significance.

Brocka met his untimely death on May 21, 1991, in a car accident. He was posthumously conferred National Artist for Film in 1997. The legacy he left as a filmmaker extends far beyond his films — he utilized film as a medium for giving bold statements on the personal injustices he experienced

from his life and onto the sociopolitical realities of the country, to the injustices brought about by oppressive regimes, elevating the medium from mere entertainment to a powerful instrument of resistance, reality, and change. His important works remain timely and relevant, continuing to inspire the next generation of Filipino filmmakers to harness film not only as an art form but also as a force for truth and justice.

Chapter 2.3

Philippine New Wave: Third Golden Age of Philippine Cinema

Advancing through the 21st century, Philippine cinema saw the rise of a movement known as the Philippine New Wave or what director Khavn de la Cruz explains better, a cinema of "third peaking, the third coming of age of a cinema that defies easy categorization." (de la Cruz, 2012) It is an age of Philippine cinema which is characterized by the emergence of independent filmmaking, digital revolution, and a shift towards experimental storytelling. It was an age in which Filipino films gained greater recognition on the global film landscape, with many achieving success at international film festivals. At most, films during this age are sequential from the previous Golden Age. New Wave films share similarities with those of the Second Golden Age, as more films from the New Wave are influenced by Second Golden Age directors and their films. The New Wave movement allowed directors to evolve their storytelling further, expanding the horizons of Philippine Cinema. The Philippine New Wave is shaped by directors such as Lav Diaz, known for his long-form, minimalist, poetic slow films; Brillante Mendoza, for his contemporary realist and socially conscious films revolutionizing unconventional filmmaking techniques; and Khavn de la Cruz himself, known for his delinquent, punk-esque, highly experimental filmmaking.

The focus for this section will be Lav Diaz. Lavrente Indico Diaz was born on December 30, 1958, in the remote barrio of Datu Paglas, Maguindanao in the Mindanao islands of Southern Philippines. He is son to Mario Vigilia Diaz from Nueva Ecija, in the main island of Luzon and Maria Indico from Iloilo, in the Visayan islands. Both are pioneering educators; they were public school teachers who resettled in Mindanao, volunteering to build roads and establishing school systems in remote areas to educate the indigenous people. Diaz would experience a challenging upbringing. He experienced the struggles of living in a remote barrio lacking basic infrastructure, scarce on electricity and unpaved roads. On a lighter note, having highly educated parents, their influence would bring him into his cultural upbringing. Diaz frequented listening to radio dramas and spent weekends traveling for about three hours to the nearest town of Tacurong to watch films with his cinephile father in the cinemas. This would be Diaz's first introduction to cinema. Spaghetti westerns, kung-fu, samurai films, and Filipino melodramas, a range of genres that would act as his only film school, as the notion of film schools didn't exist in the Philippines back then. (Ingawanij, 2021; Quito, 2021)

Figure 9. Lav Diaz, one of the representatives of the slow cinema genre.

Spanning from the late 1960's to 1970's marked the darkest period of Diaz's formative years in the plight of the Marcos dictatorship. Upon the declaration of Martial law in the country, he was 13

and in his second year of high school, and he would spend the rest of his childhood exposed to the conflicts surrounding his barrio, getting caught in the crossfires of the ongoing guerilla warfare between the government's military, Muslim separatist movements and communist insurgencies. Amid these conflicts, their home fell victim and was burned down. His family was held hostage for a week and was released immediately after the military negotiated with the Muslim rebels. Mindanao became a complete warzone, and given its dangerous environment, Diaz had to flee with his family and relocate to Manila to seek refuge, living with his relatives. The ongoing conflict would claim more lives of his relatives, some of whom went missing. After a year in Manila, Diaz and his family would return to Mindanao, having his father purchase a small piece of land to start over and begin teaching again. At the peak of the dictatorship, he graduated from university at Notre Dame in Cotabato City with a degree in economics. During his time in university, he was involved in the Communist Party's youth wing, where he decided to commit himself to cinema upon seeing Lino Brocka's 1975 masterpiece on its release, *Maynila: sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag* (Manila: in the Claws of Light). As an advocate fighting against the censorship of the arts and a vocal critic of the Marcos dictatorship, *Maynila*, together with *Insiang,* another social realist film released by Brocka in 1976, would leave a lasting impression on him. Brocka's films provided Diaz with an awakening, opening his eyes to cinema's capability to fight regimes. (Dormiendo, 2000; Ingawanij, 2021; Mai, 2016)

The Marcos dictatorship would soon weaken around the 1980s. Martial law was officially terminated on January 17, 1981, but Marcos' control would persist, as all of his decrees were still in force. (Akm Khairul Islam, 2021, p. 100; Aquino, 1982, p. 160) The regime's growing opposition would intensify, especially after the assassination of Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino Jr., the foremost leader of the Marcos opposition, which sparked widespread protests and political unrest. (Guillermo, 2012, p. 39; Overholt, 1986, p. 1156) The events leading from the assassination of Ninoy Aquino would culminate in February of 1986 in the People Power Revolution, commonly known as the EDSA Revolution, an acronym for Epifanio de los Santos Avenue in Manila, which

millions of Filipinos would gather to protest demanding Marcos' removal and his regime peacefully. (Guillermo, 2012, p. 145) The uprising would overthrow Ferdinand Marcos, leading to his exile in Hawaii and ending his 20-year rule.

For Diaz, the path to cinema would come a long way. After university, he worked odd jobs in Manila just to pay his way. He worked in various creative fields; he was a writer, writing pieces on music, film and also comics. He also worked as a tabloid journalist contributing to various newspapers and publications. In between, he wrote short stories for which two of them won prizes at the Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature in 1990 and 1991. (Dormiendo, 2000; Quito, 2021) Diaz soon found work writing for the television. His introduction to filmmaking began in 1985 in a film workshop by Mowelfund (Movie Workers Welfare Foundation). He would meet notable filmmakers at the time, Lamberto Avellana and Nick Deocampo, during the workshops. These workshops soon led to scriptwriting for the studio system in Manila, being in television first then to cinema. His first credited films for writing were the action-crime films Mabuting Kaibigan, Masamang Kaaway (Good Friend, Bad Enemy) in 1991, which stars Fernando Poe Jr. and *Galvez: Hanggang sa Dulo ng Mundo Hahanapin Kita* (Galvez: I Will Search for You Until the Edge of the World) in 1993. Working inside the studio system was Diaz's path to becoming a filmmaker; Brocka, who openly made commercial films to finance his more socially conscious work, had followed this path due to a lack of other options. (Ingawanij, 2021; Santiago, 1993, p. 3)

Diaz would soon liberate himself from the studio system, leading to the production of his first independent feature, *Batang West Side* (West Side Avenue), in 2001 At the time, it was the longest Filipino film ever made, with a total running time of five hours. The film follows the investigation of a Filipino teenager's death found on West Side Avenue, New Jersey, highlighting the challenges faced by the Filipino diaspora and, along the way, exposing the legacy of Marcos' martial law. (Ingawanij, 2021; Quito, 2021) *Batang West Side* initiated his belief in allowing material and artistic vision to dictate the running time. Diaz won his first of many awards with *Batang West Side*, earning

10 Gawad Urian[8] awards, including Best Picture, and awards at international film festivals in Singapore and Brussels. (Ingawanij, 2021; Quito, 2021) *Batang West Side* was the beginning of Diaz's filmmaking philosophy in which the aesthetic has taken the form of long runtimes. This philosophy will further develop in his next independent film, *Ebolusyon ng Isang Pamilyang Pilipino* (Evolution of a Filipino Family) in 2004, which has a duration of almost 11 hours and took nearly 11 years to make. The film depicts the lives of a family of farmers against the backdrop of the martial law years leading to the EDSA revolution. The aesthetics have taken shape into black-and-white neorealist style cinematography, featuring long static takes without scores or quick cuts. (Ingawanij, 2021; Quito, 2021) *Ebolusyon* would serve as the aesthetic template for Diaz's subsequent films, from *Heremias: Unang Aklat* (Heremias: Book One) in 2006, lasting nine hours, to *Phantosmia* in 2024, which runs for four hours, except for *Norte, Hangganan ng Kasaysayan* (Norte, The End of History)[9] in 2013, a color film with a runtime of four hours. This generation of Diaz films allowed a growing following and international acclaim as they earned selections and won major awards at various international film festivals, including the prestigious "Big Three" festivals: Cannes, Venice, and Berlin.

[8] Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino (MPP, Critics of Filipino Cinema), also known as Urian, Gawad Urian, or Manunuri, is the first organized film critics group in the Philippines, established in 1976. (Tumbocon Jr. and Pareja, 1994)

[9] *Norte* is a loose adaptation of the novel *Crime and Punishment* by Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky. The film was selected for the Un Certain Regard program of the 2013 Cannes International Film Festival, where it was first screened to wide acclaim. (Salazar, 2018)

Figure 10. Lav Diaz's *Batang West Side*, 2001.

Figure 11. Lav Diaz's *Ebolusyon ng Isang Pamilyang Pilipino*, 2004.

The significance of Lav Diaz's films stems from his challenging upbringing taking place in one of the country's darkest periods, which profoundly molded his perspective. His unconventional and alienating approach to filmmaking has warped the fabric of world cinema, allowing the Filipino story to be told in a distinct light. Lav Diaz remains one of the most influential and significant directors working today, leaving an indelible mark on the global cinematic landscape.

Conclusion

The identity of Philippine cinema is a vague and vast landscape. Following the examination of the evolution of Philippine cinema and the chronicling of its history to its substantial directors, can one really say that Philippine cinema is truly dead? Despite the accomplishments and accolades of Filipino films, which have been recognized and celebrated at some of the world's most prestigious film festivals, the issue primarily lies with the administration that governs it. Films, as vital and intangible pieces of culture, deserve to be prioritized. It is clear that Philippine cinema possesses the potential to thrive and influence (as seen in the way Lino Brocka inspired Lav Diaz), extending its impact beyond its borders. Philippine cinema remains an integral part of the world cinema collective, and I contend that Philippine cinema undergoes this cycle of death and rebirth. There have been numerous moments when it could have died, but thanks to the filmmakers, Philippine cinema and the Filipino story are here to stay, and it deserves to be told its enduring legacy throughout the world for the next generations to come.

As I conclude, I express my hopes as a Filipino who aspires to share the Filipino story: I aim to contribute to the broader discourse surrounding the ambiguous state of Philippine cinema, seeking to formulate my own insights and engage with contemporaries in the field to find common ground and understanding.

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