



The Mad World:¹ The Image of War and Peace in Philippine Motion Pictures²

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Abstract

This paper explores Filipino motion pictures as an audiovisual resource for the analysis and understanding of war and peace from a philosophical standpoint. To elaborate on the point of the paper, first, it will discuss film and philosophy. It centers on how the film becomes an important source of knowledge or to build a philosophical concept or how the film becomes an illustration to aid one's understanding. Next is the image of peace and war as reflected in the following films: *Tatlong Taong Walang Diyos* (1976), *Amigo* (2010), *Banaue: Stairway to the Sky* (1975), *Bagong Buwan* (2001), *Oro, Plata, Mata* (1982) and *Dekada '70* (2002). To elucidate the point of the paper, it employs the method of critical hermeneutic textual analysis, and the selection of films, they are based on reviews from film critics, published studies about the film, recognition and awards received from respected institutions, and narrative and historical value. In the end, the paper concludes that the film has become a form of language, where the use of this language occurs between the artwork and its audience creating an atmosphere of a modern form of Socratic dialogue, which through the process of their exchange discloses a reality that moves the spectators to think and act.

¹ "Mad World" refers to the work of Slavoj Žižek entitled, *Mad World: War, Movies, Sex* (2023).

² This is a work-in-progress paper.

Keywords: Philippine motion pictures, War and Peace, Filipino philosophy, Philosophy of film

Introduction

In Mario O'Hara's *Tatlong Taong Walang Diyos* (Three Godless Years) (1976) after the Japanese invaded the Philippines, stories of abuses and inhumane treatment spread across the country because these people decided to leave their houses and went to the mountains for safety. One of the scenes can be viewed as a remarkable conversation between Menang and Rosario:

Menang: Rosario! Rosario! aren't you leaving?

Rosario: No, Menang. Father said it's even worse in the mountains than here.

Menang: But it's dangerous here, the Japanese soldiers are in town. I heard there's no sparing the women, especially the pretty ones. They rape them. And I have listened to they're slaughtering babies in front of the Church; they toss them up and catch them with their bayonets.

Rosario: I don't think so, that's just gossip.

Menang: If you won't believe me that's up to you.

Rosario: God is merciful.

Menang: Times like these, there is no God! The powerful survive, while we (the poor) end up suffering.³

The film, particularly the scene induces spectators to raise questions, speculate possibilities, and compare with real-life issues. Aside from the ecological and economic crisis, people are witnessing staggering atrocities brought about by war. Currently, people are witnessing human degradation because of the ongoing armed conflict. The war between Russia and Ukraine not only brought thousands of deaths but at the same time made particularly civilians in Ukraine, to be homeless

³ *Tatlong Taong Walang Diyos*. Directed by Mario O'Hara. (NV Productions, 1976). 124m. iWantTFC.

and desperate for food and other supplies necessary to survive.⁴ Similarly, in October 2023, Hamas together with other militant groups launched a major attack on Israel from Gaza Strip. The immense casualties forced Israel to declare a state of emergency. The retaliation of Israel caught global attention because of the way the Israeli government is handling the conflict where it was reported that the majority of deaths were women and children, people were dying of starvation and disease, hospitals were being bombed deliberately, Palestinians living in West bank are experiencing increased mass arrests campaigns and military raids.⁵

Moreover, the experience of armed conflict and its effects such as displacement, starvation, death, loss, and so on are not foreign to Filipinos. Here in the Philippines, people have witnessed how armed conflict sprouts like wild mushrooms, how cities built over the years instantly turn into rubble, and how people caught in the war beg for peace.⁶ However, still, several reported armed conflicts continue to plague Filipinos. Thus, this paper is an attempt to analyze the image of war and peace from Philippine motion pictures. Second, an exploration of philosophy with Philippine movies; and finally, to invite philosophers in the Philippines to study Philippine films as part of Filipino philosophy.

To elaborate on the point of the paper, first, it will discuss film and philosophy. It centers on how the film becomes an important source of knowledge or to build a philosophical concept or how the film becomes an illustration to aid one's understanding. Next is the discussion which centers on the presentation of the brief historical survey of Philippine cinematography. Finally, the image of peace and war is reflected in the films. The following films: *Talong Taong Walang Diyos* (1976), *Amigo* (2010), *Banaue: Stairway to the Sky* (1975),

⁴ Christopher Ryan Maboloc. "The Imperial Ambitions of the Great Powers: Explaining the War in Ukraine from the Perspective of Global Justice." *Indonesian Journal of Political Studies*. pp. 1-16 Vol. 3 No. 1 (April 2023) available from <https://doi.org/10.15642/iips.2023.3.1.1-16>.

⁵ Daniel Byman. "A War They Both Are Losing: Israel, Hamas and the Plight of Gaza." *Survival* Vol. 66(3) (2024), pp. 61-78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2024.2357484>.

⁶ Godiva Eviota-Rivera, et.al., "Narratives of Resilience and Solidarity During the Marawi Crisis: Preserving Marawi's Culture of Peace," *Social Ethics Journal of Applied Philosophy*. pp. 1-20. Vol. 9 (2023), available from <https://ses-journal.com/2023-volume-9/>

Bagong Buwan (2001), *Oro, Plata, Mata* (1982), and *Dekada '70* (2002) are analyzed in order deduce reasonable presentation of the image of war and peace in Philippine motions pictures. The discussion centers on the scenes, lines, actors' portrayals of characters, storyline, and themes to be deemed as an image that forms an understanding of peace and war.

In addition, this paper employed the method of critical hermeneutic textual analysis. To draw a perspective of peace and war, the selected films will be treated and analyzed as text, where storyline, characters, scenes, and so on just like books with chapters, are an important part of the film that contributes to the overall standing of peace and war. Moreover, the selection of films is based on the following: reviews from film critics' published studies about the film, recognition and awards received from respected institutions, and narrative and historical value.

Film and Philosophy

Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* shares the idea with the modern form of film which is a composition of images and signs that allow the individual to invent and which it has at its disposal at a given moment.⁷ Film may entertain spectators but similar to novels, artworks, poetry, music, etc., it engrosses viewers to ponder on the trivialities faced by the characters in the film and extend it to the viewers. Thus, as Freeland and Wartenberg pointed out, philosophy can bring out important aspects of films, and film can also challenge philosophy to think itself and its questions in new ways, indicating a two-way form of relationship between film and philosophy.⁸ As a result, scholars from other academic disciplines have considered film as their resource in exploring various issues such as urban violence, family structures, marital issues, gender, power relations, teenage issues, and so on. Thus, film is an art that creates a dialogue between the artwork and the audience, which along the process of dialogue discloses *apatheia*, similar to Kant's concept of synthetic a priori.

⁷ Gilles Deleuze. *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjan. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), ix-xiv.

⁸ Cynthia Freeland and Thomas Wartenberg (eds). *Philosophy and Film*. (London: Routledge, 1995). 1-3.

Despite the multifaceted perspective and varying approaches of a philosopher in the study of film, whether the film is as objects of aesthetics or epistemology or vivid and complex illustrations of social and political viewpoints, it is however widely accepted the notion that many films resonate with traditional and contemporary philosophical issues. Scholarly works manifest a rich and diverse tradition of philosophic reflection as a means of enriching their interpretations of these films. In addition, it only goes to show that film participates in Freud's concept of daydreaming which is the desire to alter the existing and often unsatisfactory or unpleasant world of reality. The past and present are projected towards the future through the medium of film. The *ars poetica* of the film is in the technique by which the feeling of repulsion is overcome, and this has certainly to do with barriers erected between every individual being and others.⁹ The world outside of film is rife with issues and philosophers are responsible for revealing the structures of oppression that impede well-being and exploring the possibility of their supersession.¹⁰ It has been deemed that film has been fulfilling these functions, the technology of film is little more than the outer emblem or symptom by which a systematic variety of concrete situations expresses itself in a specific variety of form and form problems, making film a fecund source for philosophical reflection.

Historical Survey of Philippine Cinematography

Film scholar Clodualdo del Mundo, Jr. classified the history of Philippine cinematography into four generations. The first indigenization of the foreign medium was in the film *Dalagang Bukid* (Country Maiden, 1919), thus the birth of the first Filipino film.¹¹ The film also showed some social issues that can be interpreted as

⁹ Sigmund Freud. *Collected Paper Vol. 4*. Translated by Joan Riviere. (New York: Basic Books, 1989), 173-175.

¹⁰ Thomas Wartenberg. "Film as Philosophy." In *Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*. Edited by Paisley Livingston and Carl Plantinga. (London: Routledge, 2009), 556-558.

¹¹ Clodaudo Del Mundo. "Philippines." in *The Films of ASEAN* edited by Jose F. Lacaba 2000 ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information. 90. See also, Charles Musser. "Nationalism, Contradiction, and Identity; or A Reconsideration of Early Cinema in the Philippines" 71- in *Early Cinema in Asia* edited by Nick Deocampo. (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2017), 71.

problems that had been plaguing Filipino society at that time such as usury, infidelity, gambling, corruption, Americanization, and other negative values.¹² The film earned Jose Nepomuceno the recognition as the father of Filipino movies. Nepomuceno claimed that aside from its profitable entertainment fare, the film is also a unique medium to document the unfolding development of the Philippines.¹³

In addition, as colonial power tightened its grip on the Philippines, many intellectuals and artists felt the urge to take a clearer political stance. Filmmaker Julian Manansala is one of those filmmakers whose films dealt with nationalist themes. Thus, earning the recognition as the father of Philippine nationalist film. One of his remarkable works is *Patria Amore* (Beloved Country, 1929), the film became controversial because of its anti-Spanish sentiments. The Spanish community demanded to the court that the screening of the film be stopped because the film depicts discrimination since the film shows the abuses of the Spanish against the Filipinos, however, the court denied the request.¹⁴

Furthermore, colonialism directed how the film was introduced, received, and became an intrinsic part of the cultural structure. The Japanese occupation interrupted the indigenization of film in the country and led to different path under the influence of two *bunku senshi* (cultural warriors) Tsutomu Sawamura and Hidemi Kon's ideology. For example, in the film *Liwayway ng Kalayaan* (Dawn of Freedom, 1944) where the film viewers are shown that the coming of Japanese troops in the Philippines is to liberate them from the bondage of America and other Western influences.¹⁵

¹² Nadi Tofighian. "Jose Nepomuceno and the Creation of a Filipino National Consciousness" 79-80.

¹³ Arsenio Bautista. "History of Philippine Cinema" National Commission for Culture and the Arts <https://ncca.gov.ph/about-culture-and-arts/articles-on-culture-and-arts/arts/> See also, Nadi Tofighian. "Jose Nepomuceno and the Creation of a Filipino National Consciousness" *Film History*, Vol. 20, No. 1, Experiment in Film before World War II (2008), 77-94. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25165460>. See also, Charles Musser. "Nationalism, Contradiction, and Identity; or A Reconsideration of Early Cinema in the Philippines," 71, in *Early Cinema in Asia* edited by Nick Deocampo. (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2017).

¹⁴ Clodualdo Del Mundo Jr. *Philippines*, 91.

¹⁵ Louise Jashil Sonido. "On History, Archive, and Theory: A Review of Nick Deocampo's *Eiga: Cinema in the Philippines During World War II*" *Plaridel*, 14(1), 173-178. <https://doi.org/10.52518/2017.14.1-13sonido> See also, Patrick Campos. "Book Review on Deocampo's *Eiga: Cinema in the Philippines during World War II*." Vol. 13,

The second generation of filmmaking in the country was in the mid-1940s and spans to the 1960s. The filmmaking industry was dominated by three studios: Sampaguita, LVN, and Premiere. The second generation was primarily Manila-centered; however, it also marked the rise of local films. Similar to the Tagalogs, they made use of their language in making the title and the conversation in the film. Regional films were celebrated and received with pride not only among Cebuanos, but it extended among the *bisaya/binisaya/kana* speaking community in Visayas and Mindanao. However, due to the unavailability of most films to be screened, it was dubbed as lost cinema due to unknown reasons there are no longer copies of films. One of the celebrated and multi-awarded Cebuano films was *Badlis sa Kinabuhi* (The Line of Life, 1969). The film was directed by Leroy Sevilla and the main characters were played by Gloria Sevilla, dubbed as the queen of the Visayan film, and her husband Mat Ranillo Jr.¹⁶

The third generation of filmmaking spans from the 1970s to 1990s. Before the declaration of Martial Law, there was an increased number of films released due to the advent of softcore sex films, popularly known as *bomba* films. *Bomba* connoted the specific scenes in the film in which women exposed their bodies to the camera for the audience to see. It also pertained to the lurid scenes of simulated sexual intercourse. Moreover, *bomba* films entice viewers because of the movement of the camera stands for as well as extend the gaze of the audience towards some sensitive body parts. Furthermore, the declaration of martial law led to the increase production of *bomba* films, but it also directed films to incorporate social issues that allow viewers to be conscious of society and social activism. One of the most influential filmmakers of the third generation is Lino Brocka, whose film has not only received an international award but is considerably a timeless work of art.¹⁷

One of the most important figures that contributed to the characterization of third-generation filmmaking is the coming of Philippine independent film commonly known as indie film.

No. 1 (2017) *Social Science Diliman: A Philippine Journal of Society and Change* <https://journals.upd.edu.ph/index.php/socialsciencediliman/issue/view/590>

¹⁶ Paul Douglas Grant. "Lilas: Cebuano Cinema Revisited" *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society*. Vol. 42 (2014): 41-78. University of San Carlos Press.

¹⁷ Vicente Rafael. "Patronage and Pornography: Ideology and Spectatorship in the Early Marcos Years." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (April 1990); 282- 304, 291-292.

Filmmaker Kidlat Tahimik is dubbed the father of the Philippine independent cinema. Furthermore, one of his important and celebrated films is the *Mababangong Bangungot* (Perfumed Nightmare, 1977). According to Fredric Jameson, who extensively analyzes the film, it is a concrete example of Third-World film, for it contains the elements that decry neocolonialism, the capitalist system, and the Hollywood model of cinema as mere entertainment to make money. The relevance of the film lies in the way in which he eschews politics for the economic, and the thematics of power for that of reification.¹⁸

The quality of filmmaking from the third generation of filmmakers inspired the young generation of filmmakers which paved the way for the fourth generation of filmmaking. Among these filmmakers whose names are associated with four generations are: Chito S. Roño, Joel Lamangan, Jose Javier Reyes, Carlos Siguion-Reyna, Olive Lamasan, and Roy Quintos. Moreover, aside from mainstream and commercially driven filmmaking, some filmmakers have explored the subjects that mainstream filmmakers do not explore. Filmmakers such as Raymond Red, Manny Reyes, and Nick Deocampo.¹⁹

The Image of War and Peace in Philippine Cinema: Preliminary

Messages within motion pictures are often conveyed by themes expressed implicitly or explicitly within the story. As a whole, Philippine motion pictures can be categorized dominantly under the anti-war themes. Initially, it has identified four prevalent anti-war themes:

The first theme is that the military government itself is a corrupt institution. The theme is dramatized in two ways. First develops the characters and actions of corrupt and/or incompetent men who are in positions of military authority. The second presents situations in which, due to the hierarchical command structure of the military, subordinates have great difficulty dealing with the misdeeds of their superiors. The second theme is that war is not a glorious and glamorous thing as usually people (soldiers) thought it would be. The third theme is that war is a horrifying event. The film allows people to

¹⁸ Fredric Jameson. *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*. (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1995), 189-212.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 118-119.

see that war destroys children, women, and uncorrelated life. The adverse effects of war include death, injury, sexual violence, malnutrition, illness, and disease. For example, *Bagong Buwan* (2001) where it shows how people are forced to leave their houses and properties. It shows how ordinary people are plunged into the middle of two opposing forces, the rebels and the military. Lastly, the enemy, although different in terms of culture, religion, and political belief, in many ways shares the same humanity. For example, in *Amigo* (2010) where the American soldiers occupying the barrio of San Isidro under the leadership of Lt. Compton and the people headed by Kapitan Rafael Dacanay shows viewers that despite their conditions, they still find time to enjoy such as drinking *tuba*, hope, admiration, gambling or how they spend time with their family. Similarly, in *Banaue: Stairway to the Sky* (1975)²⁰ where Gerardo de Leon allows viewers to witness that despite coming from various tribes, the desire to be loved, and to live with peace and respect is common among tribes.

Conclusion

Noël Carroll clearly pointed out, that film is like a telescope, periscope, and mirrors in our cars for we see the objects to which we have access by means of these devices, it is an aid to our vision.²¹ When I adjust the side mirrors of my car upwards I can see the sky and when look in the mirror before opening the door it prevents me from any danger in getting out of the car. Analogously, the film expands our horizons, the thought that we create from watching is what Hume meant by transcendental idealism. If I am watching *Oro, Plata, Mata* (1982),²² it enabled me to see how *hacenderos* cope with changes brought about by the war. The film *Dekada '70*²³ Allows me to imagine what it feels like to live dangerously during the "Martial Law Era" under the then kleptocrat dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

²⁰ *Banaue: Stairway to Heaven*. Directed by Gerard de Leon. (NV Productions, 1975), 134m. iWantTFC.

²¹ Noël Carroll. Towards an Ontology of the Moving Image. 68-85. In *Film and Philosophy*. Edited by Cynthia Freeman and Thomas Wartenberg. (London: Routledge, 1995). 68-70.

²² *Oro, Plata, Mata*. Directed by Peque Gallaga. (Experimental Cinema of the Philippines and Star Cinema, 1982), 194m. iWantTFC.

²³ *Dekada '70*. Directed by Chito S. Roño. (Star Cinema, 2002). 134m. iWantTFC.

The availability and development of the film have broadened and deepened its diffusion into the everyday life of Filipinos. It has made Filipinos either hope or accept the tragic story of one's fate. What is more startling, is that Filipino philosophers need to pay attention, is the immense influence it brings to the individual and community as a whole in the conduct of its affairs, particularly on matters about love, politics, power, economy, values, language, and so on. Historical events ushered many to witness and infer how fictive characters become an important instrument even among political oppositions as they seek power and at the same time how the individual behind the fictive character becomes an extraordinary that made people perceive the actor as a beckon of change. It is not because it underestimates their commitment, knowledge, and resolve to serve but only wanted to show that all of these are overshadowed by a character in the film and how the power of film extends even among people who associate themselves with film characters.

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